

Heavy snow disrupts traffic in NE China

Heavy snow has disrupted traffic in northeast China's Liaoning Province, local authorities said Sunday.

The snowstorm started Saturday afternoon, the first day of the Lunar New Year or Spring Festival, and continued Sunday.

As of 9 a.m., 18 expressways in the province, including the section that links neighboring Jilin Province and part of the Beijing-Harbin Expressway, are either closed or restricted, according to the provincial department of transportation.

Most highway coach stations in Liaoning are also closed as a result of the snow.

The local meteorological station forecast snow to continue in most parts of Liaoning throughout Sunday.

There is no legal basis for making any extra payments to the EU

There are some on the continent who seem to think the UK will have to pay to leave the EU, based around negotiations over how much of the continuing liabilities of the EU the UK must pay. This is all nonsense.

There is no power in the EU Treaties to impose an additional one off levy on a state as it leaves the EU. Nor is there any power in the Treaty to demand any continuing budget contributions after departure. This is wise, as of course once a state leaves it leaves behind the judicial authority of the EU which would be the means of enforcing any such payment. Article 50 is clear. Once the state leaves it has no further rights and benefits, and no further duties or obligations.

It is of course true the Treaty does not prevent the EU accepting a payment volunteered by a departing state if it wished to pay one. However, the UK could not make such a payment legally under our own law and system for controlling public spending. Ministers can only authorise spending and sign cheques for approved expenditure under UK legislation and with Parliamentary authority for the budget provision that covers the payments. Ministers have proper authority to make the annual contribution payments to the EU, required by the Treaty as incorporated into UK law by the European Communities Act.

They have absolutely no authority to make one off additional payments to the EU, and would have no authority to make contributions after we have left and have repealed the 1972 Act.

They will also find that if they wanted to make a payment as overseas aid to the EU it would not qualify under our Aid budget criteria, as the EU as a whole is too rich. The only way UK Ministers could authorise a leaving payment would be to put through an Act of Parliament specifically authorising such an ex gratia payment. I can't see many Conservative MPs wanting to vote for that.

Being in the EU is a bit like being a student in a College. All the time you belong to the College you have to pay fees. You have to obey all the rules of the institution. When you depart you have no further financial obligations, and you no longer have to obey their rules and accept their discipline. If you liked the College rules you can still apply them to yourself voluntarily. The College does not on your departure say we have borrowed money to improve the College while you were here so you will have a continuing bill for servicing the College debts. It does not say we failed to make proper provision for the future pensions of the people who taught you, so we will send you additional bills for their pensions. All your rights to reside and learn at the College cease, and all your duties to pay and obey cease. So it is with a country's membership of the EU.

South Sudan: UN and regional partners call for immediate cessation of hostilities

29 January 2017 – The United Nations, the African Union (AU) and regional partners today reiterated their call for an immediate cessation of hostilities in South Sudan and urged the parties to ensure an inclusive political process, both in the proposed National Dialogue and in the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement.

Meeting in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, on the margins of the 28th African Union Summit, the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the UN, held a joint consultative meeting on South Sudan.

According to a joint press statement issued after the meeting, the participants expressed their deep concerns over the continuing spread of fighting, and risk of inter-communal violence escalating into mass atrocities, and the dire humanitarian situation in South Sudan. As such, they reaffirmed their continued and collective commitment in the search for lasting peace, security and stability in the country.

Stating that there can only be a political solution to the conflict, within the framework of the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), the AU, IGAD and UN reiterated their call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urged the parties to ensure an inclusive political process, both in the proposed National Dialogue and in the implementation of the peace deal.

The AU, IGAD and the UN reaffirmed their commitment and determination to further enhance their cooperation in support of the South Sudan peace process

Further to the press statement, the participants commended the important work performed by the Chairperson of the Joint Ministering and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) responsible for monitoring and overseeing the implementation of the Agreement and encouraged the AU High Representative for South Sudan to undertake active shuttle diplomacy towards ensuring the inclusivity of the National Dialogue and the implementation of the peace accord, in close consultation with the JMEC Chairperson, the UN and IGAD.

The AU, IGAD and the UN reaffirmed their commitment and determination to further enhance their cooperation in support of the South Sudan peace process, the statement added.

The meeting, chaired by Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of Ethiopia and Chairperson of IGAD, was also attended by Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the AU Commission; and UN Secretary-General António Guterres. The AU High Representative for South Sudan, former President Alpha Oumar Konare, and the Chairperson of the JMEC, former President Festus Mogae briefed the meeting.

Also in attendance, were the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, the Executive Secretary of IGAD, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, and other senior officials of the three organizations.

South Sudan has faced ongoing challenges since a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar erupted into full blown conflict in December 2013. The crisis has produced one of the world's worst displacement situations with immense suffering for civilians.

Despite the August 2015 peace agreement that formally ended the war, conflict and instability have also spread to previously unaffected areas in the Greater Equatoria and Greater Bahr-El-Ghazal regions of South Sudan.

As new drought hits Ethiopia, UN urges support for Government's 'remarkable' efforts

29 January 2017 – Commending the Ethiopian Government and humanitarian partners on the response to last year's El Niño drought that left 10.2 million people needing food assistance, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and UN aid chief Stephen O'Brien today said the international community must show "total solidarity" with country as it faces a new drought.

"This High-Level event must express our total solidarity with the Ethiopian people and the Ethiopian Government. And let's be clear: that solidarity is not a matter of generosity. It is a matter of justice and of self-interest," the Secretary-General told those gathered for the event, held earlier today in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, on the margins of the 28th Summit of the African Union.

It is a matter of justice in relation to the enormous generosity of the Ethiopian people themselves, he said, recalling that during his 10 years as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, he had witnessed the way Ethiopia became not only the largest African refugee-hosting country but the country with the most determined policy of keeping all its borders open, even in the most difficult security situations; "an example that, I would say, needs to be thought about in a world where unfortunately, so many borders are being closed."

Moreover, he said, the current crisis has not caught the Government and the people of Ethiopia unprepared, even if the magnitude of the crisis clearly is above the capacity of the Horn of Africa country to resolve. "Ethiopia has persistently applied a policy of building resilience in relation to the natural disasters that unfortunately with climate change have come to be more and more frequent and intense," explained Mr. Guterres.

Showing solidarity with Ethiopia is a matter of self-interest "because the link between humanitarian and development with peace and security is growing everywhere, and to invest in building resilience of populations and to invest in the best humanitarian needs in situations of stress like the one we are facing is also to contribute to strengthen peace and security," said Mr. Guterres, noting that a number of countries around Ethiopia are in the midst of deep crises "Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea.

In Ethiopia and beyond, development and peace and security must be tackled jointly UN chief

Describing Ethiopia as a "pillar of stability" in the region, he said the international community cannot allow the effect of drought to be a promoter of additional instability, social unrest, or conflict as this would

have dreadful consequences not only in relation to the conflicts in the area but in connection to displacements of populations, in a world that is so little inclined to receive more migrants, and to global terrorism that is now a threat everywhere.

With all this in mind, he urged the participants to transform this session of solidarity in a commitment to work together not only to address the pressing humanitarian needs of Ethiopia but to join efforts in addressing the huge challenges from a development perspective, a sustainable development perspective and from a peace and security perspective the world faces today.

Just back from a three-day visit to Ethiopia to see first-hand the impact of failed rains in the southern parts of the country, Mr. O'Brien, who is the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that in Warder zone in Ethiopia's Somali Region, he had witnessed the immense impact the drought is having on people's lives and livelihoods.

Below average rains in south and southeastern parts of the country caused by the negative Indian Ocean Dipole have led to a new lowland drought. Among the most affected areas are parts of Somali and Afar regions and a number of lowland areas of Oromia and SNNP regions. The new drought has led to severe shortages of water and pasture in the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. Deteriorating livestock body condition and loss of livestock are also being reported as well as high levels of acute and moderate malnutrition.

We have no time to lose UN Emergency Relief Coordinator

We need to act now before it is too late, said Mr. O'Brien, calling on the international partners to join the Ethiopian Government in funding the 2017 Humanitarian Requirements Document, which seeks \$948 million to assist 5.6 million people, whose lives, livelihoods and well-being depend on support from relief partners.

As effective as the humanitarian response to the 2016 El Niño drought has been, Ethiopian farmers and herders in affected areas are still living on the brink, unable to build back their livestock herds, or reinvigorate their small farms, and struggling to sustain themselves and their families, said Mr. O'Brien.

We have no time to lose. Livestock are already dying; pastoralists and farmers are already fleeing their homes in search of water and pasture; children more often girls are dropping out of school to support with household chores, and hunger and malnutrition levels will rise soon if assistance does not arrive on time, particularly among women who are more likely to suffer from health problems and malnutrition during droughts, he stressed.

Foreign volunteers help make Chunyun easier



Rachel (1st L) from Britain performs the Monkey King with young volunteers during a break at the East Railway Station of Hangzhou, capital of east China's Zhejiang Province, Jan. 23, 2017. Five foreign volunteers worked at the railway station to offer help to passengers who rush home for family reunion during the Spring Festival. (Xinhua/Wang Dingchang)

This Spring Festival, a group of foreigners volunteered to give something back to China as a gesture of thanks for what China has done for them.

Yu Zhongyan, was among about 80,000 passengers that will use Wuhan railway station each day during the Spring Festival travel rush, or Chunyun, this year.

She was deeply touched when the volunteers offered to help her with her bags.

"They made our holiday special this year," said the granny with her grandson in arms.

Wuhan, the capital city of the central province of Hubei, is one of the country's busiest railway hubs. This year 28 foreign students from 15 countries, wearing yellow hats and orange vests, were on hand to help passengers.

Thursday is Bassim Mohammed Dahash Aljizani's last day in Wuhan. He earned

his doctorate at Huazhong University of Science and Technology.

Together with his wife and three sons, the man had five suitcases and a buggy. Sadi Makangila Patrick from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Agil Mubariz from Azerbaijan hurried to help.

Aljizani told Xinhua that he will take the train to Guangzhou, before flying back to Baghdad. "I have been in Wuhan for four years and I really don't want to leave, but my country needs me," he said.

"It is great experience to see people off at the station," said Areen Muhammed, a student from Iraq. "The work is tiring. But when I see the smiles, I feel so happy."

"China's government provides us scholarship for our study here," said another volunteer from Sri Lanka. "China helped me, and in return, I would like to do something for the people here." [Yuan Gaoping, an official with Wuhan railway bureau, said that by working in the station, the volunteers could experience Chunyun, and experience Chinese culture and the development of its railway firsthand.

Yu Zhongyan asked Patrick to pose for a photo together, before bidding farewell to the foreign "uncle." "Thank you," said the boy, while Yu waved, "Happy New Year."