

Nearly half billion people lack decent jobs: UN

- 285 million people worldwide are considered underemployed
- Number of people registered as unemployed is expected to rise to 190.5 million
- More than 60 per cent of the global workforce currently work in the informal economy

AFP | Geneva

More than 470 million people worldwide are currently unemployed or underemployed, the UN said on Monday, warning that a lack of access to decent jobs was contributing to social unrest. The global unemployment rate has remained relatively stable over much of the past decade, according to the UN's International Labour Organization. But while the rate -- which stood at 5.4 percent last year -- is not expected to change much, overall jobless numbers are likely to inch up as slowing



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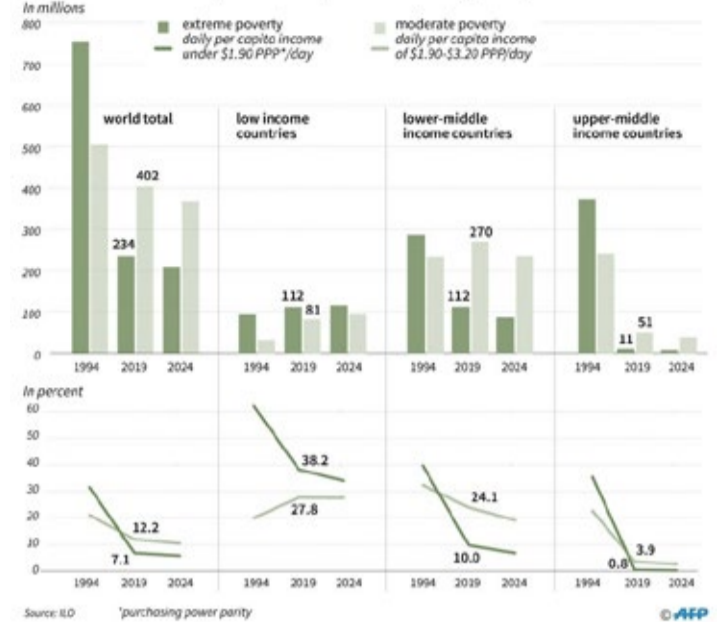
economies reduce the number of jobs available to a growing population. This year, the number of people registered as unemployed is expected to rise to 190.5 million up from 188 million in 2019, ILO said in its annual World Employment and Social Outlook report. At the same time, the UN body stressed that some 285 million people worldwide are considered underemployed, meaning they either work less than they want to, have given up searching for work or otherwise lack access to the labour market. That amounts to nearly half

a billion people and represents a full 13 percent of the global labour force, the ILO pointed out. **'Extremely worrying'** "For millions of working people, it is becoming increasingly difficult I think to build better lives through work," ILO chief Guy Ryder told reporters in Geneva. He warned that "persisting and substantial work-related inequalities and exclusion" were preventing many from finding decent work and thereby also creating better futures. "I think that this is an ex-

tremely worrying finding," he said, adding that lacking access to decent work appeared to be part of what was spurring growing protest movements and unrest around the world. "Labour market conditions are contributing to... this erosion of social cohesion in many of our societies," he said, referring to mass demonstrations in places like Lebanon and Chile. According to the ILO's "social unrest index", measuring the frequency of things like demonstrations and strikes, there was an increase both at the global level and in seven out of 11 sub-regions between 2009 and 2019. The ILO report highlighted that more than 60 per cent of the global workforce currently work in the informal economy, often toiling for substandard wages and lacking basic social protections. And in 2019, more than 630 million people -- a fifth of the global working population -- lived in so-called working poverty, meaning they made less than \$3.20 per day in purchasing power. At the same time, the ILO report warned of significant income and job access inequality, driven by things like gender, age and geographic location. In particular, it warned that

Working poverty

More than 630 million workers (1 in 5 worldwide) earn too little to escape poverty



a staggering 267 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are not in employment, education or training, while many more in this group endure substandard working conditions. The study showed that the average share of national income going to pay wages and other labour costs shrank from 54 percent to 51 percent between 2004 and 2017.

And within the waged population, the gap between the highest earners and those at the bottom is "extremely unequal", Ryder said. The ILO report found that it took 11 years for the bottom 20 percent of wage earners to make the same amount as the top 20 percent make in a year. "The situation is worse than we previously thought," Ryder said.

Central banks join forces to look at future digital currencies

Reuters | London/Frankfurt

Major central banks are looking at the case for issuing their own digital currencies, the Bank of England and European Central Bank said yesterday, amid a growing debate over the future of money and who controls it. The central banks of Britain, the euro zone, Japan, Sweden and Switzerland will share experiences in a new group headed by former European Central Bank official Benoit Coeure and assisted by the Bank of International Settlements, they said.



Representative picture

Central banks across the world have quickened the pace with which they are looking at

issuing their own digital currencies in the wake of Facebook's push to launch Libra. Of major central banks, China's has emerged as the front-runner in the drive to create its own digitised money, though details of the project are still scarce. "The group will assess ... economic, functional and technical design choices, including cross-border interoperability; and the sharing of knowledge on emerging technologies," the central banks said in a statement.

CBDCs are traditional money, but in digital form, issued and governed by a country's central bank. By contrast, cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin are produced by solving complex maths puzzles, and governed by disparate online communities instead of a centralised body. The common denominator is that cryptocurrencies and CBDCs, to a varying degree, are based on blockchain technology, a digital ledger that allows transactions to be recorded and accessed in real time by multiple parties.

Macron and Trump declare truce in digital tax dispute

Reuters | Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Monday he had a "great discussion" with US President Donald Trump over a digital tax planned by Paris and said the two countries would work together to avoid a rise in tariffs. The two leaders agreed to the truce after Paris offered to suspend down payments for this year's digital tax and Washington promised to keep negotiating toward a solution

rather than acting on a tariff threat, French sources said. Specifically, Macron and Trump agreed to hold off on a potential tariff war until the end of 2020, a French diplomatic source said, and to push ahead with broader negotiations at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to rewrite the rules of international taxation during that period. "They agreed to give a chance to negotiations until the end of the year," the source said.

Egypt village turns a profit on used tyres

Mit El Harun | Egypt

Residents of the Egyptian village of Mit al-Harun have for decades eked out a living by recycling old tyres into baskets, landscaping materials and alternative fuels. From early morning, workers covered in soot and dust can



be seen sharpening their knives to cut huge tyres stockpiled on the village's roadsides. "The entire village works on recycling damaged tyres," said 35-year-old Abdelwahab Mohamed outside of his workshop. "We inherited it from our fathers and grandfathers." The small Nile Delta village, some 70 kilometres (43 miles) north of Cairo, has gained a reputation as Egypt's top rubber recycling hub. Dealers collect used tyres from across the country, delivering them to Mit al-Harun in huge trucks. Mohamed said prices per tyre go up to



Dealers bring tyres from across Egypt for processing in Mit al-Harun

around 70 Egyptian pounds (four dollars). "We cut the tyres here and pull out material including wire rings, which are collected by steel and iron factories to be recycled," he said. "Tyre rubber is often

chopped into small pieces to be used by cement factories as an energy source" -- an alternative to low-grade mazut fuel oil. Other parts are recycled into mulch for playgrounds, he added. Mohamed said his work has grown unstable over the years, especially since the 2011 uprising that unseated longtime dictator Hosni Mubara and triggered years of political and economic turmoil. "There are days with plenty



Some of the tyres are turned into baskets, while others are cut up for fuel or playground mulch

of work and others with little to none," he said. At another workshop, 43-year-old Mostafa Azab fashions baskets out of tyres from trucks, tractors and industrial vehicles. "We cut the tyre in half, then we split its inner layers using a winch, before shaping them into baskets and hammering nails around the edges to make them hold," said Azab. The heavy-duty baskets are often used by farmers, gardeners

and labourers, he said. Azab's workshop, with a handful of workers, processes up to 10 tyres per day, producing between 80-120 baskets. Azab's brother, Haitham, said the job was "exhausting". "It requires physical strength to carry around the heavy tyres," he said. "If we had the option of a more stable occupation, we would have quit this one. But this is our only source of income."