

# Stability, peace aid relief efforts

**Editor's note:** In the first part of a series on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa, DJ Clark looks at the ways nations in the region are dealing with the situation.

By DJ CLARK  
FOR CHINA DAILY

**ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia** — At the Babile hospital in eastern Ethiopia the children's ward was practically empty. Two malnourished children sat with their mothers on thin black mattresses on the floor. The empty corridors of a hospital which serves 30,000 people in the heart of an area recently highlighted by UNICEF as a food crisis hotspot demonstrate a fact little known beyond the borders of Ethiopia. Most of the countries affected by the Horn of Africa drought have managed to cope extremely well.

"For three months the media has been reporting this drought to be the worst in 60 years, but what they failed to describe is how well we have dealt with it," said Tadesse Bekele, deputy director of Disaster Risk Management at the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture.

"Nature betrayed us and it has been a difficult time, but we worked hard with our development partners to respond."

While the food crisis in Ethiopia appears to be slowly easing, across the border in Somalia the situation is very different. Continued fighting between Al Shabaab and Transitional Federal Government/African Union Mission forces has made reaching those in need extremely treacherous.

Somalia now has some of the world's highest malnutrition rates, with three out of 10 children under the age of 5 being acutely malnourished, according to UNICEF.

The US government international development wing, USAID, estimates that 29,000 children under the age of 5 died in the first three months of the drought in Somalia, with

that figure now presumed to be much higher with the famine intensifying.

"Although it was the same lack of rain that hit the three countries the response was very different," Lynne Miller, deputy country manager of the World Food Programme (WFP) in Ethiopia, explained.

"In Kenya and Ethiopia there are structures in place that give us a clear indication of what the food needs will be in the coming months and we are able to respond. In Somalia there isn't quite that system in place, there are conflict areas with security issues that make it very difficult to access."

The UN estimates there are currently 13.3 million people across the Horn of Africa in need of emergency assistance, with 4.5 million in Ethiopia, 3.75 million in Kenya, 4 million in Somalia and 150,000 in Djibouti.

The situation across the region can be broadly broken down into three different crises, all with different levels of severity and needs.

In Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti, where stable governments working with international development organizations have the infrastructure to deal with the drought, the question has simply been about having the resources to make up for the shortfall in food.

China, which has contributed 342 million yuan (\$54 million) in bilateral aid to the three countries. The response has been successful.

In Somalia, where Al Shabaab controls large areas of the country, the UN has declared famine for the first time since 1991 in a number of districts.

On Oct 2, Al Shabaab confiscated 10 trucks carrying food aid in one of the worst affected areas, interrupting the move-



Somali refugees wait for food at a distribution center in Mogadishu on Oct 12. Chinese food aid to Somalia, which is worth as much as \$16 million, has started to arrive in the country.

ment of aid and jeopardizing the operations of humanitarian partners.

Fighting has also intensified around Mogadishu, threatening the livelihoods of nearly half a million internally displaced people sheltering in the region.

Even with October rains now starting to fall, the UN

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs still estimates the situation in Somalia is set to worsen over the coming months.

The third crisis exists in continually expanding refugee camps outside the borders of Somalia. The influx of Somali refugees into Kenya and Ethiopia continues, although the

rate of daily arrivals to Kenya seems to be decreasing.

In September, an average of 1,000 refugees arrived each day in Dadaab, now the world's biggest refugee camp with an estimated half-a-million population, down from a peak of 1,600 a day in June.

In contrast, last week in Ethiopia, the rate of refugee arrivals

increased from an average of 250 to 450 per day, according to the UNHCR, which supervises the camps.

More than a quarter of Somalia's 9.9 million people have now been displaced from their homes. Nearly a million of them are now outside the countries, putting additional stress on host nations.

Last week the WFP began the distribution of food purchased with a 100 million yuan donation from China — the country's largest single donation to WFP humanitarian operations.

The UN organization hopes to use the aid to reach an estimated 1.7 million people desperately in need of food, though this will depend on the security situation improving.

The WFP estimates it is currently only reaching about half the people in need of food in Somalia.

Back in Ethiopia, Bekele is confident with the Chinese food shipments now starting to arrive along with greatly anticipated seasonal rains, the situation is for the time being under control.

"We had good rains and a reasonable harvest in some areas so, with that expectation, the number of food dependent beneficiaries will definitely go down by the end of the year," he claimed.

Miller of the WFP is also optimistic about the immediate future, however warns "there are increasing signs of another La Nina event in this area in the next few months which would mean another year of low rainfall, but it is very difficult to predict and be sure how that may play out."

For the immediate future the crisis across the Horn of Africa appears to be focusing on one country. As the situation improves in the countries that surround Somalia, the famine inside the unstable nation appears to be worsening.

## Nations vow to talk on South China Sea

**BEIJING** — China and Vietnam pledged to ensure peace and stability in the South China Sea, and keep calm and restrained rather than take any action that will complicate and expand disputes, according to a joint statement issued on Saturday as Communist Party of Vietnam General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong concluded his China visit.

The two countries also reaffirmed their political will to settle maritime issues through negotiations and friendly consultation.

China and Vietnam have a long-standing dispute over sovereignty of part of South China Sea, which has potentially oil-rich waters and a vital commercial shipping route.

"Neither side shall allow any hostile force to destroy the relations between the two parties and the two countries," according to the joint statement.

Both sides will step up negotiations on maritime issues, seek basic and long-term approaches that will be acceptable for both sides, and explore interim and temporary solutions, including research and negotiations on the joint development of the sea, without impacting each side's stance and position, it said.

On the military front, China and Vietnam agreed to strengthen cooperation. The vice-ministerial strategic dialogue between the two defense ministries will be maintained and a hotline for the two countries' defense ministries is expected to be established, according to the statement.

The two countries also agreed to launch a pilot project of joint patrols along their land border at an appropriate time, continue joint naval patrols in the Beibu Gulf and increase naval exchanges.

Both sides agree to fully prepare for the third ministerial meeting between the two public security ministries on cooperation in crime prevention, and take steps to crack down on illegal border crossing and coordinate in new areas such as fighting telecom fraud.

Both sides spoke highly of the agreement on basic principles guiding the settlement of maritime issues existing between the two countries, which was signed on Tuesday by Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun and his Vietnamese counterpart Ho Xuan Son.

Beijing and Hanoi will seek steady progress in negotiations regarding the maritime demarcation of the mouth of the Beibu Gulf, the statement said.

Cooperation in marine environmental protection, scientific research, search and rescue, and disaster reduction and prevention will also be promoted.

Trong's China visit was a positive step to restore strained relations, said Chu Hao, a researcher with China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations.

"The joint statement showed the two sides' determination to work in areas both parties could accept," said Chu.

Yet observers also cautioned that Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang signed an oil exploration agreement in New Delhi last week, which will bring Indian state-owned enterprises into the disputed area.

CHINA DAILY

## Thai floods spread but Bangkok avoids the worst



A man sleeps on a bench at a flooded pier on the Chao Praya river in central Bangkok on Sunday. Relief workers reinforced barriers to help defend Thailand's capital, Bangkok, from the country's worst floods in half a century.

the early hours of Sunday.

Most of the factories make electronic components and car parts, so this will add to the problems of the international firms that use Thailand as a regional production hub.

"The water broke in at around midnight. Operators there were aware of it and evacuated people from the estate... Up to now, five industrial estates have been flooded," said Prayoon Tingthong, in charge of industrial affairs for the province.

Japanese car maker Honda Motor Co Ltd has shut its Ayutthaya plant, which accounts for 4.7 percent of its global output, and said on Friday it would stay closed until Oct 21.

The authorities are worried about another industrial park, Nava Nakorn in Pathum Thani province north

of Bangkok, which is standing in the way of the flow of water towards the capital.

Thai media said soldiers and workers from the estate, Thailand's oldest with more than 200 factories, were working around the clock to strengthen its walls and divert water.

On Sunday the Bangkok Post website quoted an irrigation official as saying a crucial sluice-gate had been repaired so the estate was now safe.

China's People's Liberation Army will offer relief materials to the Thai armed forces to aid the country's flood relief work, according to a news release issued by Defense Ministry on Saturday.

The relief materials, including 24 speed and rubber boats, six diesel-fuel generators and 200 emergency lights were expected

to be airlifted to Bangkok on Sunday.

The north, northeast and center of Thailand have been worst hit by the flooding and Bangkok — much of it only two meters above sea level — is at risk as water overflows from reservoirs in the north, swelling the Chao Phraya river that winds through the densely populated city.

That danger was compounded at the weekend by high estuary tides that hamper the flow of water into the sea.

The river was reported to be at a record high level of 2.15 meters at one point on Saturday but the embankment wall running along it in inner Bangkok is at least 2.5 meters high and has been raised along vulnerable stretches.

REUTERS-XINHUA

## Israel names prisoners to be freed in swap

By HAZEL WARD  
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**JERUSALEM** — Israel and Hamas on Sunday published the names of 477 Palestinian prisoners to be released next week in the first stage of a historic deal to secure the freedom of captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

Details of the prisoners' identities were made public just 48 hours before the exchange was expected to occur, although the specific details of how the handover would take place were still being worked out, officials said.

Under terms of the agreement which was signed last Tuesday, Israel will free a total of 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the release of Shalit, who has been in captivity in Gaza for more than five years.

If the swap goes ahead as planned, it will be the first time in 26 years that a captured Israeli soldier has been returned to the Jewish state alive.

The list of 450 Palestinian men and 27 women was released early on Sunday on the website of the Israeli Prisons Service, in a move which gives the public 48 hours to lodge any legal appeals against the names.

The remaining 550 prisoners are to be released within two months.

Hamas also published an identical list on its official website.

As soon as the list was published, Israel's main radio and

television stations began running details of deadly attacks the prisoners were convicted of carrying out.

Among those to be freed on Tuesday were Palestinians found guilty of taking part in the 2001 bombing of a Tel Aviv nightclub which killed 21 people, and the so-called Passover bombing of a hotel in the coastal town of Netanya in 2002, which killed 29 people, both of which were claimed by Hamas's armed wing.

The prisons service said 131 of the prisoners would be returning to their homes in Gaza and 55 to their homes in the West Bank. Another 55 would be permitted to return to their families in the West Bank but with certain restrictions.

Six Arab-Israelis will also be sent home.

But 203 prisoners from the West Bank were to be exiled, with 145 to be transferred to the Gaza Strip, and 40 to be sent abroad. Another 18 were to be sent to Gaza for three years before they would be permitted to return to the West Bank.

Israeli President Shimon Peres received the files of the prisoners on Saturday evening to begin working on their official pardons, which must be signed before the exchange expected on Tuesday.

And with the names now officially in the public domain, Israelis who wish to appeal against the release of certain prisoners, have 48 hours to do so.