

International

Starvation kills 'nearly 200' children in Tigray hospitals

At least 1,000 arrested since Ethiopia state of emergency: UN

News in brief

France clears migrant camp

GRANDE-SYNTHE: French police cleared a major migrant camp yesterday that was home to around a thousand people hoping to reach Britain, amid tensions between London and Paris over Channel crossings. A record number of migrants crossed the Channel in small boats last Thursday - 1,185 according to British figures - which the British government described as "unacceptable". French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin spoke to his British counterpart Priti Patel on Monday, but only after giving a blunt interview in which he said Britain should "should stop using us as a punch-ball in their domestic politics". Yesterday morning, Darmanin announced that "on his orders" police had cleared a camp in Grande-Synthe, near the port of Dunkirk, which is one of the main departure points for Britain. "Thank to the police who were in action as well as our security personnel in the north who are finding shelters," Darmanin added. — AFP

Sudan frees Al Jazeera chief

KHARTOUM: Sudanese authorities released Al Jazeera television's Khartoum bureau chief yesterday, the Qatar-based network said, two days after security forces arrested him from his home. The arrest of Al-Musalami Al-Kabbashi was the latest since a military coup three weeks ago and came after tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets on Saturday to demand a transition to civilian rule. Kabbashi, a Sudanese citizen, "was released yesterday... the military has yet to give a reason for his detention," the network said. The editor in chief of the armed forces newspaper, Ibrahim al-Hory, charged that Al Jazeera had "published unrealistic reports and released old videos and hosted hostile personalities that instigated strife." Al Jazeera has given prominent coverage to the anti-coup demonstrations, but has also aired a detailed interview with top general Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan. — AFP

Six hurt in drive-by shooting

LOS ANGELES: An apparent drive-by shooting Monday near a Colorado high school left six teenagers in hospital, police said, as the specter of gun violence raised its head again in the United States. Witnesses spoke of around 30 shots being fired, and police said they had recovered multiple rounds of different calibers at a park in Aurora, a municipality in Denver's suburbs. Aurora Police Chief Vanessa Wilson said there appeared to have been more than one shooter, and that the department's gangs unit was involved in the investigation. "My understanding is it was a drive-by shooting as well as there may have been people on foot," she told reporters. "We do have suspects that are at large." Wilson said five teens aged between 14 and 17 had been taken to hospital, one of whom was in emergency surgery. A sixth person, age 18, was treated for minor injuries after arriving at hospital on their own. — AFP

Ukraine woos vaccine-wary

KIEV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that people will be offered a cash incentive to get double-vaccinated against COVID-19 in a bid to boost the country's low inoculation rate. "Everyone who has had two doses will be able to receive 1,000 hryvnias" or around 35 euros (\$40), Zelensky said in video message, a sizeable sum for the citizens of one of Europe's poorest countries and where fewer than a third of the population has been fully vaccinated. The money could be used to buy a sports club membership, tickets for the cinema, theatre or a museum, or go towards a train or plane ticket for a journey within Ukraine, the president said. "These are the sectors that have been hardest hit by the lockdowns," Zelensky said. — AFP

Ecuador 'seriously threatened'

GUAYAQUIL: Ecuador is "seriously threatened" by drug trafficking mafias who want to "take control of all the country's prisons," President Guillermo Lasso said Monday, after the heads of the armed forces and the prison service quit following jail riots that left 68 people dead. Lasso said a "massive operation" was underway by the police and the army in the overcrowded prison in Guayaquil, where two days of fighting between inmates armed with guns, machetes and explosives claimed dozens of lives. The president said the country faced "one of the biggest crises in recent decades" and warned that the same drug mafias "were bringing insecurity to our streets." He promised joint action to end the repeated slaughters at the country's prisons. Soldiers with rifles entered the perimeter of Guayas 1 prison, which includes several security rings, during the day, according to AFP journalists on the scene. — AFP

ADDIS ABABA: Nearly 200 young children have died of starvation in hospitals across Ethiopia's Tigray region as malnutrition soars one year after a brutal conflict broke out, according to a new survey. The data collected from 14 hospitals offers a rare look at the scale of suffering in Tigray, which is grappling with a communications blackout and what the UN describes as a de facto aid blockade, meaning most essential medical supplies are no longer available.

Yet the toll is hardly comprehensive, given that most health facilities are not functional and Tigrayan health workers have only been able to reach roughly half of the region's districts, said Dr Hagos Godefay, head of the health bureau in Tigray's pre-war government. Hagos described the unpublished findings, some of which were collected in partnership with Mekele University in Tigray's capital, in an interview with AFP this week. "We have registered more than 186 deaths," Hagos said, referring to fatalities caused by severe acute malnutrition in children younger than five. "We collected this information from hospitals only."

Some 29 percent of children are acutely malnourished, up from nine percent before the war, Hagos said. For severe acute malnutrition, the figure is 7.1 percent, up from 1.3 percent before the war, he said. Only 14 percent of surveyed households report having enough access to food, down from 60 percent, he said, adding that he fears what is unfolding in areas his teams have so far been unable to reach. "For those areas that are not accessible, you can only imagine how many children are dying because of starvation. They are living in remote

areas, there is no water... there is no food, no communication, no health facility," he said. "So I am telling you if we go to the remote areas it will double for sure."

'It's catastrophic'

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray last November to topple the regional ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a move he said came in response to TPLF attacks on army camps. The 2019 Nobel Peace laureate promised a swift victory, but by late June the TPLF had retaken most of the region including Mekele and has since advanced south. Since mid-July less than 15 percent of needed aid has been able to enter Tigray, according to the UN, raising the spectre of the kind of mass starvation that turned Ethiopia into a byword for famine in the 1980s.

AFP has previously documented scattered starvation deaths in multiple parts of Tigray, describing how mothers feed leaves to their children in a desperate bid to keep them alive. The survey findings Hagos described cover the four months from late June, when the TPLF retook control of Mekele, to late October.

The 14 hospitals still functioning in the region are each recording between three and four deaths weekly due to ordinarily treatable illnesses like pneumonia and diarrhoea, Hagos said. He added he was especially worried for tens of thousands of Tigrayans under "chronic follow-up", including 55,000 HIV-positive patients and others battling conditions like cancer, hypertension and diabetes. "If we are not able to manage them, if we are not able to provide them drugs... it's catastrophic," he said.

'Frustrated' doctors

Abiy's government has rejected claims it is blocking aid to Tigray, saying access has been restricted because of TPLF advances into neighboring Amhara and Afar regions. In an interview with CNN last week, Abiy's spokeswoman Billene Seyoum said "the onus of responsibility on humanitarian access... is on the TPLF". The US, however, has said access to essential supplies and services was "being denied by the Ethiopian government" while denouncing "indications of a siege". And aid workers have sounded the alarm about government-imposed restrictions on medicines entering the region. Hagos said that with health facilities damaged across Tigray, banking services suspended and supply stocks now empty, there is little health workers can do.

At least 1,000 arrested

Meanwhile, the UN voiced alarm yesterday at surging arrests in Ethiopia since the country introduced a state of emergency on November 2. The United Nations human rights agency said most of those detained in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa as well as in Gondar, Bahir Dar and other locations were of Tigrayan origin. "According to reports, at least 1,000 individuals are believed to have been detained... with some reports putting the figure much higher," spokeswoman Liz Throssell told reporters in Geneva.

The arrests have occurred since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government declared a state of emergency two weeks ago, when Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) fighters threatened to march on the capital. Lawyers have also said that thousands of Tigrayans have been arbitrarily detained since the announcement of the measures, which allow the authorities to detain without a warrant anyone suspected of supporting "terrorist groups". — AFP



Malnutrition soars amid brutal conflict

Ugandan capital hit by twin explosions

KAMPALA: Two explosions hit Uganda's capital Kampala yesterday, injuring a number of people in what police termed an attack on the city, the latest in a string of blasts targeting the country. The explosions occurred in the central business district of Kampala near the central police station and the entrance to parliament, police said. "What we can say (is) this was an attack but who is responsible is a matter that is under investigation," Uganda's Assistant Inspector General of police Edward Ochom told AFP. Health ministry spokesman Ainebyoona Emmanuel said on Twitter that Kampala's Mulago Hospital was treating 24 people, four in critical condition.

"Following the unfortunate and cowardly act of terrorism, our health workers are working around the clock to save lives of those injured," he said. The explosion near the police station shattered windows while the one near the entrance to parliament saw cars parked nearby burst into flames, Ochom said. "We have dispatched a team" to the area, Uganda Red Cross spokeswoman Irene Nakasita told AFP. The twin attacks follow two blasts last month - a bus explosion near Kampala that wounded many people and a bombing at a roadside eatery in the capital that killed one woman.

Police said last month both those attacks were connected and were carried out by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) which the United States



KAMPALA: People extinguish fire on cars caused by a bomb explosion near Parliament building in Kampala, Uganda yesterday. — AFP

has linked to the Islamic State group. Kyle Spencer, the executive director of Uganda's Internet Exchange Point, told AFP that yesterday's explosions had sparked panic among many people nearby. "The road to parliament is closed off, there are people just crying, everyone else is just trying to get away from these areas," he said. "Everybody is evacuating office buildings and the buildings are locking up and not letting anybody inside."

Parliament cancelled

Parliament cancelled its session following the attacks, asking members to avoid the area "as security forces are working hard to restore order". The premises were put under tight security, with heavily

armed soldiers securing the area as forensics officers in white overalls inspected the blast site for clues.

The US embassy in Kampala warned its citizens to steer clear of the area and monitor local news. Ugandan police last month arrested a number of ADF operatives and warned that extremists were believed to be plotting a new attack on "major installations". The ADF, historically a Ugandan rebel group, has been accused of killing thousands of civilians in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. In March the United States officially linked the ADF to IS. The ADF is considered by experts to be the bloodiest of more than 120 armed groups that roam eastern DRC, many of them a legacy of two regional wars a quarter-century ago. — AFP

Heavy rains force evacuations, trap Canada motorists

OTTAWA: Relentless rain battered Canada's Pacific coast on Monday, forcing a town's evacuation and trapping motorists as mudslides, rocks and debris were washed across major highways. Some 275 people, according to local media, were stuck overnight in their cars between two mudslides on Highway 7 near the town of Agassiz in British Columbia. Since the morning, additional mudslides near Lillooet and Haig pinned down more travelers, the province's public safety minister, Mike Farnworth, told a news conference.

Meanwhile, Merritt—about 300 kilometers from the coast—ordered the evacuation of all 7,000 of its townsfolk after flooding compromised the local wastewater treatment plant and washed out two bridges. Barricades also went up restricting access to the town. Farnworth said search and rescue crews were dispatched to free people trapped for hours without food or water in 80 to 100 cars on Highway 7.

"Many people have been rescued by helicopters from mudslides near Agassiz and Hope with crews working to rescue the remaining people in the next few hours," he said. Those trapped in 50 vehicles in the Lillooet mudslide have all been rescued, while efforts were underway to free an unspecified number of people at the Haig site, he added. Video footage showed a military helicopter landing on a highway covered in mud and debris, to pick up stranded motorists.

British Columbia emergency health services said it transported nine patients to hospital with minor injuries overnight from the Agassiz landslide. Emergency centers were set up for displaced residents. "Please stay safe," Prime Minister Justin



MALAHAT, Canada: Photo shows storm water on the Malahat Highway on Vancouver Island. Relentless rain battered Canada's Pacific coast - forcing a town's evacuation and trapping motorists as mudslides, rocks and debris were washed across major highways. — AFP

Trudeau said in a Twitter message to British Columbians. "We're ready to provide whatever assistance is needed as you deal with and recover from the flooding and this extreme weather," he said.

Wettest ever

British Columbia's transportation ministry said several highways were closed Monday. "Heavy rains and subsequent mudslides/flooding have impacted various highways in the BC interior," it said.

The local utility issued flood alerts due to high water flows into its reservoirs, and said it was working to restore power to thousands hit by outages. Construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline connecting the Alberta oil sands to the Pacific coast was also paused, a company spokesperson told AFP, "due to widespread flooding and debris flows." — AFP

Police investigate 'Christian convert' in Liverpool attack

LIVERPOOL: British police are investigating the background of a mentally troubled Iraqi-Syrian convert to Christianity who died in a botched bomb attack in Liverpool, according to multiple reports yesterday. Counter-terrorism police in northwest England released four men held for questioning over the incident, which came seconds before Britain marked Remembrance Sunday.

"Police have been satisfied with their account and they have been released," security minister Damian Hinds told ITV News yesterday. Emad Al Swealmeen, 32, has been named by police as the would-be bomber whose crude improvised device went off in the back of a taxi outside a Liverpool hospital.

He was killed, while the quick-thinking taxi driver escaped with minor injuries after locking Al Swealmeen inside his cab. The government increased its terrorism threat assessment to "severe"—the second-highest level, meaning an attack is highly likely—following the second terror incident in a month after Conservative MP David Amess was stabbed to death. Police gave few other details about the Liverpool suspect. Hinds said he could not comment on the background of the suspect because of the investigation.

But reports by newspapers and broadcasters quoting unidentified security sources said Al Swealmeen was a failed asylum seeker of Iraqi and Syrian descent with a history of mental-health problems. He was taken in by Elizabeth and Malcolm Hitchcott, a Christian volunteer couple in Liverpool, for eight months from 2017 as his appeal for refugee status played out. Elizabeth Hitchcott told the BBC she felt "just so sad" and "very shocked" by Sunday's incident, adding: "We just loved him, he was a lovely guy." — AFP