



Myanmar must end violence, restore democracy: Indonesia

## Three held after police worker stabbed to death near Paris

Page 6

Page 7

# US names envoy amid tensions over Tigray

## Sudan warns of legal action against Ethiopia over dam

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday tasked a senior diplomat with reducing tensions surrounding Ethiopia's Tigray region as fears rise that the conflict will spread. Jeffrey Feltman, a veteran US diplomat who until 2018 served in a top UN position, was named to a new role of special envoy to the Horn of Africa.

Feltman will address the Tigray conflict as well as related tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan, which has taken in refugees and sent troops into a disputed border area. He will also take up disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a massive project that Egypt and Sudan fear will deprive them of vital water resources.

"At a moment of profound change for this strategic region, high-level US engagement is vital to mitigate the risks posed by escalating conflict while providing support to once-in-a-generation opportunities for reform," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. The announcement comes a day after the UN Security Council voiced alarm over Tigray, where the UN aid chief says that people have started to die of hunger and sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war.

Blinken has previously spoken of "ethnic cleansing" in the region by troops of neighboring Eritrea, which has since announced a pullout. Ethiopia, a US ally, launched an offensive in Tigray in November after the local ruling party was blamed for attacks on military installations. The former administration of Donald Trump unsuccessfully sought to mediate a solution on the mega-dam at the behest of Egypt.

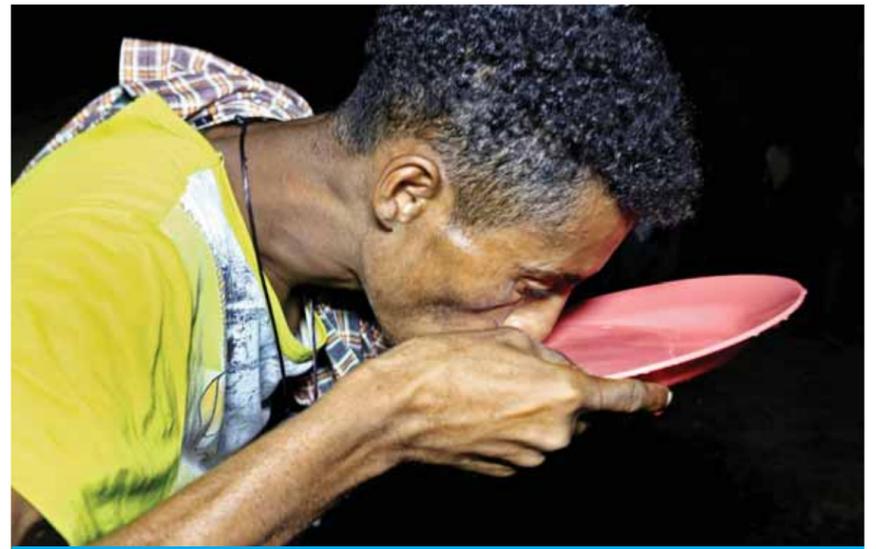
Meanwhile, Sudan warned Friday it could take legal action against Ethiopia if it goes ahead with

plans to fill a mega-dam on the Blue Nile without a deal with Khartoum and Cairo. Water Minister Yasser Abbas also said in a tweet that Ethiopia has raised "objections" to an invitation by Sudan to attend three-way talks to discuss the controversial dam. Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia have been locked in inconclusive talks for nearly a decade over the filling and operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) which broke ground in 2011.

Cairo has regarded the dam as an existential threat to its water supplies, while Khartoum fears its own dams would be harmed if Ethiopia fills the reservoir without a deal. Last week, Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok invited his Egyptian and Ethiopian counterparts to a closed meeting after recent African Union-sponsored negotiations failed to produce a deal. "Ethiopia has objected to the invitation of Sudanese prime minister Abdalla Hamdok for a three-way summit and we see that there is no justification for that," Abbas tweeted.

Addis Ababa announced last July that it had filled part of the barrage with a second stage due to take place this coming July, even if no agreement has been with Cairo and Khartoum. If Ethiopia goes ahead with the filling, Sudan "would file lawsuits against the Italian company constructing the dam and the Ethiopian government", Abbas warned.

He said the lawsuits would highlight that the "environmental and social impact as well as the dangers of the dam" have not been taken into adequate consideration. The tensions over the dam come as Sudan's relations with Egypt warm while its relations with Ethiopia have been hit by a dis-



In this file photo, a man drinks water from a plate as Ethiopian refugees who fled fighting in Tigray province camp at the Um Raquba camp in Sudan's eastern Gedaref state. —AFP

pute over the use of the Fashaga farmland near their common border. In March, Sudan said it has accepted an offer by the United Arab Emirates to mediate with Ethiopia over GERD and the contest-

ed border region. Abbas said the UAE's initiative included investment opportunities in the Fashaga region as well as "unofficial bid to bridge the gap in views with regard to GERD". —AFP

## 'Best thing I've done': First person to get COVID jab is beaming

LONDON: It was the shot in the arm that made history: in December last year British grandmother Margaret Keenan became the first person in the Western world to get an approved coronavirus vaccine, kicking off a global campaign to end the pandemic. Now, close to one billion people around the world have received Covid jabs — both first and second doses — and Keenan said she is proud to have been the first.

"It really is the best thing I've ever done," the former jewelry shop owner said. She got her shot on December 8 — just a week before her 91st birthday — and says she is now looking forward to going on holiday, after only retiring four years ago. She also hopes her inaugural vaccine will inspire others to follow in her steps. "I just feel really honored to have had it done, to have been the first and to have got the ball rolling," Keenan said this week during a call with the state-run National Health Service (NHS).

"I'm telling everyone to go and get it... I hope everyone comes forward." She got her first dose

less than a week after UK regulators became the first in the world to approve the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for general use, and has since had her second. Britain has now approved several other jabs, and an army of health officials and volunteers have now administered nearly 45 million doses — one of the most successful efforts globally.

### 'Dawn is coming'

Keenan praised the NHS for its pivotal role in the UK's vaccine rollout, calling its efforts "incredible" and the cherished institution "wonderful". Medics cheered and formed a guard of honor back in December after Keenan — wearing a festive Christmas T-shirt — got the first jab, administered by nurse May Parsons.

An NHS veteran of two decades originally from the Philippines, Parsons also spoke this week of her pride in helping Britain appear to turn a corner in the fight against COVID-19. Following surging virus infections, hospitalizations and deaths earlier this year, months of stringent restrictions and the successful jabs drive have helped push the numbers back to levels not seen since last September. "Vaccinating Maggie was a little spark of light in the midst of the darkness, and now I feel like the dawn is coming," she said.

"It's almost unbelievable that we've managed to roll out the vaccine so successfully. "I'm really



A nurse administers the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to Margaret Keenan, 90, at University Hospital in Coventry, central England on December 8, 2020. — AFP

grateful to all my colleagues for the bravery and courage that they've shown throughout this pandemic, which has helped us care for our people and care for our patients like Maggie." Britain is aiming to have offered a first vaccine dose to all adults by August. Queen Elizabeth II, who turned 95 this week, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson are among those to have already received jabs. —AFP

## Iran's Zarif to visit Qatar, Iraq today

TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is to visit Iraq and Qatar today, his ministry announced, following reported talks brokered by Baghdad between Tehran and regional rival Riyadh. The talks in the Iraqi capital earlier this month, which have not been confirmed by either capital, were held at the level of officials not ministers and aimed at restoring relations severed five years ago, an Iraqi official and a Western diplomat told AFP in Baghdad.

Tehran has neither confirmed nor denied the reports saying only that it has "always welcomed" dialogue with Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has flatly denied them. Foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said Zarif's visits to Qatar and Iraq are "in the framework of developing bilateral ties (and) regional and trans-regional talks."

The Baghdad talks, brokered by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, remained secret until the Financial Times reported last weekend that a first meeting had been held on April 9, with another planned for shortly after. An Iraqi government official confirmed the meeting to AFP, while a Western diplomat said he was "briefed in advance that talks would happen" with the "purpose to help broker a better relationship between Iran and Saudi and decrease tensions".

The meetings came amid talks in Vienna between Iran and major powers on the mechanics of a US return to a landmark 2015 nuclear deal abandoned by president Donald Trump. The talks must also address Iran's own return to full compliance with the deal, after it suspended its implementation of several key provisions in protest at Trump's reimposition of sweeping economic sanctions. Tehran has rejected calls by Riyadh to be involved in the nuclear negotiations, but has repeatedly stated its readiness to conduct a regional dialogue.

Tehran and Riyadh are on opposing sides in conflicts from Syria to Yemen and have had strained relations since the kingdom cut diplomatic ties in 2016. Some Gulf states have followed Saudi Arabia in taking a tough line on Iran. But Qatar has maintained warm relations despite the appeals of Saudi Arabia and its allies, which cited it as one of the reasons for imposing a blockade on the gas-rich emirate in 2017. That rift now appears to have healed after Qatar was invited to a meeting in Saudi Arabia in January at which it was brought back into the regional fold.

Meanwhile, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday that they had dismantled a "terrorist" cell linked to the Islamic republic's enemies and killed three of its members in the country's southeast. The Guards mounted a "successful operation" yesterday morning in Sistan-Baluchistan province and ambushed the "terrorist cell linked to the global arrogance", according to a statement published on the force's official website, Sepah News. Iran generally uses the term "global arrogance" to refer to the US or its allies. "Three of the terrorists were killed and their weapons, ammunition and communications equipment were seized," the statement added. —AFP

## 'Landmark' advance as malaria vaccine first to hit WHO goal

LONDON: A new malaria vaccine has proven 77 percent effective in trials on infants, British researchers said Friday, in what could prove to be a potential game-changer against the deadly mosquito-borne disease. In a clinical trial in Burkina Faso, the Matrix-M vaccine—developed by the University of Oxford's Jenner Institute—was found to be 77 percent effective after 450 infants inoculated in 2019 were followed up for a year, the Oxford researchers said in a statement.

No serious adverse events were reported. It is the first candidate vaccine for malaria to surpass a target set by the UN's World Health Organization, for researchers to create a jab of 75 percent efficacy by 2030. A broader "Phase 3" trial involving 4,800 children will now be carried out in four African countries, in collaboration with the Serum Institute of India and the US pharmaceutical company Novavax. Professor Adrian Hill, head of the Jenner Institute—which developed the coronavirus vaccine now being distributed worldwide by Anglo-Swedish pharma giant AstraZeneca—said the test results marked "a great day" in the global fight against malaria.

"We need to build on this, we need to keep all our ducks in a row, we need to avoid any safety signal, but I think the odds are now on our side, we can get this through," he told the PA news agency. He pointed out that vaccines against COVID-19 were approved rapidly while the first trials for one against malaria date all the way back to the 1940s.

Ahead of World Malaria Day today, the UN health agency has insisted that elimination of the disease that kills some 400,000 people each year around the globe is a "viable goal for all countries". But a vaccine breakthrough remains key, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the Oxford trial result was a "landmark achievement". "Malaria kills hundreds of thousands of children a year. An effective vaccine holds out the possibility of ending this global tragedy," he said on Twitter.



A medical volunteer of the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) organization takes a blood sample from a patient to be tested for malaria at his home in Barcelona, Anzoategui State, Venezuela. —AFP

### Children at greater risk

"Malaria killed at least four times as many more people in Africa last year as Covid did," Hill said. "And nobody for a moment questioned whether COVID should have an emergency use review and authorization in Africa—of course it did, very quickly. "So why shouldn't a disease that firstly kills children rather than older people, certainly killed an awful lot more, be prioritized for emergency use authorization in Africa?" The Serum Institute has committed to make at least 200 million doses annually, and Hill said Matrix-M "has the potential to have major public health impact if licensure is achieved".

The vaccine was given in a randomized trial involving 450 babies and toddlers aged five months to 17 months. A control group received a rabies vaccine instead. The infants received a booster vaccine after a year. Professor Charlemagne Ouedraogo, minister of health in Burkina Faso, said: "Malaria is one of the leading causes of childhood mortality in Africa. "We have been supporting trials of a range of new vaccine candidates in Burkina Faso and these new data show that licensure of a very useful new malaria vaccine could well happen in the coming years. "That would be an extremely important new tool for controlling malaria and saving many lives." The results of the clinical trial were reported in a pre-print article on the website of the British medical journal The Lancet. —AFP

## Kremlin critic Navalny ending hunger strike

MOSCOW: Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said Friday he was ending a 24-day hunger strike he launched to demand medical treatment behind bars, after allies said his life was in danger. The announcement came after Navalny's personal doctors said Thursday that he had received treatment at a civilian hospital and urged him to put a stop to his protest. "Taking into account the progress and all the circumstances, I am beginning to end my hunger strike," President Vladimir Putin's best-known critic said in an Instagram post.

He said that the process would take him 24 days, writing: "They say it's even harder" than the hunger strike. Navalny's protest in prison had raised the stakes in a standoff between Putin and Western leaders, who said Moscow would face repercussions if Russia's most prominent opposition leader died in detention. The 44-year-old announced the hunger strike in his penal colony on March 31, demanding to see an independent doctor for pain in his back and numbness in his arms and legs.

Navalny was thrown behind bars in February for more than two years on old embezzlement charges—which he says are politically motivated—just weeks after returning to Moscow from Germany where he had been recuperating from a near-fatal poisoning attack.

Navalny blames Russian authorities for the attack with nerve agent Novichok—a claim the Kremlin has repeatedly denied. His allies had demanded he be allowed access to proper treatment and warned in mid-April he could suffer cardiac arrest "at any moment", calling on the authorities to move him to intensive care. Medical professionals including Navalny's personal doctor Anastasia Vasilyeva made several attempts earlier this month to visit him, but were either detained or turned away. Navalny said he was guided in his decision by the recommendation of his doctors, whom he "completely trusts", and the fact that some of his supporters also went on hunger strike in solidarity. —AFP