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The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision

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Al Rayyan aim to bounce back against Al Duhail







Health Ministry reaffirms follow-up to global situation of coronavirus

QNA — DOHA

The Ministry said that, until the moment, no case of infection was recorded in the State of Qatar.

The Ministry of Public Health reaffirmed its continuous and prompt follow-up to the epidemiological situation of the emerging coronavirus, against the background of the World Health Organization's declaration that the virus has become a global health emergency with the emergence of cases in countries other than China.

The Ministry of Public Health stressed that it is closely monitoring the developments of the emerging coronavirus around the world while continuing to raise the degree of preparedness through a system of monitoring the epidemiological situation at the local and global levels, in coordination and full communication with WHO.

The Ministry said that, until the moment, no case of infection was recorded in the State of Qatar. The Ministry further explained that it took all necessary precautions and measures to monitor any suspected case at Hamad International Airport, after installing thermal cameras at the airport a week ago to record the temperature of passengers from a distance while raising awareness between the travellers regarding symptoms of pneumonia include high fever, coughing, and difficulty breathing.

The Ministry of Public Health assured the public that the health sector in the State of Qatar is ready to deal with any situation regarding the emerging coronavirus.

The Ministry confirmed that it has taken all means to ensure the diagnosis and treatment of cases when they are discovered and the necessary procedures to isolate the people close to the patients when necessary.

The Ministry of Public Health explained that these measures taken in Qatar contribute to strengthening health monitoring in all state border points and raising awareness to ensure the public gets accurate information about the disease and the most important methods of prevention.

The Ministry of Public Health indicated that the emerging coronavirus may not show some of its symptoms to the infected person until two to 14 days after infection.

➔P2



Souq Waqif Honey Exhibition

Customers at different stalls looking at honey products on display at the third edition of Souq Waqif Honey Exhibition 2020 which began on Thursday. Over 150 companies from 37 countries showcasing over 50 varieties of honey are participating in the exhibition. PIC: SALIM MATRAMKOT/THE PENINSULA

Vegetables' marketing programmes witness record 71% growth in sales

SANAULLAH ATAULLAH
THE PENINSULA

The three different programmes, being run by the Ministry of Municipality and Environment (MME) to help local farmers market their agricultural produce directly to customers, have witnessed a huge 71% growth in selling vegetables in 2018-19 season compared to 2017-18 season.

The programmes – 'Winter Vegetable Markets', 'Premium Vegetables' and 'Qatar Farms' – have helped selling 20,162 tonnes of local vegetables in 208-19 compared to 11,765 tonnes of vegetables in 2017-18, said the Ministry in a Report of National Strategy for Food Security - 2019, released recently.

The impressive performance of the programmes has also increased their market share from selling 18 percent of total local vegetables in 2017-18 season to 27 percent in 2018-19 season, showing a 50 percent growth.

Qatar Farms programme attracted the highest number of customers showing growth over three and half times (353 percent), by selling 10.385 tonnes vegetables in 2018-19 compared to 2291 tonnes vegetables in 2017-18.

Premium Vegetables programme witnessed 13 percent growth, by selling 2,484 tonnes vegetables in 2018-19 compared to 2,256 tonnes vegetables in 2017-18 while Winter Vegetable Markets sold 7,288 tonnes vegetables in 2018-19 compared to 7,269 tonnes vegetables in 2017-18.

Winter Vegetable Markets are operating in Al Sheehaniya, Al Mazrouha, Al Wakrah, Al Khor-Al Zakhira and Al Shamal from Thursday to Saturday from 7am to 3pm and they will continue until the end of agricultural season.

A total of 150 local agricultural farms, 40 livestock farms and 12 fishermen are participating with their produce in the markets.

➔P3

QTerminals wins concession for Port of Olvia in Ukraine

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

In the presence of Ukrainian Prime Minister H E Oleksiy Honcharuk, Minister of Transport and Communications H E Jassim Saif Ahmed Al Sulaiti and Ukrainian Ministers H E Vladyslav Kryklii of Infrastructure and H E Tymofiy Mylovanov for Development of Economy, Trade and Agriculture, an event was held in Kiev on awarding the concession to QTerminals to develop, manage and operate Port of Olvia in Ukraine.

Under the concession, which represents an exceptional opportunity on developing and operating world ports, QTerminals will invest some $120m in the port during the concession term of 35 years, said a statement issued by the Ministry yesterday.

The event was also attended by Qatari Ambassador to Ukraine H E Hadi bin Nasser Mansour Al-Hajri and a number of officials representing Qatari maritime transport sector, Qatar Ports Management Company (Mwani Qatar), shipping and logistics company Qatar Navigation (Milaha) and the Ukrainian Sea Ports Authority.

On this occasion, H E Minister Al Sulaiti stressed the deep relations between the State of Qatar and the Republic of Ukraine and the high level of bilateral cooperation between the two friendly countries.

"This concession is a major achievement for QTerminals that honors its strategy for expanding in overseas investments as a Qatari company specialised in seaports management," he said.

He noted that awarding the concession is a key investment opportunity in one of Ukraine's most important Black Sea ports and it will feature significant developmental works at the port in a way that supports its operations and boost its navigational and logistics services portfolio to meet best world standards and this will enhance its operational revenues.

The Minister also said that this step will bolster the economic cooperation with Ukrainian and international firms, thus supporting the goals of the Qatar National Vision 2030. This investment, he noted, will represent a turning point in QTerminals' journey of contributions to the sustainability of the national economy and support for the efforts that aim to leverage Qatar's competitiveness on world map.

Established in 1992, Port of Olvia, located in the Mykolaiv region on the Black Sea coast, has been seeing a significant year-on-year increase in grain and oils exports. Mykolaiv is a city in southern Ukraine and one of the top shipbuilding centers.

On an area of 178 hectares, Port of Olvia has 6 berths and 22 cranes and a number of warehouses and storage areas.

➔P3



A vintage orange-and-white taxi which plied on Doha roads from the 70s to the early 2000s at the classic cars exhibition launched at the National Museum of Qatar yesterday. PIC: BAHER AMIN/ THE PENINSULA

Story of Qatar told through cars exhibition at NMoQ

RAYNALD C RIVERA
THE PENINSULA

For those who have lived in Qatar for several decades, visiting Mawater Centre's vintage cars exhibition at the National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ) can evoke the feeling of nostalgia.

Visitors to the month-long show which opened yesterday can relive the past through the 12 vehicles that could be seen plying on Qatar's roads in the 70's, 80's and 90s spread around NMoQ's Baraha Square.

"The concept behind the exhibition was really to tell the story of Qatar through land transportation between the 70s, 80s, and 90s," Bouthayna Baltaji, Acting Head of Exhibitions Section at NMoQ, told local media yesterday.

Divided into three sections, the exhibition spans public transport vehicles, private cars, government vehicles used in Qatar in the past.

Museum visitors are greeted outside the entrance of the museum by three vehicles, one of which is a Toyota Cressida saloon which used to roam around Doha from the 70's to the 90's. With their distinct orange and white colours, the taxis were the means of public transport until 2004.

A maroon school bus used by the Ministry of Education from the 70s until 2004 is also on display in this section, along with an old water truck which was utilised to transport drinking water collected from water desalination plants in Msheireb and Ras Abu Aboud to houses.

The second part of the exhibition comprises government and ministerial cars including a police car used in the 70s by several departments in the Ministry of Interior, and a motorbike used by messengers of a number of ministries to carry letters and official documents to other government institutions in the 70s and 80s. Also showcased in this section are a vintage Special Forces car now known as Lekhwiya, an ambulance, and a fire truck.

➔P3

Deputy PM gets phone call from Russian FM

QNA — DOHA

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani received yesterday a telephone call from Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, H E Sergey Lavrov.

During the call, they reviewed bilateral cooperation relations and the latest developments on the regional and international arenas, in addition to a number of issues of common concern.

Johnson hails 'new beginning' as UK counts down to Brexit

AP — LONDON

Britons counted down the hours yesterday to their country's departure from the European Union — some joyous, some sad, many just hopeful the divorce would mark the end of an anguished chapter in their country's history.

The UK officially departs the EU at 11pm local time, midnight in Brussels (2300 GMT) . The move comes three-and-a-half years after the country voted by a margin of 52%-48% to walk away from the club that it had joined in 1973.

Throughout the day, bands of ardent Brexit backers draped in Union Jack flags gathered outside Parliament in London to celebrate, their numbers growing and volume increasing as the time grew closer.

Whether Brexit makes Britain a proud nation that has reclaimed its sovereignty, or a diminished presence in Europe and the world, will be debated for years to come.

Symbolically, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson held a Cabinet meeting in the pro-Brexit town of Sunderland in northeast England, rather than in London. In a pre-recorded address to the country, Johnson will say it was "not an end but a beginning". His office said he will describe it as "a moment of real national renewal and change." In

The UK and the EU have given themselves an 11-month "transition period" — in which the UK will continue to follow the bloc's rules — to strike new agreements on trade, security and a host of other areas.

➔P7

FEBRUARY FUEL PRICES

Qatar Petroleum (QP) yesterday announced the petrol and diesel prices for February.

QR1.85
Price of super grade petrol for a litre.

QR1.75
Price of premium grade petrol for a litre.

QR1.90
Price of diesel for a litre.

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR	04.59 am	SUNRISE	06.17 am
ZUHR	11.47 am	ASR	02.56 pm
MAGHRIB	05.20 pm	ISHA	06.50 pm

WEATHER TODAY

15°C Minimum | 23°C Maximum

Misty to foggy at some places at first becomes moderate temperature daytime with scattered clouds and chance of light rain, cold by night..

HIGH TIDE 08:23 - 00:00 LOW TIDE 03:02 - 16:37

» ALRUWAIS: 10°»22° » ALKHOR: 14°»22° » DUKHAN: 10°»21° » DOHA: 15°»23° » MESAIEED 09°»21° » ABUSAMRA 07°»22°

Islamweb issues new educational, recreational materials for children

QNA — DOHA

The materials include the first edition of the book "The Holy Hadith" for children.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs' online network, Islamweb, has released new educational and recreational materials for children.

The materials include the first edition of the book "The Holy Hadith" for children, which contained 21 of the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), dealing with many aspects, in addition to a new entertaining programme for children under the title "color and fun" that contained (22) paintings from the Boys and Girls website of IslamWeb.

The programme deals with the behavior that a child needs in his daily life. The Daawa and Guidance Department at the Ministry of Awqaf also issued the fourth edition of "My Prayer Book" for children.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, through its Islamic network, aims to strengthen and document communication links with the site's pioneers and followers, to pass its message through various means of social media, and to provide modern technical means that benefit the user in accessing useful legal information, reinforced by global and local sources.

These efforts come within the framework of the Daawa and Guidance Department at the Ministry of Awqaf to provide various publications for boys and girls, as well as for adult Muslims, which contain a set of topics that are of interest to each category, with a focus on the latest technologies and best specifications, to advance the level of the material provided for the site's visitors.

Al Sulaiti meets Ukraine Infrastructure Minister



The Minister of Transport and Communications, H E Jassim bin Saif bin Ahmed Al Sulaiti, with the Ukrainian Minister of Infrastructure, Vladyslav Kryklii, in Kiev. The two ministers discussed means of enhancing cooperation in the fields of transportation, ports, and aviation. They also discussed matters of common interest between the two friendly countries. The meeting was attended by the Qatari Ambassador to Ukraine, H E Hadi bin Nasser Mansour Al Hajri, and the delegation accompanying H E the Minister.

QU members win awards at HMC Stars of Excellence Awards

THE PENINSULA — DOHA



QU College of Pharmacy members with the awards at at HMC Stars of Excellence Awards.

Hamad Medical Corporation 's (HMC) Stars of Excellence is a prestigious annual event sponsored by HMC to recognise and award programmes that made a significant difference during that year.

The award is comprised of three main categories, health, education and research. Teams that included Qatar University (QU) College of Pharmacy (CPH) members, won awards in the research and health categories.

The first award was won by CPH Associate Professor and Section Head of Clinical Education, Dr. Hazem Elewa and his team for their project entitled "First Anticoagulation Stewardship Program in Qatar." The Anticoagulation Stewardship Program (ACSP) is a system-based team integrated into the healthcare organization and focused on ensuring safe and effective anticoagulation practices. The aim of ACSP is to implement evidence-based anticoagulation management related care throughout all areas of Al Wakra Hospital (AWH), achieve regulatory compliance, and monitor all aspects of improvement.

The work for this project was led by AWH Medical Director Dr. Sabah Alkadhi, HMC Executive Director of Pharmacy Dr. Moza Al Hail, AWH Head of Cardiology Department Dr. Ezeldin Soaly, AWH Pharmacy Director Dr. Rasha Elenany, AWH Assistant Director of Pharmacy Dr. Eman Alhamoud, AWH Lead of Anticoagulation Clinic Dr. Osama Abdelsamad and Dr. Hazem Elewa. Dr. Hazem is a cross-appointed faculty member who spends 20% of his time as a clinical pharmacy specialist at the anticoagulation clinic.

Commenting on this award, Dr. Hazem Elewa said, "Anticoagulation is a high-risk therapy involving complex dosing and stringent monitoring as well as ensuring patient adherence with therapy. There is an urgent need to implement processes to reduce the likelihood of patient harm associated with the use of anticoagulation therapy and to ensure proper anticoagulation transition of care. The program is one step forward to closing the gap in the anticoagulation management at HMC."

QU CPH graduate Asmaa Al-Mansouri, along with her research team from CPH and Fahad Bin Jasim Kidney Center (FBJKC), won an award in research for their project "Treatment Burden Impact on Quality of Life," which is a collaboration between FBJKC of HMC and CPH. The research was conducted as an MSc thesis project by Asmaa under the supervision of Dr. Ahmed Awaisu and Mohamed Izham from CPH, and Nadir Kheir from Ajman University.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is highly prevalent among patients with diabetes in Qatar, which increases cost on Qatar's healthcare system as well as increases treatment-related burden on patients and their families. Understanding the magnitude and predictors of treatment burden is essential in improving medication adherence and designing effective intervention strategies. This research project conducted at FBJKC was aimed at exploring the treatment-related burden among CKD patients (both dialysis-dependent and pre-dialysis) in Qatar.

HBKU organises workshops in computer engineering for aspiring school students

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

As part of its mission to nurture technically grounded leaders and innovators through teaching and research, the College of Science and Engineering (CSE) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) has launched a series of workshops for high school seniors with an interest in computer engineering.

The 'Innovate.Create' series provides opportunities for participants to work in group settings to better understand how computer engineering affects their lives. The series also provides opportunities to work on practical engineering projects and application developments covering cybersecurity and robotics. The workshop on January 25 explored the origins of computer security and how cybersecurity works. A session on programming as well as mobile application design and development will be held on February 22.The workshops are open to students in their final two years of high school who have a good academic record.

Following the first workshop, Dr. Mounir Hamdi, dean of CSE, said: "CSE's determination to become a world-class multidisciplinary college effectively starts at home. Put simply, we need to attract local students with a passion and flair for computer engineering. Our 'Innovate.Create' series of workshops are designed specifically to pique high school seniors' interest in this constantly evolving field of research. We're also determined to show them what makes HBKU such an exciting and innovative place to study."

CSE regularly holds events that reflect its research activities and interests. The second session will be held at the Information and Computing Technology (ICT) Division, Penrose House (LAS building), Education City. To register for the upcoming workshop on February 22, please visit cse.hbku.edu.qa



School students get tranining during the 'Innovate.Create' workshops at HBKU.



The business deleagtes from Qatar during their participation at Indus Food.

Business delegates from over 17 companies from Qatar participate in 'Indus Food'

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Indian Business & Professionals Council (IBPC Qatar), the apex body of Indian Businessmen and Professionals, functioning under the aegis of Embassy of India, led a delegation of food & beverage importers, hypermarkets and supermarkets from Qatar to participate in 'Indus Food', India's official F&B focused Trade Fair showcasing India's best line-up of food & agriculture products to international buyers.

Indus Food, organised by the Trade Promotion Council of India and supported by Department of Commerce, Government of India, hosted over 1000 most prominent global F&B industry buyers from over 80 countries gathered to meet over 700 + Indian exhibitors and suppliers with the purpose of sourcing new products, meeting with suppliers and developing new business.

A gala awards function was organised as part of 'Indus Food'. At the award function the Trade Promotion Council of India recognized stalwarts from the global F&B industry for promoting Indian F&B trade.

IBPC Qatar was awarded as the Global Alliance Partner by the Trade Promotion Council of India. Sumit Malhotra, Vice President Indian Business & Professional Council who led the business delegation of over 17 Qatar based companies including leading names like Lulu Group, Safari Group & Ali Bin Ali, received the award on behalf of IBPC Qatar from Mohit Singla, Chairman, Trade Promotion Council of India. The Qatar business delegation led by Sumit Malhotra also participated in the India-GCC Business to Business (B2B) conference and discussed ways of increasing the bilateral trade in Food & Beverages with leading food suppliers and exporters from India.

Azim Abbas, President IBPC Qatar pointed out that IBPC promotes the various business events in India which benefit Qatar based companies and mentioned that IBPC had earlier led similar delegations to India from Qatar, including to the Vibrant Tamil Nadu & Vibrant Goa summits. IBPC has signed an MoU with Trade Promotion Council of India for promoting business and trade opportunities between India and Qatar.

Health Ministry reaffirms follow-up to global situation of coronavirus

FROM PAGE 1

Since the appearance of the virus in China, the Ministry of Public Health has issued national guidelines for dealing with new cases of coronavirus, with alerting all hospitals and government and private health facilities in the State to report any suspected respiratory infections, especially for travelers coming from countries where it is spread, during the 14 days of their arrival, with a focus on the importance of reporting cases that show symptoms of respiratory infections, where investigative teams make daily visits to hospitals to ensure that any of them conform with the definition approved by the WHO for suspected cases.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Public Health recommended avoiding unnecessary travel to cities where the virus is spread in China, as well as avoiding close contact with animals in the affected areas and not mixing closely with people who show symptoms of respiratory infections while continuing to wash hands with soap and water.

The rapid response team at the Ministry of Public Health operates around the clock and receives any communications or inquiries related to communicable diseases on the hotline numbers 66740948 or 66740951.

Mathaf introduces university students to its world-class collection, facilities

THE PENINSULA — MATHAF

Arab Museum of Modern Art (Mathaf) hosted College Night, an event designed to introduce university students to the museum's world-class collection, its programmes, and facilities.

The event, which was held yesterday, is part of Mathaf's educational activities which place enhancing creativity, engagement, and developing an appreciation for modern art at the core of the museum's community outreach.

Through a series of tours, film screenings, fun games, and art-making activities inspired by the museums' Triumphant Scale exhibition – featuring the work of Ghanaian artist El Anatsui – students learnt about the artist's inventive usage of sculptural form and visual language. Students also learnt about Mathaf's internships programs and other ways to collaborate with the museum through its different educational programmes.

Abdellah Karroum, Mathaf Director, said: "College Night aims to connect university students with our team in order to strengthen Mathaf's relationship with local academic institutes and encourage an exchange of dialogue that could lead to long-term partnerships.

"The activities we hosted focused on El Anatsui – perhaps Africa's most prominent living artist – and encouraged students to reflect on his commentary about the making of human communities."

Mathaf, a member of Qatar Foundation, encourages visitors and students to use its space as a place for learning and discovery. The museum often collaborates with local and international universities to develop tailored programmes.

Lebanese PM meets Qatar's Ambassador



The Prime Minister of the Lebanese Republic, H E Dr. Hassan Diab, met with the Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Lebanon, H E Mohamed Hassan Jaber Al Jaber, in Beirut, yesterday. They reviewed bilateral cooperation relations, in addition to topics of common interest.

New research from WCM-Q sheds light on common diseases

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The researchers at Weill Cornell Medicine – Qatar (WCM-Q) have examined the relationship between natural modifications of human chromosomes, a process called DNA methylation, and their effects on proteins circulating in the blood stream, shedding new light on the causes behind several common disorders.

Their findings may eventually help to better understand complex diseases that involve chronic inflammation, including cardiovascular disease, obesity, and rheumatoid arthritis.

The team of researchers, led by WCM-Q's Dr. Karsten Suhre, professor of physiology and biophysics, analyzed data derived from blood samples of more than 1,300 individuals from Europe, Asia and the Middle East. The researchers examined how DNA methylation, a naturally occurring chemical modification of the cell's chromosomes, regulates important genes by looking at the proteins that these genes produce.

Methylation is a process by which a gene is turned on or off – i.e. methylation of a gene determines whether it creates a specific protein or not. This process often changes in response to disease or other stress factors acting on the human body, and DNA methylation can therefore inform researchers about which genes are affected by a certain disease.



Dr. Shaza Zaghlool and Dr. Karsten Suhre.

By examining 450,000 methylation sites on all human chromosomes and measuring at the same time 1,100 proteins in blood samples from 1,300 individuals, 350 of whom are from Qatar, the research team was able to calculate the probability that the methylation of a certain gene affects the production of a specific protein. Once common factors that control DNA methylation, like age and gender were filtered out, the researchers then identified 98 direct correlations between the methylation of a specific gene and a protein. Taking it to the next stage, the researchers then used this information to ask whether there are further correlations between disease manifestations and specific proteins that could eventually link several conditions back to relevant genes.

The team has now published this work in the prestigious international journal Nature Communications under the title "Epigenetics meets proteomics in an epigenome-wide association study with circulating blood plasma protein traits" [https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-019-13831-w].

Dr. Suhre said: "Our research lays the foundations for the development of new medicines and therapies as it connects proteins – which can be the targets for drugs – to fundamental biological processes and their dysregulation diseased individuals."

The research paper's first author, Dr. Shaza Zaghlool was responsible for the majority of the computational work and is also the bioinformatics research manager at WCM-Q. She said it was gratifying that the study may lead to the development of new disease therapies : "Connecting these huge genetic and protein data sets to disease information obtained from hundreds and thousands of individuals using sophisticated computing skills is like looking for a needle in a haystack, but it can also be very rewarding knowing that our findings may eventually help developing new cures."

Dr. Khaled Machaca, Senior Associate Dean for Research, Innovations, and Commercialisation at WCM-Q, praised the support of Qatar Foundation for the work. "This multi-disciplinary work fully led by researchers located in Qatar has only been possible thanks to the visionary support from Qatar Foundation to WCM-Q and its genomics, proteomics and bioinformatics cores who generated and analysed most of the data."

Doha Institute for Graduate Studies to hold seminar on February 6

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Doha Institute for Graduate Studies will hold its English language seminar titled 'Teaching Across the Curriculum' on February 6 from 9am to 2pm.

The event will take place in Auditorium 2 of the Cultural Building at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. The opening speech and welcoming remarks will be given by Dr. Alaa El Gibali, Director of the Language Center at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, at 9:45am.

Dr. Dudley Reynolds, Teaching Professor of English at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, will give his talk from 10am titled 'Teaching for Transfer: Moving Beyond Task Authenticity in EAP'. At 11am, Dr. OkonEffiong, Lecturer at Qatar University, will present on 'Today's language classroom: How much is too much?', and at 1pm, Dr. Mick King, Chair of the English Language Center, Community College of Qatar, will talk about 'English – a 'dirty word'? Challenges and solutions when incorporating English into the curriculum in the Gulf'.

The Director of the Language Center has stated that this event falls within the context of Doha Institute's community outreach initiative and contributes to enhancing communication between the Institute, individuals, and organizations in the community.



The officials of CNA-Q with the accreditation certificates of its engineering programmes.

CNA-Q Engineering Technology programmes receive full international accreditation

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

CNA-Q has received accredition by the Canadian Technology Accreditation Board (CTAB).

Six additional programmes were recently accredited by CTAB; Electrical Power Systems Technician, Telecommunications and Network Engineering Technician, Telecommunication and Network Engineering Technology, Process Automation Technician, Mechanical Technician (Industrial Maintenance), and Chemical Processing Technician.

With this latest accreditation certificates received, all of the engineering programmes offered at CNA-Q are now internationally accredited.

Dr. Salem Al-Naemi, Acting Vice-President, Academic, has indicated that the latest accreditation of CTAB are in line with our strategic plan and serves the overarching goal of the College which is the student success in terms of having high quality learning methodologies that are internationally recognized, continuously monitored and improved.

The dean of the school of engineering technology at CNA-Q, Dr Awni Al-Otoom, elaborated that the latest accreditation is a proof of our commitment at CNA-Q to deliver world class of technical education that focuses on experiential learning with highest international standards. He stated that the state of the art workshops, laboratories, and highly skilled and qualified instructors at the school have enabled the College to receive these prestigious certificates of accreditation.

CTAB Established in 1982, it is a standing committee of The Canadian Council of Technicians and Technologists (CCTT). The board is in charge of developing, coordinating and managing the national accreditation programmes for applied science and engineering technology programs, locally and internationally.

QTerminals wins concession for Port of Olvia in Ukraine

FROM PAGE 1

Its quay is 1530 meters long and having own rail connection for transporting cargo inside the port.

QTerminals was established as a JV between Mwani Qatar and Milaha. It operates Phase 1 of Hamad Port and now is building Phase 2 of the port. Hamad Port has played a key role in making Qatar a regional business hub that boosts intra-trade in the Middle East region and region's trade with the world.



Customers buying vegetables at a winter vegetable market.

Vegetables' marketing programmes witness record 71% growth in sales

FROM PAGE 1

However, other two programmes are being run by the MME in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry at major commercial outlets throughout the country offering fresh vegetables directly from local farms to customers at competitive prices.

The marketing programmes aim at proving reasonable prices to local farmers for their investments and hard-work enabling them to offer their produce directly to the customers. The good yield also encourages local farms to increase their products by cultivating in free spaces at their farms and setting up greenhouses.

According to the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, the greenhouse areas have increased to 400 hectors from 129 hectors in 2012-13, when the first winter vegetable market opened.

To further boost the marketing activities of local agricultural produce, the Ministry launched another initiative of establishing a local company to serve the purpose.

Under the initiative, Hassad Food established Mahaseel for marketing local agricultural produce with supervision and cooperation with the Ministry. Mahaseel launched new programme – Contract Farming – offering farmers to sign a contract with the company before the beginning of agricultural season to market their produce at a fair and fixed prices throughout the season.

The initiative encourages the farmers to increase their produce by ensuring fair prices for it. Mahaseel also buys vegetables from local farm on daily basis without prior contract, creating opportunities to the farmers from all over the country to supply their produce to the company.

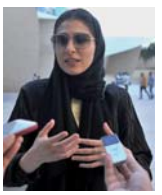
Story of Qatar told through cars exhibition

FROM PAGE 1

Private cars are on display in the final segment of the exhibition which includes a 1989 model of Nissan Skyline GT which was popular with the younger generation until the late 80s, a pick-up truck, and a couple of family cars, one of which is a GMC still very famous until now that some households still have it.

"The whole idea was to show how some things may have changed with modernization, but also some things have stayed very much the same. Families are still very important. We love to go to the desert and have road trips together; these simple things have remained the same," said Baltaji.

The exhibition is a collaboration between NMoQ and Mawater, which will see a series of exhibitions in the future, she said, adding the idea was based on the fact that "the National Museum is representative of the nation's history, and Mawater also plays a large role in the recent history of many people living in Qatar. This is another way that we tell the story of Qatar."



Bouthayna Baltaji, Acting Head of Exhibitions Section at NMoQ. PIC: BAHER AMIN/THE PENINSULA

The exhibition runs until February 29.

Erdogan: Turkey won't hesitate to use force to stabilise Syria



Turkish President and Leader of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, delivers a speech during the party's extended meeting with provincial heads at the AK Party headquarters in Ankara, yesterday.

AGENCIES — ANKARA

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stressed that his country wants to establish stability in Syria and that it will not hesitate to do everything necessary regarding that, including the use of military force.

"We sincerely want stability in Syria and will not hesitate to do whatever it takes, including using military force," Erdogan told a meeting of provincial heads of his ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party in the capital Ankara.

The Turkish leader pointed out that any development in Syria is extremely important, especially for Turkey, adding that Turkey cannot remain spectators about the situation in the Governorate of Idlib and other regions in Syria.

The recent campaign has also raised tensions between Ankara and Moscow, which back opposing sides in the conflict. Turkey, which already hosts 3.6 million refugees from Syria, fears a fresh wave of migrants from Idlib. It has 12 military observation posts around Idlib, set up under a 2017 agreement with Russia and Iran, and several of them have since been surrounded by advancing Syrian government forces.

"We sincerely want stability in Syria and will not hesitate to do whatever it takes, including using military force," Erdogan told a meeting of provincial heads of his ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party in the capital Ankara.

Erdogan accuses Russia of violating agreements to reduce the fighting in Idlib, a charge Moscow denied yesterday. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Idlib was a haven for militants targeting Syrian troops and a Russian airbase in Syria.

Speaking in Ankara, Erdogan repeated Turkey could not handle a fresh influx of migrants and would not allow new threats near its borders, even if it meant resorting to military power as it did in three previous cross-border operations in northern Syria.

"We will do what is necessary when someone is threatening our soil. We will have no choice but to resort to the same path again if the situation in Idlib is not returned to normal quickly," Erdogan said.

He also appeared to hold out the option of another operation in northeastern Syria, where in October Ankara targeted the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia that it calls a terrorist group.

The United Nations sent yesterday humanitarian aid for civilians in Idlib, a war-torn city in northwestern Syria.

The international organisation sent 42 truckloads of supplies, which will be distributed among families in the city, as well as rural areas nearby. The trucks entered the Middle Eastern country through the Cilvegozu border gate in the southern Turkish province of Hatay.

The Bashar Al Assad regime continues intensified air and land attacks on civilian settlements in Idlib de-escalated zone despite cease-fire.

In September 2018, Turkey and Russia agreed to turn Idlib into a de-escalation zone in which acts of aggression are expressly prohibited. But more than 1,300 civilians have been killed in attacks by the regime and Russian forces in the zone since then as the ceasefire continues to be violated.

wwwOn January 10, Turkey announced that a new ceasefire in Idlib would start just after midnight on January 12. However, the regime and Iran-backed terrorist groups continued their ground attacks.

East African airlines suspend China flights due to coronavirus

REUTERS — KIGALI

Kenya Airways and RwandAir said yesterday that they had suspended all flights to and from China until further notice after a virus outbreak killed more than 200 people in China and spread to 18 countries.

Authorities in Kenya have sent samples from a person suspected of having the new coronavirus to South Africa for further tests. The patient is isolated in a Nairobi hospital having arrived on Tuesday on a Kenya Airways flight from Guangzhou in Southern China.

"We have temporarily suspended all flights to and from Guangzhou until further notice," the airline said in a statement.

The World Health Organization on Thursday declared a global emergency as the virus spread to more countries. Air transport links between Africa and China have boomed in the past 20 years, in tandem with the growth of trade, social, economic, political and cultural ties between the continent and the Asian giant.

Kenya Airways, which operates one flight daily to Guangzhou via Bangkok, joins other airlines around the world that have stopped flying to the world's second-largest economy as it deals with the outbreak that has infected at least 8,000 people.

Flights to Bangkok will continue, Kenya Airways said.

RwandAir has also suspended flights to Guangzhou, the airline said yesterday, adding that the decision would be reviewed in February.

On Thursday, Ethiopian Airlines, Africa's largest carrier, denied reports that it would suspend flights to the Asian country after its call centre told Reuters that flights were cancelled. Air Tanzania, which was poised to start maiden flights from Dar es Salaam to China in February, said on Wednesday it had postponed the plan, citing concerns over the spread of the virus. Kenya Airways did not respond to queries about the share of its revenue that comes from the China flights.

Three dead in Boko Haram suicide bombing in Nigeria

AFP — KANO

A girl detonated a bomb, killing three boys at an Islamic seminary in northeast Nigeria in an attack that bore the hallmarks of Boko Haram, a local militia and residents yesterday.

The girl, aged around 12, detonated the device late on Thursday when open-air classes were on in Muna Dalti, on the outskirts of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state.

She walked up to the group of boys who were just ending their lessons and "blew herself up in their midst," Mohammed Bola, head of the Anti-Jihadist Militia in the area, said.

"She killed three boys and injured four others," Bola said about the attack which happened around 1900 GMT.

Moments earlier, another young girl stormed into a house in the area and detonated her explosives, injuring one person, said resident Salisu Mohammed.

"The house was totally destroyed. Luckily, no one was killed as the occupants of the house were outside chatting with neighbours," he said.

The two bombers sneaked into the area together but split to attack different targets, Bola said.

Iraqi cleric condemns use of force, 11 protesters wounded

AP — BAGHDAD

Iraq's most powerful religious figure Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani reiterated yesterday his condemnation of the use of force against anti-government protesters as the mass movement enters a critical juncture and political blocs tussle over naming a new premier.

Meanwhile, influential and radical cleric Muqtada Al Sadr called for his followers to return to the street, one week after he withdrew support for anti-government demonstrators camped out in Baghdad's Tahrir Square.

Al Sistani's comments came as unrest continued in Baghdad's Khilani and Wathba squares, where at least 11 demonstrators were wounded yesterday by security forces firing tear gas canisters to disperse crowds, according to security and medical officials. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

The area has become a flash point in the recent escalation staged by demonstrators to refocus public attention on the demands of the four-month protest movement after a US airstrike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad monopolized Iraqi politics.

Protesters called for 1 million Iraqis to take to the streets to revitalise demonstrations and pressure the government to implement a reform agenda after Al Sadr withdrew his followers from the street last week. Al Sadr's pullout was followed by a security crackdown on protest camps. Tents were burned and at least four protesters were killed in Baghdad and Iraq's south.

But yesterday, Al Sadr issued a statement calling on his followers to "renew" the demonstrations and return to the street, amid deadlock over the naming of a new prime minister. He said large demonstrations were necessary to pressure political elites to form a new "non-controversial" government and hold early elections.

A second statement from Al Sadr said the call was "effective immediately" and he called on protesters to head to Tahrir Square, epicenter of the anti-government protest movement.

Al Sadr is the head of political bloc Saeroon, which won the most seats in Iraq's 2018 federal election.

Al Sadr's departure last week had created clear divisions between his followers and other anti-government protesters in the square.

"All those who are already in protest squares are your brothers," Al Sadr's statement said. "Never be divided in slogans, sayings or deeds." Al Sistani reaffirmed his condemnation of the use of violence against demonstrators in his weekly sermon, delivered in the holy city of Karbala through a representative. Al Sistani's opinion holds sway over many Iraqis and elites.



Arab League Secretary -General, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, meets with Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, in Cairo yesterday.

Israel tightens security after Trump plan

AFP — JERUSALEM

Israel stepped up security in Jerusalem's Old City yesterday after US President Donald Trump enraged Palestinians with his controversial peace plan.

The plan released on Tuesday was seen as heavily biased towards Israel and was angrily rejected by Palestinians, with one of the key bones of contention being its classification of Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided capital."

Fears of tensions were raised yesterday morning when a group of Palestinians protested at the Al Aqsa compound in east Jerusalem after dawn prayers. The acting head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, Christian Saunders, said Friday that Palestinians were in a "state of shock" over the US plan. "We certainly have serious concerns that it will result in an escalation in clashes and in violence," he added.

At least 30 Palestinians have been wounded since Tuesday in clashes with Israeli forces in the West Bank, although the demonstrations have mostly been small. In Hamas-controlled Gaza, thousands gathered for demonstrations this week. Many more donned badges proclaiming "no to the deal of the century".

Israel carried out air strikes on Hamas targets in Gaza early yesterday after three rockets were fired the previous evening, causing neither casualties nor damage, the army said.

Israeli police injure 10, detain 3

Israeli police injured 10 worshippers and detained three others after storming Jerusalem's flashpoint Al Aqsa Mosque yesterday morning, an official said.

The Israeli police forced their way into the mosque and shot rubber-coated metal bullets at the worshipers, the official with Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, an organisation responsible for overseeing the city's Islamic and Christian sites, said.

This is the third Friday in a row that Israeli police stormed Al Aqsa Mosque and attacked worshippers after morning prayer.

Thousands of Palestinians perform morning prayer at the Al Aqsa Mosque, to affirm their devotion to it and their refusal to the Israeli incursions.

US appoints special envoy for S Sudan crisis

AFP — WASHINGTON,

The United States yesterday named a special envoy to seek progress in the crisis in South Sudan, whose rival leaders have repeatedly missed deadlines to end their devastating conflict.

The State Department said that Stuart Symington, a retired ambassador with long experience in Africa, "will lead US efforts to support the peace process and a successful political transition in South Sudan."

The United States has been a major supporter of the impoverished, majority-Christian nation that won independence from Sudan in 2011, contributing around $1bn a year in food and other humanitarian aid.

A fallout soon after independence between President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar has triggered brutal violence that has left almost 400,000 people dead and displaced four million more.

vodafone

Vodafone Qatar Notice

Reissue of suspended numbers

Effective from 1 February 2020, Vodafone will exercise its right to disconnect and reuse any number that has been suspended for a period of 6 months due to non-payment of the bill.

To retain your suspended number, please settle your unpaid bills before 8 February 2020.

Iran says new US sanctions will have no effect

AFP — TEHRAN

New American sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme will have "no effect", Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said yesterday.

Washington announced new sanctions on Thursday against the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran and its head Ali Akbar Salehi.

Brian Hook, the US pointman on Iran, accused them of playing "a big role in Iran breaching its key nuclear commitments" and exceeding "the limits on its uranium stockpile and enrichment levels". In a statement, Mousavi said "Mr Salehi is an eminent scientific and political figure" and sanctions against him showed the "despair" of the United States. The sanctions would have "no impact on the progress of the peaceful nuclear programme of the Islamic republic of Iran," Mousavi added.

Salehi holds a doctorate of nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States and was minister of foreign affairs from 2010 to 2013.

Australia on standby for fire threat as heat, winds return

REUTERS — SYDNEY

Australian authorities warned yesterday of severe fire danger in densely populated areas this weekend, declaring a state of emergency in the capital, Canberra, as soaring temperatures and strong whipped up huge, unpredictable blazes.

With temperatures above 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit), emergency officials urged people to prepare for fires in parts of the southeast including hundreds of miles of coast south of Sydney that has already been badly hit in months of blazes.

"Tomorrow will be the peak of the heatwave in NSW with some areas expected to reach extreme heatwave conditions," the New South Wales (NSW) state Rural Fire Service said in a Facebook post late yesterday.

Australia's bushfires that have killed 33 people and an estimated 1 billion native animals since September. About 2,500 homes have been destroyed as more than 11.7 million hectares (117,000 sq km) have been razed.

Andrew Barr, chief minister of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), said the area's first state of emergency since fatal wildfires in 2003 indicated the danger this weekend. Four people were killed and almost 500 homes destroyed in 2003.

With temperatures above 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit), emergency officials urged people to prepare for fires in parts of the southeast including hundreds of miles of coast south of Sydney that has already been badly hit in months of blazes.

Officials said an out-of-control fire in the ACT's south, on the doorstep of Canberra, had grown to 185 sq km, almost 8% of the territory's land mass.

"This fire may become very unpredictable. It may become uncontrollable," Barr said in a televised briefing. "The combination of extreme heat, wind, and a dry landscape will place suburbs in Canberra's south at risk." The state of emergency will run for 72 hours, giving authorities greater powers to order evacuations, close roads and take control of property.

Victoria state, which adjoins NSW and ACT, is also expected to see heatwave conditions on the weekend.

In neighbouring New Zealand, where smoke from the Australian blazes has turned glaciers brown, firefighters were battling to contain about 25 fires that spread rapidly to cover about 100 hectares on the South Island. Heatwave conditions were also forecast for much of the country over the weekend.

Main events yesterday in the bushfire crisis:

* There were 60 active fires in NSW, one at emergency level, 27 in Victoria, of which three were at emergency level.

* Temperatures in Canberra and the southern states of Tasmania and Victoria reached above 40C (104F) yesterday. The hot weather is forecast to continue over the weekend.

* The Australian Energy Market Operator, attempting to prevent supply shortages, urged people in Victoria to restrict energy use yesterday when demand is expected to peak because of unusually high humidity.

* Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who critics say has not done enough to address the impact of climate change, on Friday pledged funding for emissions reduction projects as part of a A$2bn ($1.37bn) package to increase gas supplies in NSW.



India's PM arrives for Parliament budget session

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Ram Nath Kovind, Parliament's Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu arrive at the Parliament for the opening of the budget session in New Delhi, yesterday.

Indonesia deports detained US reporter

REUTERS — JAKARTA

A US journalist who has written stories about environmental destruction in Indonesia was deported yesterday after being arrested over alleged visa violations, his lawyer and his news outlet said.

Philip Jacobson, had been detained 45 days earlier in Palangkaraya, the provincial capital of Central Kalimantan in Borneo island, according to a statement from environmental news provider Mongabay.

His detention was criticised by rights groups who said it raised concerns over media freedom in the world's third-biggest democracy. Arvin Gumilang, a spokesman for Indonesia's Immigration Directorate General, did not respond to a request for comment.

Jacobson had entered Indonesia using a business visa for a series of meetings, the statement said. On the day he was due to leave, immigration authorities confiscated his passport and later ordered him to remain in the city pending an investigation, it added.

Immigration said he should have been on a journalism visa and formally arrested him on Jan. 21. His lawyer Aryo Nugroho and Mongabay said his meetings there did not constitute journalism.

Under Indonesia's immigration law, Jacobson could have faced up to five years in prison. But after an outcry from activists and widespread media coverage, Indonesia's chief security minister Mahfud MD said the journalist would be deported.

In his role at Mongabay, Jacobson has worked on environmental stories including some containing allegations that companies in Indonesia used falsified permits to clear out a vast area of rainforest in the easternmost region of Papua.

Virus: India bans export of protective masks, clothing

REUTERS — NEW DELHI

India yesterday banned the export of personal protection equipment such as masks and clothing amid a global coronavirus outbreak.

It did not give a reason for the ban but it reported its first case of the new coronavirus on Thursday, a woman in the southern state of Kerala who was a student of Wuhan University in China.

Wuhan is the epicentre of the outbreak. Several Indian citizens living in Wuhan will arrive in India by plane today and be taken to a quarantine centre on the outskirts of the capital New Delhi.

India, the world's second most heavily populated country after China, has taken measures to ensure that all people arriving from China report to health authorities.



Filipinos scramble to buy masks

People buying protective masks at a medical supplies store in Manila yesterday. The Philippines reported its first case of the virus on January 30, of a 38-year-old woman who arrived from Wuhan and is no longer showing symptoms.

Nepal's ousted female deputy speaker to fight on for gender equality

REUTERS — KATHMANDU

One of Nepal's most senior female politicians has said she was a "victim of patriarchy" after she was forced to stand down as parliament speaker, and vowed to fight for greater equality for women.

Shiva Maya Tumbahamphe took over as acting speaker of Nepal's lower house after the incumbent was accused of abuse, but the leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist Party made her stand down to make way for a male colleague.

The veteran politician, who has a doctorate in political science, said things were now even worse for women than under the monarchy, which was abolished in 2008 after a Maoist revolution.

"Patriarchy is more deeply rooted now than it was under the monarchy," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview. "It is even stronger now in our country." The abolition of Nepal's monarchy came with promises of a more equal society that many historically marginalised groups, including women, do not feel have been fulfilled.

Women's rights groups were particularly angered by a clause in the new national constitution introduced in 2015 that restricts women from passing on their Nepali citizenship to their children. No such restrictions are placed on men.

Tumbahamphe said she strongly resisted her removal as speaker, giving the men who lead her party a list of reasons why she was the most qualified candidate — and copy of her book about the women's movement in Nepali politics.

Her replacement on Sunday by Agni Prasad Sapkota, a former Maoist rebel who stands accused of abduction and murder during the country's decade-long civil war, triggered protests by conflict victims and human rights campaigners.

Nepal's post-war constitution mandates that one-third of the country's lawmakers must be women. The country has a female president - a largely ceremonial role - and briefly had a female chief justice.

But senior women in politics say they still face far greater challenges than men, and are frequently sidelined. "In my 40 years in politics, I have not noticed much change in the condition of women. That is why I have devoted myself to fighting discrimination and injustice," said Tumbahamphe.

The 56-year-old said: "Women must get equal opportunities and access to state resources and power," she said. "I will continue to fight... to ensure that women get a fair deal."

Talks between Thailand, insurgents to resume in March

REUTERS — BANGKOK

Talks will resume in early March between representatives of the Thai government and the main insurgent group fighting for independence in the country largely Muslim-Malay south, the head of the government team said yesterday.

The conflict in the Malay-speaking region of predominantly Buddhist Thailand has flared on and off since the area was annexed by the Thais in 1909, with the latest round that started in 2004 killing some 7,000.

Kuala Lumpur last week hosted a meeting between Thai officials and envoys of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), which observers say controls the majority of fighters on the ground and which pulled out of peace talks in 2014.

General Wanlop Rugsanaoh, the head of the Thai dialogue team, said he was cautiously optimistic following the Malaysia talks. "The first session was a meeting for trust-building... and now it will be about the proposals from both sides," Wanlop told reporters. "This (next meeting) will take place round early March."

The general said the talk will only be between his team and the BRN for now with mediation from Malaysia. The process would gradually bring in other insurgent and civil society groups, he said.

Warning that hard-liners on both side that could derail the spirit of peace through violence, Sunai Phasuk, senior Thai researcher for Human Rights Watch, said: "The process should incorporate the population in the deep south as well."

Hanging of Nirbhaya convicts postponed

AFP — NEW DELHI

The hanging of four men scheduled today for the Nirbhaya gang-abuse and murder on a Delhi bus in 2012 has been postponed "until further orders," a court ruled yesterday.

The brutal attack on Jyoti Singh sparked weeks of demonstrations and shone a spotlight on the alarming rates of abuse and the plight of women in India. Four men were convicted in 2013 and were due to be hanged today at 6am in India's first execution since 2015. A fifth was found dead in jail in a suspected suicide, while a 17-year-old accomplice spent three years in a juvenile detention centre.

The delay was because some of the men still have legal options to appeal their sentences including "mercy petitions" with the Indian President. All are however widely expected to fail, with support for their execution appearing to be overwhelming within Indian society and among political parties. Singh's mother Asha Devi said after the postponement that her "hopes were dashed" but that she would continue to fight for justice for her daughter.

Malaysia plans tougher penalties for illegal loggers

REUTERS — PUTRAJAYA, MALAYSIA

Malaysia is set to beef up its decades-old forestry laws this year in an effort to protect its rainforests from illegal loggers, a senior minister said yesterday.

The move would stiffen penalties, including fines and jail terms, for those found guilty of cutting down trees without permission, Xavier Jayakumar, Malaysia's water, land and natural resources minister, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Last year, hundreds of environmentalists marched on Malaysia's parliament demanding changes to the constitution and laws to step up punishments for forest-clearing, corruption and pollution.

The government has prepared revisions to Malaysia's forestry legislation that are due to be tabled in parliament by June and likely to become law before the end of the year, Jayakumar said.

"In terms of (a) deterrent it is very good. It will make a difference," he said in an interview in the government's administrative capital of Putrajaya.

"We have introduced (draft) laws whereby if you're caught in the jungle, you have got to have a reason why you are there." The world lost 12 million hectares (30 million acres) of tropical tree cover in 2018 — equal to 30 football pitches a minute - according to monitoring service Global Forest Watch.

Malaysia was among the six countries with the biggest forest shrinkage that year. From 2001-2018, it lost about 7.7 million hectares of tree cover, equivalent to a 26% decrease since 2000.

Besides being a major producer of timber and wood products, the Southeast Asian nation is the second-largest grower of palm oil, the world's most widely used edible oil. Palm plantations in both Malaysia and Indonesia have come under scrutiny over logging activities, forest-clearing, fires and labour abuses.

Under Malaysia's constitution, forest management falls largely under state, not federal control. That has led to economic interests being prioritised over the environment and rights of indigenous people, green groups say.

Jayakumar said states were reluctant to give up their right to manage and control their forests, making it "very difficult" to change the constitution. "That is a no-go area," he said at his office, decorated with a life-size art sculpture of a Malaysian tiger.

But states have taken on federal government messages about the need to curb deforestation and change the economic model, he added.

Jayakumar, a dentist-turned-politician, identified the key threats to Malaysia's forests as illegal logging and plantation expansion.

Countries tighten China travel curbs

AFP — BEIJING

At least 213 people have died and nearly 9,700 people have been infected in China by the new coronavirus while new cases were found abroad, with more than 20 countries now affected by the disease.

Countries expanded restrictions on travellers from China over a deadly virus epidemic yesterday as an official admitted that a botched response worsened an outbreak that has now grown into a global health emergency.

At least 213 people have died and nearly 9,700 people have been infected in China by the new coronavirus while new cases were found abroad, with more than 20 countries now affected by the disease.

The top Communist Party official in Wuhan, the central city of 11 million people where the virus first emerged in December, said yesterday that he felt "remorse" because local authorities had acted too slowly to contain the threat.

Last week, China's central government finally jumped into action, effectively sealing off Wuhan and its surrounding Hubei province, and curbing travel across the nation of 1.4 billion people. The World Health Organization on Thursday declared the outbreak a global health emergency, but said it was not recommending any international trade or travel restrictions.

Countries nonetheless intensified travel curbs. The US State Department told Americans not to travel to China and urged those already there to leave. China's neighbours went a step further. Citing a likely "sharper rise" in the spread of the virus, Singapore's government barred arrivals and transit passengers who visited China in the past 14 days, and stopped issuing all forms of new visas to Chinese passport holders.

Vietnam ordered the suspension of new tourist visas for Chinese citizens and foreigners who have been in China over the last two weeks. Japan, meanwhile, joined Britain, Germany, and other countries that have recommended that their citizens avoid China.

The WHO warned that closing borders was probably ineffective in halting transmissions of the virus and could even accelerate its spread. China's ambassador to Geneva also said his country was controlling the outbreak and insisted there was no need for "excessive measures".

Authorities, businesses and worried people around the world have been taking matters into their own hands, with airlines and countries suspending or reducing flights with China.

Wuhan officials have been criticised online for withholding information about the infection until the end of last year, despite knowing about the new illness weeks earlier.

"Right now I'm in a state of guilt, remorse and self-reproach," said Ma Guoqiang, the municipal Communist Party secretary for Wuhan. "If strict control measures had been taken earlier, the result would have been better than now," he told state broadcaster CCTV.

Countries have scrambled to evacuate their nationals from Wuhan, with hundreds of US, Japanese, British, French and South Korean citizens evacuated so far, and more countries planning airlifts. One French evacuee was hospitalised with coronavirus symptoms. Russia said it would evacuate more than 2,500 of its citizens holidaying on China's Hainan island.

China yesterday said it sent charter planes to Thailand and Malaysia to bring Hubei residents back to Wuhan, citing the "practical difficulties" that they have encountered overseas.

In a sign of growing global anxiety, more than 6,000 tourists were temporarily confined aboard their cruise ship at an Italian port after two Chinese passengers fell ill. They later tested negative for the coronavirus. More than 40,000 workers at a vast Chinese-controlled industrial complex in Sulawesi island have been quarantined although Indonesia has not reported any cases.



A security guard checks the temperature of a woman as they both wear protective facemasks at the entrance of a park in Beijing yesterday.

First human-to-human virus transmission in Thailand

REUTERS — BANGKOK

Thailand has its first case of human-to-human transmission of the new coronavirus inside the country, a health official said yesterday, as authorities raised the total number of cases in the country to 19, the second-highest after China.

The first patient to contract the virus inside Thailand is a Thai taxi driver, said Tanarak Pipat, deputy director-general of the Department of Disease Control. "(He)...does not have the record of travelling to China, and it is likely that he was infected (by) a sick traveller from China," Tanarak said.

Authorities have conducted virus scans on 13 people, including three family members, who the taxi driver came into contact with. They said that initially none of them had tested positive for the virus.

"The overall risk of infection in Thailand is still low, but people should take precautions to protect themselves," Tanarak said. Thai health officials have urged the public to wear face masks, regularly wash hands and be vigilant in public, especially in areas frequented by tourists.

The taxi driver is one of five other coronavirus cases confirmed in Thailand yesterday.

Seven of the 19 cases have recovered and gone home while 12 are still being treated at hospitals. All but two of the cases are Chinese tourists visiting the country, the health authority said.

Pakistan halts flights to and from China: Civil Aviation Authority

REUTERS & INTERNEWS — ISLAMABAD

Pakistan yesterday halted flights to and from China with immediate effect, a Civil Aviation Authority official said.

"We are suspending flights to China until February 2," additional secretary of aviation, Abdul Sattar Khokhar, told Reuters by phone, adding the situation would be reviewed after that date.

Pakistan has decided not to bring its citizens from China as it can become a reason for the spread of novel coronavirus. However, a Pakistani student has returned from Wuhan on his own and has said other countrymen are facing hard times there.

However, federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood, while speaking on the floor of the National Assembly, claimed that the government was considering bringing Pakistani citizens back from China.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health, Dr Zafar Mirza, said: "There is no confirmed case in Pakistan. Four Pakistani citizens have been infected with the virus in China but they have been improving. Moreover they [the Chinese authorities] have requested Pakistan not to share their identity and details of their families in Pakistan," he said.

Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Andleeb Abbas said that Pakistan Embassy in China had established a round-the- clock hotline to coordinate with Pakistani students in Wuhan. She said that about 28,000 Pakistani students were studying in various universities of China of whom 500 to 800 were in Wuhan.

To mask or not to mask: Confusion spreads over protection

REUTERS — SINGAPORE/KUALA LUMPUR

"Do not wear a mask if you are well" read a warning plastered across the front of Singapore's main newspaper yesterday, as authorities around the world sought to calm panic buying of masks seen as a guard against the fast-spreading coronavirus. In neighbouring Malaysia, the government urged people to always have masks and hand sanitisers ready, similar to advice by authorities in Thailand and Vietnam.

Conflicting messages have sowed confusion over how to protect against an epidemic that has claimed over 200 lives, with some experts saying wrong handling of masks could even increase infection risk.

"Wearing a mask only when u feel unwell? Then why do u need soldiers when there isn't war? It's better to be safe than sorry" Facebook user Kenny Chan Wai Kong posted in Singapore, where authorities have announced plans to give four masks to every household as retailers' stocks run dry across the island. In parts of Asia, wearing face masks is common when people are sick or to counter urban pollution.

Official guidance from the World Health Organisation and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention makes no mention of wearing a face mask as a preventative measure against the virus - but their websites do not specifically advise against them.

Australia and Taiwan have said healthy people don't need masks, but Australia has released 1 million masks from the national medical stockpile, and masks are widely worn in Taiwan's capital Taipei where the government has imposed purchase limits and an export ban on masks. The Taiwan Railway Administration said that if the virus continues to spread it will refuse to carry passengers not wearing masks.

Coronavirus can be transmitted from person to person, although it is not clear how easily. Most cases have been in people who have been in the Chinese city of Wuhan at the centre of the outbreak, family members of those infected, or medical workers.

Transmission is likely through contact with an infected person via particles in the air from coughing or sneezing, or by someone touching an infected person or object with the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

"Situations that require a mask are when you are in a crowd ... or if you are caring for a sick person. If it makes you feel better, wear a surgical mask," Angela Rasmussen, virologist at the Center for Infection & Immunity at Columbia University said on the Reuters Global Markets Forum.

Other experts have said disposable surgical masks may not fit the face tightly enough to prevent infection, while some have pointed out that wrong handling of masks such as touching the front could increase the likelihood of infection spread.

In Hong Kong, a lawmaker who chairs the city's government health services panel was slammed over a short video she posted showing people how to steam and re-use disposable face masks. More unusual advice has seen India's government suggest a traditional concoction that includes ginger and holy basil as virus protection, while a Myanmar minister was rebuked for sharing a Facebook post that advised people to eat more onions.

Some overseas Chinese have been buying masks to send to friends and relatives in China, where some stocks have been running out. Chinese citizens living in Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia sent 150,000 masks back to their home province of Gansu on Thursday, China's Xinhua news agency reported.

In China, where nearly 10,000 cases have been reported so far, Zunyou Wu, chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, told state broadcaster that people need to wear masks when taking public transport.



A woman wears a plastic water bottle with a cutout to cover her face, as she walks on a footbridge in Hong Kong yesterday as a preventative measure following a virus outbreak in Wuhan.



Diplomacy

In this picture released by Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi (left) shakes hands with US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, at the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad.

Pakistan PM office rejects reports about pay raise for Imran Khan

INTERNEWS — KARACHI

Terming reports on increase in the Pakistani prime minister's salary 'baseless' and 'unfortunate', the PM office spokesperson has clarified that there will be no increase in the premier's official pay.

The clarification was issued in response to media reports alleging that the prime minister's gross salary was being increased to Rs800,000.

"At a time when the prime minister was carrying out a campaign to slash the government's expenditures which he initiated from his own, the propagation of such a baseless and concocted news report was unfortunate," the spokesperson remarked, according to a press release.

It said the prime minister at a recent meeting of the federal cabinet, while amending the rules for perks and privileges of the president and prime minister, allowed both of them to declare only one residence as their camp offices.

The prime minister had also directed the cabinet to define a limit of the expenditures permissible at the camp offices, contrary to the previous practices. The spokesperson quoted the Prime Minister as saying that expenditures incurred on the head of the government were borne out of the people's hard-earned money, so it was a must to keep it at the minimum level.

Earlier, during a cabinet meeting, Minister for Communications and Postal Services Murad Saeed said Prime Minister Imran Khan was living at his private residence at Banigala despite being the premier and even spent money from his own pocket for the construction of the road leading to his home.

Prime Minister Khan recently disclosed that he could not cover his household expenses from his official salary. "We have reduced the expenses of Prime Minister House by 40 percent. I live in my own home, pay my own expenses. My [official] salary is not enough to cover the expenses of my own household," he said during his a recent interaction with the business community.

The premier also said that his expenses on foreign trips were 10 times less than those spent by leaders before him.

Describing his participation in the World Economic Forum's annual meeting as the "cheapest" official visit, PM Khan had said that his trip was sponsored by his friends and well-known businessmen Ikram Sehgal and Imran Chaudhry.

This is not the first time the prime minister's salary has come under public discussion. Last year, it was reported that the prime minister earned less than federal and provincial ministers.

According to local media reports, as per his February 2019 salary slip, the prime minister is entitled to a gross salary of Rs201,574 which is reduced to 196,979 after tax and other deductions.

Britain sees 'new dawn' in historic farewell to EU

AFP — LONDON

Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised to unite the island nation in a new era of prosperity, forging new links further from home.

Britain ends almost half a century of integration with Europe, finally making its historic departure from the EU to begin a new — but still uncertain — future, with emotions running high following years of wrangling and several false starts.

As the clocks strike 11:00pm (2300 GMT) in Britain, the bloc's often reluctant member becomes the first to leave an organisation set up to forge unity among nations after the horrors of World War II.

The country's departure has exposed deep divisions in British society — and soul-searching in Brussels about the impact of the loss of 66 million people, a global diplomatic big-hitter and the clout of the City of London financial centre.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson was a figurehead in the 2016 referendum vote to end 47 years of increasingly close ties between the British and more than 500 million of their nearest neighbours.

He has promised to unite the island nation in a new era of prosperity, forging new links further from home.

"This is not an end but a beginning. This is the moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up on a new act," he said.

Britain's departure was sealed at an emotional EU parliament hearing this week that ended with MEPs singing a chorus of "Auld Lang Syne", a traditional Scottish song of farewell.

Although almost nothing will change immediately due to an 11-month transition period negotiated as part of an EU-UK exit deal ratified this week.

Britons will be able to work in and trade freely with EU nations until December 31, and vice versa, although the UK will no longer be represented in the bloc's institutions.

But legally, Britain is out.

And while the exit terms have been agreed, Britain must still strike a deal on future relations with the EU, its largest trading partner.

Both will set out their negotiating positions on Monday.

"We want to have the best possible relationship with the United Kingdom, but it will never be as good as membership," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said in Brussels.

Getting this far has been a traumatic process.

Despite Britain's resistance to many EU projects over the years — it refused to join the single currency or the Schengen open travel area — the 2016 vote to leave was a huge shock.

It unleashed political chaos in London, sparking years of bitter arguments that paralysed parliament and forced the resignations of prime ministers David Cameron and Theresa May.

In the debate about why Britain voted to leave, some said voters saw the distant EU as a convenient scapegoat to punish the government in London, which backed staying in, for years of cuts and austerity that left many worse off.

Johnson brought an end to the turmoil with last month's decisive snap general election victory and parliamentary majority to ratify his revised Brexit deal.

But Britons remain as divided as they were nearly four years ago, when 52 percent voted to leave and 48 percent voted to remain in the EU.

In Scotland, where a majority in 2016 backed Britain remaining in the bloc, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon called it a moment of "sadness... tinged with anger". She vowed to step up the campaign for Scottish independence, which Scots rejected in a 2014 vote.



People celebrate Britain leaving the EU on Brexit day in London, yesterday.

In Northern Ireland, where there are fears Brexit could destabilise a hard-won peace after several decades of conflict over British rule, europhiles rallied in Belfast, parking a billboard in front of the devolved assembly. It read: "This island rejects Brexit."

Johnson, himself a polarising figure, has said he is avoiding any major celebrations that might exacerbate divisions.

The Conservative leader hosted a special cabinet meeting in the northeastern city of Sunderland, which was the first to declare for Brexit in the 2016 vote.

A Downing Street spokesman said ministers discussed aiming to have 80 percent of Britain's commerce covered by free trade agreements within three years.

At 10:00pm, Johnson will broadcast to the nation, as a countdown clock is beamed onto the walls of Downing Street, before marking the occasion at a reception with beverages, and canapes topped with roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and Shropshire blue cheese.

Government buildings were lit up in the red, white and blue of the British flag. Millions of commemorative 50 pence coins will go into circulation.

Ex-MEP Nigel Farage, who has spent decades campaigning to leave the EU, is planning a large rally in nearby Parliament Square — one of several pro-Brexit parties being held around the country.

"I'm pleased, it's about time, this has took far longer than it should have," said Eric Horsley, 67, from Hartlepool, northeast England.

Not everyone is celebrating, with vigils planned by pro-EU supporters.

"Today is a day of mourning," said Katrina Graham, 31, an Irish women's rights activist who lives in Brussels, at a protest in central London.



EU Council staff members remove the United Kingdom's flag from the European Council building in Brussels, yesterday.

Brexit: UK flag lowered at EU council building

REUTERS — LONDON

The United Kingdom leaves the European Union with a mixture of joy, anger and indifference, casting off into the unknown in one of the biggest blows yet to Europe's attempt to forge unity from the ruins of World War Two.

The EU's most powerful leaders, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron, cast Brexit as a sad moment that was a turning point for Europe. The EU warned that leaving would be worse than staying.

In the United Kingdom's most significant geopolitical move since its lost its empire, it turns its back on 47 years of membership and must begin charting its own course for generations to come.

In Brussels, the Britain's Union Jack was lowered at the EU council building and the bloc's circle of 12 stars on a blue background was removed from outside the British embassy.

Leaving the EU was once far-fetched: the UK joined in 1973 as "the sick man of Europe" and less than two decades ago British leaders were arguing about whether to join the euro.

But the turmoil of the euro zone crisis, fears about mass immigration and a series of miscalculations by former Prime Minister David Cameron prompted the 52% to 48% vote to leave.

The final parting of the EU's most reluctant member is an anticlimax of sorts. Beyond the symbolism, little will change until the end of 2020.

By then, Johnson has promised to strike a broad free trade agreement with the EU, the world's biggest trading bloc.

"These negotiations certainly won't be easy," Merkel said, cautioning London that if it deviated from the EU's rules then its access to the EU's market would be limited.

Macron said Britain it could not expect to be treated the same way as when it was part of the club.

"You can't be in and out," Macron told the French in a televised address. "The British people chose to leave the European Union. It won't have the same obligations, so it will no longer have the same rights."

US President Donald Trump has long supported Brexit. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Britons wanted to escape the "tyranny of Brussels".

UK govt replaces O'Neill as president of UN climate summit

REUTERS — LONDON

British politician Claire O'Neill will no longer serve as president of a major UNclimate summit taking place in Glasgow in November and her replacement will be confirmed shortly, the UK government said yesterday.

"Preparations will continue at pace for the summit, and a replacement will be confirmed shortly," said a statement issued by the cabinet office. "Going forward, this will be a ministerial role."

O'Neill said on Twitter that she was "very sad" that the role she had been offered last year by Prime Minister Boris Johnson to lead the team overseeing the summit, which is known as COP26, had been rescinded.

"A shame we haven't had one Climate cabinet meeting since we formed. Wishing the cop team every blessing in the climate recovery emergency," O'Neill said.

The two-week climate summit is seen as a moment of truth for the 2015 Paris Agreement to combat climate change, with the British hosts aiming to persuade big polluting countries to shore up the deal by pledging more ambitious cuts in emissions.

The government's plan to appoint a cabinet minister to replace O'Neill signalled that it was throwing its full political weight behind the summit, said Jennifer Tollmann of climate and energy think-tank E3G.

"However, international partners will want to be confident that whoever steps into the post is there to stay - and that climate will be a top priority across UK foreign policy post-Brexit," Tollman said.

Richard Black, director of the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit, a London-based non-profit think-tank, said that the government still had to show it could get on track to meet its own target to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

"It's a change of personnel, but the key tasks before the UK government remain the same - get the international diplomacy right, and make sure the UK is demonstrably on track to its own net zero target well before the summit opens so it's 'walking the walk' on its climate leadership claims," Black said.

Hungary to build more prisons to tackle overcrowding, halt lawsuits

REUTERS — BUDAPEST

Hungary will begin an ambitious prison-building programme in an attempt to stem a tide of costly lawsuits by inmates complaining of overcrowding and inhumane conditions, Prime Minister Viktor Orban said yesterday.

Orban accused "business-savvy lawyers" of exploiting the conditions to launch 12,000 lawsuits against the Hungarian state for breaking EU prison standards, leading to penalties of $33m in total.

"I have never seen such prison business in my life," he told state radio MR1. "It's mind-blowing."

Orban, who has often come under fire from the European Union and rights groups over his perceived erosion of the rule of law since he took power in 2010, announced plans for more prisons to reduce the prison overcrowding and disarm "malignant lawyers".

Last week, Orban drew criticism from top lawyers for suggesting his government would disobey court orders to pay compensation over the inhumane treatment of prisoners. The government later signalled it would pay the fines.

Orban also raised eyebrows by refusing to pay a fine of 100 million forints to a Roma community in Gyongyospata, eastern Hungary, which had sued the state because of illegal segregation in the local school.

Yesterday, Orban said the school's move to separate Roma students had been an attempt to stem an exodus of students caused by what he said was the unruly and often violent behaviour of the local Roma minority.

"Non-Roma in Gyongyospata began to feel that they had to back down and apologise, despite being the majority," Orban said. "They feel like they are in a hostile environment in their own homeland."

Orban's populist rhetoric on ethnic minorities to agree on Wednesday to extend his Fidesz Party's suspension from the group.



Green protest

An Extinction Rebellion activist is being removed by the police for blocking the entrance to oil giant Shell's headquarters, during a demonstration against the company's plans to continue investment in developing new sources of gas and oil showing it is not taking the threat of climate change seriously, according to the activists, in The Hague, Netherlands, yesterday.

Poland inks $4.6bn deal for US fighter jets

AFP — WARSAW

Poland yesterday finalised an agreement to buy dozens of F-35 fighter jets from the US in a multi-billion dollar deal aimed at revamping its air force and further strengthening close ties with Washington.

The United States in September approved the $4.6bn contract to deliver a total of 32 aircraft to Nato ally Poland.

The first batch is expected to be delivered within four years and will replace old Soviet models.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo praised Poland's "smart decision" to buy what he termed the "world's most advanced fighter aircraft," in a Twitter post yesterday, adding this would "further our partnership and bolster its (Poland's) collective & self defence."

Poland's air force already has around 50 US F-16 fighter jets.

The agreement signed by Polish Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak and US ambassador to Warsaw Georgette Mosbacher includes pilot training, flight simulators and logistical support.

"This is an important day for Polish military aviation, Poland's security and also the security of our part of Europe," Polish President Andrzej Duda said at the ceremony.

The opposition has slammed the purchase, claiming the fighter jets are too expensive and unsuitable for Poland's military and critics say the army is not able to make full use of the capabilities of the state-of-the-art aircraft.

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EDITORIAL

Successfully combating financial crimes

THE State of Qatar, in recent years, has taken a number of concrete measures from enacting new laws to enhancing international coordination to combat financial crimes.

Qatar's efforts in this direction have borne fruits as the country as among the nations which have successfully confronted financial crimes winning global appreciation.

H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad Al Thani, Deputy Governor of Qatar Central Bank (QCB), who is also the Chairman of the National Anti-Money Laundering & Terrorism Financing Committee, addressing at 'Compliance Challenges and Combating Financial Crime Conference' emphasized the need to unify efforts to confront and combat financial crimes, which are developing rapidly with the advancement of technology.

The Deputy Governor of QCB also urged the financial institutions to understand the risks of financial crimes of all kinds and to apply due diligence in combating them according to best practices, adopting financial technology innovations and promoting financial inclusion.

Qatar has made the necessary amendments to a number of laws related to combating money laundering and terrorist financing which contributes to setting the best legislative practices for an integrated system.

The two-day conference, organised by the Union of Arab Banks and the World Union of Arab Bankers, under the auspices of the QCB, held last week with the participation of a group of senior specialists in the field of financial crime, anti-money laundering and terrorist financing from various countries of the world.

The Deputy Governor of the QCB said that Qatar has reviewed all legislation related to combating money laundering and terrorist financing in accordance with the international standards issued by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). He referred to the issuance of law No. 20 of 2019 on combating money laundering and terrorism financing to replace Law No. 4 of 2010 and the issuance of law No. 27 of 2019 on counter-terrorism to replace law No. 3 of 2004.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Union of Arab Banks Sheikh Mohammed Al Jarrah Al Sabah praised the success of the State of Qatar in the field of combatting money laundering and the financing of terrorism, calling for the region to benefit from the country's experience.

Speaking at the conference, he said that choosing Doha as the host of the conference was mainly to try to understand and benefit from the country's experience in the field, adding that the State of Qatar has been vigilant in the face of financial crimes.

The Peninsula

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Palestinian protesters, waving national flags, during a demonstration against a US-brokered Middle East peace plan, near the West Bank village of Tamun near the Jordan Valley, yesterday.

Ottoman archive: Palestine's weapon against occupation

QAIS ABU SAMRA
ANATOLIA

Turkey late last year handed the Palestinian Authority an electronic copy of the Ottoman archive of some 38,000 pages of land ownership registries for Palestinians.

The struggle of the Palestinian people to prove their ownership of lands under Israeli occupation has been taken to a new level thanks to the Ottoman archive.

Turkey late last year handed the Palestinian Authority an electronic copy of the Ottoman archive of some 38,000 pages of land ownership registries for Palestinians.

The Ottoman Empire notably ruled the territory of historical Palestine from 1516 to 1917 and the archive contains documents dated to pre-1917.

The archive is currently located at the Mithaq Foundation in East Jerusalem. The foundation belongs to the Palestinian Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs and is dedicated to reviving heritage and Islamic research.

The foundation has received special safes from the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) to store the archive.

"The Palestinian archives were lost due to the British Mandate, the Israeli occupation, and the population displacement of Palestine," Murad Abu Sobh, head of Ottoman documents at the Mithaq Foundation, told Anadolu Agency.

He noted that "Israel is depleting Palestinian lands on the pretext that they are absentee property or claims they are properties of Jewish individuals and associations." He asserted that the Ottoman archive is a "lifeline" for Palestinians to prove the ownership of lands and properties.

Abu Sobh stated that the documents are confidential and are given to the concerned parties after consulting relevant Palestinian institutions.

The documents are written in the Ottoman language, he said, adding the process of translating them is carried out by Palestinian specialists.

For his part, the head of Mithaq, Khalil al-Rifai, said there is great cooperation between various Turkish institutions and the foundation.

"Turkey provides us smoothly with everything we want," al-Rifai said, adding the archive was provided by Turkey under the guidance of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and is being used mainly for scientific research. He went on to say that Mithaq is unremittingly making efforts to prevent the Judaization of Jerusalem, stressing that "the Ottoman archive is our weapon to prove the truth."

"Israel has documents that prove our ownership of the lands that are in its national library... All Palestinian documents have been seized by Israel.

"There is no justification for the Israeli fuss over receiving the Ottoman archives; whoever works legally does not fear such documents," Al Rifai said.

He pointed out that before receiving the archive, if a Palestinian citizen wanted to document his land, he would travel to Turkey to obtain its documents. But today, he can obtain them from the West Bank.

-Israeli fear Israeli media outlets have highlighted the concerns of Israel over the Turkish move to help Palestinians prove their right to lands occupied by Israel, especially Jerusalem and the West Bank, by providing them with the Ottoman archive.

The Israel Hayom daily newspaper reported that "attorneys for the Palestinian Authority are already using archived Ottoman-era documents to claim the rights to lands."

As Syria currency crisis bites, every penny counts

RIM HADDAD
AFP

As Syrians feel the sting of a nosediving currency, local businesses have launched a campaign to sell goods symbolically priced at a single pound to counter a deepening economic crisis.

The central bank puts the official exchange rate at 434 Syrian pounds to the dollar -- down from 48 pounds per dollar at the start of the war.

On the black market, the pound has hit more than 1200 pounds against the dollar -- its lowest in history.

After nearly nine years of war, the devaluation is driving up prices and exacerbating dire economic conditions that the government blames on tightening Western sanctions. To cushion the blow, a campaign labelled "our pound is our pride" was launched in January.

The month-long initiative encourages businesses in Damascus to sell goods for one Syrian pound, a coin that has been out of circulation for years.

"My father used to be a bus driver and he has held on to these coins even after he stopped working several years ago," said Nadia, her father standing beside her with a bag full of coins. "Now is the time to use them."

Nadia spoke while she and her father perused stalls in a Damascus fair organised by the chamber of commerce in support of the campaign. Everything on display was selling for a single pound, with more than 50 companies taking part in the one-day event.

Although the campaign will have no measurable economic impact, merchants participating in the fair said they believed they were helping out.

Abdul Salam Ashi, a sales manager for a company selling cleaning products, said he might as well be giving his products away for free.

His company, he said, decided to "participate in the fair to help the economy." Nearby, Samer Darwish manned a stall selling food products.

"We are losing money, but in the end, we are benefiting the economy," he said.

"If the economy improves, then this will directly benefit our company."

However, critics say the initiative will do little to rescue the plummeting Syrian pound. "It is a good campaign but unfortunately it is nearly impossible to execute because the one pound coin is extinct," said Fadwa, who was attending the fair.

In the suburbs of Damascus, the owner of a cosmetics store shared a similar concern. He offered discounts on his products instead of selling them for one pound, which he said was not practical.

"Logically, I can't sell items for one pound, simply because it is not available," he said. One of his clients agreed but said the point was to boost morale.

"It's about social impact and not economic impact," she said, asking not to be named to protect her identity.

The Syrian government meanwhile is also grappling with the currency crisis.

A recent presidential decree increased the penalty for conducting transactions in foreign currencies.

Two shop owners were detained for selling products in dollars, state news agency SANA reported on Thursday, the latest in a series of arrests.

Money exchange houses are also coming under scrutiny, with the Syrian government cracking down on those it accuses of price gouging.

According to local media reports, the government has shut down several exchange offices accused of driving up the exchange rate on the parallel market. Compounding the situation, the devaluation has led to a rise in the cost of basic food items, including sugar and rice whose prices have nearly doubled in recent months.

To combat inflation, the Syrian government will introduce a smart-card system in February to allow residents to purchase rice, sugar and tea at a subsidised rate.

The cards, which will be valid in state-designated department stores, cap the quantities that can be purchased at a discount.



Quote of the day

You can't be in and out. The British people chose to leave the European Union. It won't have the same obligations, so it will no longer have the same rights.

Emmanuel Macron, French President

The cognitive biases that make coronavirus seem scarier than it is

Remember West Nile virus in 1999? SARS in 2003? Ebola in 2014? And Zika virus in 2015? Though they're wildly different, they all act on the same anxieties that many of us are experiencing now, when word of a new disease spreads faster than the disease. It's worth dissecting what these episodes teach us about the psychology behind our fear of coronavirus, because they demonstrate why we worry too much about some things, not enough about others and create new risks as a result.



DAVID ROPEIK
THE WASHINGTON POST

Global health emergency! A rising toll of sick or dead. Ominous warnings of new cases around the world. Headlines asking, "Should you be worried?" The two coronavirus contagions are upon us, both the disease, and our fear. The disease is new. The fear, however, is not. Both need to be understood, because both are dangerous.

Remember West Nile virus in 1999? SARS in 2003? Ebola in 2014? And Zika virus in 2015? Though they're wildly different, they all act on the same anxieties that many of us are experiencing now, when word of a new disease spreads faster than the disease. It's worth dissecting what these episodes teach us about the psychology behind our fear of coronavirus, because they demonstrate why we worry too much about some things, not enough about others and create new risks as a result.

You know those memories I invoked of those other "new pandemics"? The very fact that they come so readily to mind is the product of one of the cognitive quirks that make us worry about some things more than we need to. The scarier an experience, the more deeply we encode it into memory and the more readily it pops back into consciousness when something similar comes along. Cognitive scientists call this the Availability Heuristic. Think about where you were on 9/11, for example. Pop!

But what makes some risks feel scarier than others in the first place? Why worry more about those new viruses, for example, than influenza, a far greater actual threat? Over their careers, Paul Slovic, Baruch Fischhoff and other researchers have identified a number of psychological characteristics we use to subconsciously assess how circumstances feel and gauge potential danger, and it turns out we instinctively worry more about new risks than familiar ones. This is probably because we also worry more about risks over which we have no control, and when a risk is new and we don't understand it, that lack of knowledge leaves us feeling powerless to protect ourselves. Think about the questions you may already have asked yourself about the latest coronavirus outbreak: Do masks work? Is there a vaccine? How does this new virus spread? How deadly is it? Not knowing, which is almost always the case with new risks, leads to more fear.

Another psychological characteristic contributing to coronavirus fear is related to both the "new" factor and the impact of Availability Heuristic. This one is called Representativeness Bias. We jump to quick conclusions about things based on the first few hints we get that seem to fit the pattern of what we already know.

Another psychological characteristic contributing to coronavirus fear is related to both the "new" factor and the impact of Availability Heuristic. This one is called Representativeness Bias. We jump to quick conclusions about things based on the first few hints we get that seem to fit the pattern of what we already know. (Think of how quickly we judge people as soon as we hear what political party they're in.) We have been warned, quite appropriately, that the next global pandemic is a matter of when, not if. We have been warned this will likely be some virus that jumped from animals to humans. That it will probably come from east Asia. Sound familiar? So could this be it … The Big One? We don't know, but it sure sounds like it might be.

Finally there is what Roger Kasperson and colleagues call the "social amplification of risk." We only have so much cognitive bandwidth, and as social animals, we have evolved to pay closer attention to whatever a lot of other people are already paying attention to. Think of it this way; when everybody in the tribe looks in one direction, better look that way, too, in case a lion is attacking. So when the news and our social media feeds are dominated by coronavirus, that danger becomes the biggest blip on our risk radar screen, pushing most other threats off, even if they pose far more peril.

This then feeds on itself. To protect ourselves, we seek information, because knowledge restores at least some sense of control. No wonder then that searches for "coronavirus" on Google have jumped more than 1,000 percent in the last two weeks. Those searches have risen the most in places where there have been cases: Washington state in the United States, British Colombia in Canada, and Germany. This is explained by the entirely reasonable psychological fear factor, that concerned query, "Could it happen to ME!?" A risk that only threatens somebody else is less scary than one that might have your name on it. Remember Ebola? When it was elsewhere in the world, it probably felt like no big deal. Then it was in Dallas, and U.S. fear shot through the roof. The same will almost surely follow in the United States.

Understanding that, as Slovic and colleagues have put it, "risk is a feeling – that what determines our fears is not simply an objective analysis of the facts but how those facts feel – is vitally important for our safety. Overworrying or underworrying can both be dangerous. If we worry more about new risks and less about familiar ones, we fail to adequately protect ourselves. The flu is a far more infectious and deadly disease, but it is familiar, which is, at it happens, one reason many have not had their flu shots this year. If we worry more about risks that come readily and powerfully to mind, we tend to seek aggressive remedies that can potentially be harmful. This is what happens, for example, when we treat nonthreatening kinds of cancer (some types of prostate, breast, thyroid cancers) with the same risky surgeries that we use to fight other types, simply because both go by the name "cancer." If we don't fear that climate change threatens us, personally, we fail to protect ourselves. If we don't fear obesity enough because we think we can control that risk by giving up the french fries and soda (tomorrow), we don't lose weight.

On the whole, our risk perception system does a pretty good job. It has, after all, gotten us this far through evolution's gantlet. But we need to wise up to the reality that when it comes to risk we are not always as wise as we like to think we are. Understanding that our risk perceptions are subjective, emotional, and prone to an occasional misreading of the actual threat, is an important way to vaccinate ourselves against the danger that a system can sometimes create.

Ropeik is a retired Harvard Instructor, risk communication consultant and author of "How Risky Is It Really? Why our fears don't always match the facts."



Bangladeshi citizens, mostly students, wearing facemasks wait at Wuhan airport yesterday, as the Bangladeshi government prepares to evacuate them following a SARS-like virus outbreak in the city of Wuhan.

A 1988 climate warning was mostly right

Those assertions made headlines around the world, and can be said to have started the public and political discussion over global warming (the scientific discussion was already well under way) that continues to this day. They also caught Hansen some flak from fellow climate scientists who thought he had expressed himself with more certainty than warranted.



JUSTIN FOX
BLOOMBERG

On a 98-degree June day in Washington in 1988, physicist James Hansen told a US Senate committee that "global warming is now large enough that we can ascribe with a high degree of confidence a cause and effect relationship to the greenhouse effect." Hansen, at the time director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, elaborated that "with 99% confidence we can state that the warming during this time period is a real warming trend."

Those assertions made headlines around the world, and can be said to have started the public and political discussion over global warming (the scientific discussion was already well under way) that continues to this day. They also caught Hansen some flak from fellow climate scientists who thought he had expressed himself with more certainty than warranted. Indeed, the scientific paper on which Hansen based his testimony, which he wrote with seven co-authors and was published that August in the Journal of Geophysical Research, cautioned that it was not yet certain that the warm temperatures of the 1980s were the product of the greenhouse effect.

Still, the paper did speculate that it might become clear soon, and provided detailed forecasts of how much global temperatures could be expected to rise under three emissions scenarios. The annual forecasts ran through 2019, meaning that we can now judge in full how on-target they were.

As benchmarks I've used the global land-ocean temperature averages maintained by NASA's Goddard Institute, where Hansen held the top job until 2013 - but also, because I know I will get emails from readers asserting that NASA can't be trusted, those of Berkeley Earth. The latter organization was founded in 2010 by a University of California at Berkeley physicist who was somewhat dubious of the NASA data (and got a big chunk of its early funding from the Charles Koch Charitable Foundation, which has a history of backing climate-change skeptics). Its temperature estimates, while lower than NASA's, aren't much lower.

Scenario A, which assumed that the greenhouse-gas emissions-growth rates of the 1970s and 1980s would "continue indefinitely," turns out to have been way off on the high side. Scenario C, which envisioned "draconian emission cuts," is way off on the low side. But Scenario B, in which greenhouse-gas emissions-growth rates slowed "such that the annual increase of the greenhouse climate forcing remains approximately constant at the present level" is definitely in the ballpark.

In 1988, Hansen and his co-authors termed Scenario B "perhaps the most plausible of the three cases," so it does seem like the fairest one to judge them by. Scenario B turns out to have quite accurately predicted the rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide through 2019. Its temperature forecast nonetheless came out a little high because it overestimated the atmospheric concentrations of methane and of chlorofluorocarbons, which began to level off and then decline more quickly than pretty much anyone expected after the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

Correct for that, as Zeke Hausfather of UC Berkeley, the Breakthrough Institute and Berkeley Earth and his three co-authors did in a paper published in Geophysical Research Letters last month, and "the results are consistent with the observations." That is, the model used by Hansen and his co-authors in 1988 did a good job of predicting how much warming would be caused by increased concentrations of greenhouse gases, it just failed to predict with perfect accuracy what those concentrations would be. Hausfather and his co-authors made similar corrections to 15 other detailed warming forecasts made from 1970 through 2007 and found that all but three had proved "skillful" in extrapolating temperature changes from greenhouse-gas concentrations.

It should be noted that seven or eight years ago, after global average temperatures had barely risen for a decade, these warming forecasts weren't looking quite so accurate. "People were thinking, 'Something's going on,'" Schmidt recalled when I paid him a visit this week, with climate scientists trotting out alternative explanations ranging from decadal ocean variability to tiny particles (aka aerosols) in the atmosphere to problems with the temperature record. "Then you have the three warmest years on record in a row, and everybody stops talking about it because it's stupid."

I happen to really dislike it when people use the phrase "the science is settled" in reference to climate change. Science, if it's actually science, should never be entirely settled. Researchers seem to be very much in the early stages of figuring out how to predict greenhouse-gas-induced changes in the climate beyond just increases in global average temperatures - and some of those changes may simply not be predictable. But it's now been 124 years since Swedish physicist Svante Arrhenius hypothesized that higher atmospheric carbon-dioxide concentrations would bring higher global temperatures, and 50 years since scientists began building detailed climate models around that notion. When James Hansen said in 1988 that he was virtually certain that humans were warming the earth's climate "he went out on a limb," Schmidt says now. That limb, however, has yet to break.

Justin Fox is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering business. He was the editorial director of Harvard Business Review and wrote for Time, Fortune and American Banker. He is the author of "The Myth of the Rational Market."

Pompeo vows unwavering US support to Ukraine

AFP — KIEV

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington's support for Ukraine was unwavering during a delicate visit yesterday to the country at the heart of the US impeachment process.

After talks with Pompeo, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said he appreciated US support, but stressed that Washington should be more involved in resolving his country's conflict with Moscow-backed separatists.

Ukraine is walking a careful line in its relations with the United States — keen to maintain American backing in the war but wary of being further entangled in US domestic politics.

Pompeo is the most senior US official to visit Ukraine since the start of the impeachment process against US President Donald Trump, who is accused of withholding military aid to push Kiev into investigating his Democratic rival Joe Biden.

Pompeo said there could be no doubts about Washington's support for Ukraine, calling it "a bulwark between freedom and authoritarianism in eastern Europe".

"The United States sees that the Ukrainian struggle for freedom, democracy and prosperity is a valiant one. Our commitment to support it will not waver," he said at a news conference with Zelenskiy.

President Zelenskiy said he appreciated US support, but stressed that Washington should be more involved in resolving his country's conflict with separatists.

Zelenskiy, who allegedly faced the pressure from Trump in a July 25 phone call, called on Washington to "be more actively involved in the peace process in eastern Ukraine" and to appoint a special representative on the conflict.

"I do not believe that our warm and important relations have been influenced by the question of the impeachment," he said.

Zelenskiy said he was "ready to go tomorrow" to meet with Trump in Washington.

Pompeo said no date had been set yet for a White House meeting.

A senior State Department official told reporters that talks between Pompeo and Zelensky were "very focused on investment and infrastructure".

"There was no talk of impeachment or any investigations," the official said.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a Ukrainian official said that the issue of Biden was not brought up during the meeting.

Washington has been an important backer of Ukraine in its conflict with the separatists in the country's east, providing both military aid and diplomatic support.

That support is at the centre of the impeachment process, with Trump accused of withholding $400m in assistance to demand dirt on Biden, whose son was on the board of a Ukrainian company.

A Senate trial of Trump is under way in Washington, but the Republican majority in the US upper house all but guarantees an acquittal.

Pompeo is himself under pressure over Ukraine. He was among senior officials who listened in on the phone call with Zelenskiy and has been accused of not doing enough to defend Marie Yovanovitch, the former US envoy to Kiev who Trump removed last year.

Pompeo also met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Vadym Prystaiko and the head of the newly independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Yepifaniy.

He visited Kiev's golden-domed Saint Michael's Cathedral — torn down by the Soviet Union and rebuilt after Ukraine's independence — and a memorial wall with photographs of soldiers killed in the conflict in the country's east that broke out in 2014.

The US Secretary of State also met with Ukrainian Defence Minister Andriy Zagorodnyuk, who thanked the United States for its assistance in reforming the ex-Soviet country's armed forces.

Washington's support for Kiev has included not only military assistance but diplomatic backing, including the imposition of US sanctions against Russia following its 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Zelenskiy, a comedian with no previous political experience who won a landslide election victory last year, has made ending the conflict a key plank of his presidency.

The fighting with separatists in two mainly Russian-speaking breakaway regions has left more than 13,000 dead and crippled Ukraine's economy.

Russia is accused of backing the separatists and seeking to undermine Ukraine's efforts to develop closer ties with the West.

After Kiev, Pompeo was due to visit three more countries of the former Soviet Union, seeking to extend US sway in Russia's traditional sphere of influence.

He was to meet with senior officials including President Alexander Lukashenko in the Belarusian capital Minsk on Saturday, then travel on to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy during a joint news conference in Kiev, yesterday.

No clash with US over Kosovo talks: EU top official

AP — BELGRADE

The European Union's top diplomat said yesterday that there is no clash with the United States over the two powers' parallel efforts to bring Serbia and Kosovo back to the negotiating table.

EU-mediated negotiations between the wartime Balkan foes started in 2011, but broke down over a year ago when Kosovo imposed 100% tariffs on Serbian goods.

Meanwhile, the US stepped in, with senior American officials last week brokering tentative deals to resume air and railway links between the two states that have been suspended for 21 years.



EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell **(pictured)**, who was on his first trip to the Balkan region, said yesterday that Brussels isn't in a race with Washington and that they are working together to achieve a result.

"There is no difference between the United States and the European Union in our approach to Kosovo," Borrell said. "During my visit to Kosovo (on Thursday) everybody was asking about it, how controversial is the relationship with the United States with respect to Kosovo. It is not controversial at all".

"I think everybody understands that without an agreement of the UN Security Council, Kosovo will not be a state recognised by the international community. It depends not only on the will of Washington," the Spanish diplomat added.

Serbia's intervention against Kosovo's independence-seeking ethnic Albanians in 1998-1999 prompted Nato to intervene to stop the conflict.

Serbia and its allies Russia and China don't accept Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence, although Serbia's former province has been recognized by about 100 countries, including the US and most EU nations.

During his visit to Serbia and Kosovo, Borrell called for quick resumption of the dialogue, saying it's the only way to normalise ties and bring them closer to the EU.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said at the joint news conference that Serbia is ready to resume the negotiations as soon as Kosovo abolishes the 100 percent tax.

In Belgrade, Borrell urged Serbia to align its foreign policies with the EU as it gets closer to membership in the bloc. Serbia has refused to introduce sanctions against Slavic ally Russia over Moscow's policies in Ukraine and has lately strengthened military and political ties with the Kremlin and China.

"As every country negotiating access, Serbia should progressively align its foreign policy with the one of the European Union," Borrell said.

Spain to open Catalonia talks before elections

REUTERS — MADRID

Spanish government said that it will begin talks on resolving the Catalan political conflict before elections are held in the region, walking back an earlier decision to postpone the negotiations until after the polls.

The talks were a precondition for left-wing separatist party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) to facilitate Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's recent investiture.

His decision to delay the negotiations drew sharp criticism from Catalan politicians, including a top ERC official who referred to it as an "absolute irresponsibility".

Catalonia has been a dominant theme in Spanish politics since the region unilaterally declared independence in October 2017 following a referendum deemed illegal by courts, prompting Spain's biggest political crisis in decades.

ERC's support is crucial for the government's budget proposal to be approved by the Spanish parliament, and the party has previously said its support for the bill would depend on the evolution of the negotiations.

"We asked for the agreement to be fulfilled and it will be done," an ERC source said.

In a statement, the Spanish government said it wanted to reaffirm its commitment to the talks even though the current conditions were not ideal to begin negotiating. "Throughout the day we have heard our willingness to talk and our commitment to the agreements be called into question."



A general view shows the Lazzaro Spallanzani National Institute for Infectious Diseases where two Chinese tourists, who have tested positive for the coronavirus, are being held in isolation, in Rome, yesterday.

State of emergency in Italy over coronavirus

REUTERS — ROME

Italy declared a six-month state of emergency yesterday over the new coronavirus, allowing the government to cut through red tape quickly if needed, after two Chinese tourists tested positive for the illness in the first cases detected in the country.

The move, which will have no impact on people's everyday lives but will enable authorities to take rapid decisions if needed, follows a decision to stop all flights to and from China as a precautionary measure.

The two tourists, a 67-year-old woman and a 66-year-old man, came from the Chinese city of Wuhan, the epicentre of the virus, and fell ill during their trip to Italy.

They had been staying in a hotel in central Rome and are now being treated in an isolation unit at the city's Spallanzani Hospital, which specialises in infectious diseases and viruses.

"They are in a reasonable condition," the hospital said, adding that 12 other Chinese citizens had been placed under observation in the hospital.

A further 20 people who had come into contact with the ill Chinese couple since their arrival in Italy on January 23 were also under observation but showed no sign of illness. Italy is the latest major European country to be hit by the virus, with cases also confirmed in Britain, France and Germany. Concern over the illness has led to some drastic measures in some places.

Photographs on social media showed a sign in a Rome restaurant saying Chinese guests were not welcome because of "international safety measures".

The Santa Cecilia Conservatory, Rome's leading music school, has banned all students from eastern Asia, not just China, from courses until they can provide medical certificates to prove they are well.

The government's flight ban is already operational and will remain in force until further notice.

The government is arranging a special flight to evacuate some 80 Italian citizens from Wuhan, which is due to arrive in Italy on Monday morning.

Poland begins evacuating EU citizens from China

AFP — WARSAW

Poland's flagship LOT airline said yesterday it was sending a passenger plane to Beijing to evacuate Polish and other EU nationals at risk from the deadly novel coronavirus.

"The plane will fly from Warsaw to Beijing on Friday (yesterday) and will bring LOT crew members remaining in China and other Polish and EU passengers who decide to return," LOT said in a press release.

The airline announced earlier it was suspending all flights to China until at least February 9, but would accommodate Polish government requests to evacuate more citizens as needed.

Poland's deputy health minister Waldemar Kraska said separately yesterday that the government was making arrangements to evacuate 31 Poles from Wuhan.

Numerous countries, including France, Britain, Japan and South Korea, have already begun airlifting their citizens out of Wuhan.

"We're in the process of implementing a plan to transport Poles from Wuhan — currently 31 people have declared they want to return," he told reporters in Warsaw.

The flight, expected in the coming days, "will be destined for France, and then directly to Poland," Kraska added.

The Wuhan metropolis is at the heart of the SARS-like virus epidemic that has so far killed 213 people.

Three doctors acquitted in euthanasia case

REUTERS — BRUSSELS

A Belgian court yesterday cleared three doctors accused of murder for helping a woman end her life, in the country's first criminal case concerning euthanasia.

The doctors were accused of unlawfully poisoning 38-year-old Tine Nys in April 2010 because she did not fulfil the conditions to be euthanised. They were the first doctors to go on trial for euthanasia in Belgium since it legalised the practice in 2002.

A 12-member jury returned to deliver their verdicts of not guilty in the early hours yesterday after about eight hours of deliberations, said prosecutors in the city of Ghent, where the trial was held.

The three accused, whose signatures were required for the procedure, were the doctor who administered the lethal injection, Nys's former general practitioner and a psychiatrist.

Nys's parents and sisters, who were present at her death, complained that the euthanasia was carried out in an amateurish manner and that Nys did not have an incurable mental disorder, an important condition for granting euthanasia.

Belgian law allows adults to request the right to die on condition that they are facing unbearable physical or mental suffering resulting from a serious and incurable disorder. It was extended to terminally ill children in 2014.

Most patients choosing medically assisted death have terminal cancer, but mental suffering has extended, for example, to twins born deaf and becoming blind who were unable to bear not being able to communicate with each other.

Supporters of euthanasia say the trial has made doctors in Belgium nervous about signing papers for patients or helping them die. Some patients, they say, are also anxious that they will not be able to die on their own terms.

Impeachment: Trump's acquittal nears with Senate likely to deny witnesses

BLOOMBERG — WASHINGTON

The most consequential day in Donald Trump's impeachment trial begins in the Senate, with Republican leaders likely to muster enough votes to block witnesses and rapidly move to acquit the president.

The decision late Thursday by Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, a Republican who had been considered a potential supporter of testimony, to vote against new evidence largely dashed Democrats hopes of prevailing.

His announcement is a victory for Trump's legal team and, especially, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who had been steering the trial to a quick conclusion after two weeks of debate and questioning.

"We took another big step towards the president's acquittal in the Senate today, and look forward to completing this impeachment process as soon as possible," chief White House congressional liaison Eric Ueland said.

The Senate started yesterday with House prosecutors and Trump's defence each delivering two hours of closing arguments. Then senators vote on calling witnesses. If the Senate rejects that option, the chamber would move toward a vote on final judgment on the two impeachment articles against Trump. There's little chance that two-thirds of the Republican-controlled chamber would vote to convict and oust the president.

"If my Republican colleagues refuse to even consider witnesses and documents in this trial, this country is headed to the greatest cover-up since Watergate," Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said yesterday.

If my Republican colleagues refuse to even consider witnesses and documents in this trial, this country is headed to the greatest cover-up since Watergate: Chuck Schumer

The final vote would clear Trump in time for his delivery of the State of the Union address, which he'll deliver next Tuesday from the same House chamber where Democrats adopted the impeachment articles six weeks ago. It also gives him a chance to claim vindication and a rallying point for supporters just as the 2020 election campaign fully gets under way with the Iowa caucuses on Monday.

Democrats would need four Republican votes to get a majority to call witnesses in the trial. But only Utah's Mitt Romney and Maine's Susan Collins have backed hearing from witnesses, including former Trump National Security Advisor John Bolton.

The remaining potential GOP vote for witnesses is Alaska's Lisa Murkowski, who has previously indicated openness to calling witnesses. But since a meeting with McConnell Wednesday morning she's repeatedly refused to huiscuss the issue.

At best, that leaves the question of calling witnesses at a 50-50 tie. Chief Justice John Roberts could decide whether he should step in as a tie-breaker. Both McConnell and Schumer have expressed doubt that he would. If Roberts declines to act, the witness vote would fail.

Senator Jeff Merkley said early yesterday he doesn't think Roberts would step in to break a tie vote in the Senate. "I do not see that in this chief justice," the Oregon Democrat said.

Senator Dick Durbin, the Democrat in charge of counting his party's votes, also said he doesn't expect Roberts to rule on a draw. He said his party is resigned to the trial ending quickly with no new witnesses.

"We are resigned to this happening," Durbin said. "It's clear after all the days we spent on this, Republicans are afraid of a trial and afraid of the truth."

Alexander said in a statement released late Thursday night that the prosecutors already had enough evidence to prove key factual allegations in the impeachment articles, but the judgment of Trump's conduct should be left to voters.

"There is no need for more evidence to prove that the president asked Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden and his son, Hunter," Alexander, who is retiring when his term ends next January, said. "The question then is not whether the president did it, but whether the United States Senate or the American people should decide what to do about what he did.



US President Donald Trump signing an executive order on combating human trafficking in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday.

Trump signs anti-human trafficking order

BLOOMBERG — WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump signed an executive order yesterday aimed at combating human trafficking, even as some victim-advocacy groups criticised the president's record on the issue and declined to attend a White House ceremony.

Trump touted his record on human trafficking at the event, where he announced he was creating a new position on his Domestic Policy Council to coordinate efforts on the problem.

"My administration is 100% committed to eradicating human trafficking from the Earth," Trump said at yesterday's ceremony.

Trump has drawn criticism for his hard-line stance on immigration, including measures that may affect human trafficking victims. Some stakeholders declined to attend the ceremony, including Freedom Network USA, a national coalition of anti-trafficking groups.

"Today's event is a disingenuous claim to be dedicated to addressing the needs of survivors by an administration that has acted to the opposite of the interests of survivors," said Jean Bruggeman, Freedom Network's executive director. "We don't want pretty events and promises of funding; we want policies that work."

Trump's administration has tightened access to the T visa, a special permit for victims of human trafficking to stay in the US. Wait times are longer, denials have risen, and rules have been changed so that a person denied a T visa can be called before an immigration judge, a move that could lead to deportation.

Trump's order doesn't include changes to T visa rules, said an administration official who spoke to reporters about the measure on condition of anonymity.

The White House said there were more than 150 stakeholders at the event, which was pegged to the 20th anniversary of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, a measure that ushered in the T visa.

Another group, the Polaris Project, said it declined to attend to avoid being "misconstrued as taking a political side."

Trump credited his daughter Ivanka Trump with leading the White House efforts on human trafficking.

13 Dallas officers disciplined over social media posts

AP — DALLAS

More than a dozen Dallas police officers have been disciplined for making offensive statements on social media, including posts that were bigoted or made light of police violence.

The police department announced that 13 officers whose posts violated department policy would receive punishments ranging from a written reprimand to unpaid suspension.

Two more cases are still being reviewed and one officer resigned, the department said.

"It is imperative that we operate with the highest level of ethics and integrity to ensure that the public is confident in the legitimacy of who we are as a law enforcement agency," Dallas Police Chief U Renee Hall said.

The officer's posts were among thousands identified by researchers with the Plain View Project as potentially undermining public confidence in police departments around the country.

Dallas police launched an internal review after the watchdog released its findings in June. Internal affairs investigators reviewed hundreds of posts dating back to 2010, but found 60 of the 169 Dallas officer identified by the Plain View Project were no longer with the department, a police statement said.



People wear medical masks at John F. Kennedy Airport (JFK) out of concern over the coronavirus, in New York City, yesterday.

Delta, American Airlines suspend all China flights

REUTERS — CHICAGO

Delta Air Lines Inc and American Airlines Group Inc decided yesterday to temporarily suspend all remaining US-China flights after the US State Department elevated a travel advisory over concerns about the coronavirus.

US officials were due to hold a call with airlines later to discuss the Chinese flights.

Some airline officials worried that if they did not voluntarily halt flights it would prompt the Trump administration to take formal action, potentially complicating any subsequent flight resumption.

The United States told citizens on Thursday not to travel to China due to the epidemic that has infected nearly 10,000 people and been declared a global emergency.

Pilots and flight attendants have been demanding airlines stop flights to the country, with American Airlines' pilots filing a lawsuit on Thursday seeking an immediate halt.

"The decision to file a lawsuit was made out of concern for the safety of our pilots," said Dennis Tajer, a spokesman for the Allied Pilots Association which represents American's pilots.

Delta and American had both announced lighter schedules to China earlier this week.

Yesterday, American said operations to and from China would be halted until March 27. The carrier will continue to fly to Hong Kong.

Delta said its last China-bound flight departing the United States will leave on Monday, February 3, with the last US return flight departing China on February 5.

The Delta suspension is set to last through April 30.

Pentagon says US injury count from Iran strike rises to 64

BLOOMBERG — WASHINGTON

At least 64 US military personnel in Iraq suffered brain trauma in a Iranian missile attack launched in retaliation after President Donald Trump's ordered the killing of an Iranian general.

The 64 service members — 14 more than previously reported — have been diagnosed with mild traumatic brain injuries, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Campbell, a Defense Department spokesman, said in a statement.

Of those, 39 have returned to duty; at least 21 have gone to Germany for "further evaluation and treatment." The severity of the other cases has not been disclosed.

"We'll continue to monitor them the rest of their lives, actually, and continue to provide whatever treatment is necessary," General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in the statement.

Trump initially minimised the fallout after Iran fired more than a dozen guided missiles at two bases in Iraq on January 8.

The attack less than a week after the killing in Baghdad of Qassem Soleimani, a leader of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards. The missiles struck deserted parts of the sprawling Al Asad airbase in Anbar Province and another base near Erbil. No casualties were initially reported.

"Iran appears to be standing down," Trump said afterward. "Which is a good thing for all parties concerned and a very good thing for the world."

Two weeks later, he acknowledged that some Americans had been hurt in the attacks.

"I heard they had headaches," the president told reporters during a press conference at the conclusion of a two-day trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "I can report it's not very serious."

The Veterans of Foreign Wars later said in a statement that it "expects an apology from the president to our service men and women for his misguided remarks."

Trump ordered the drone strike that killed Soleimani after an American contractor died in a rocket attack on an Iraqi base in Kirkuk in late December.

In the Pentagon statement, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said that the department "is a leading contributor in the treatment and research of brain-related trauma."

"We do everything we can to identify, treat and help our service members recover and return to duty," he added.

A 2018 study by the federally funded RAND Corp found a dearth of research and understanding of potential damage to the nervous system from repeated exposure to these lower-level blasts.

John Delaney bows out of Democratic race ahead of Iowa caucuses

BLOOMBERG — WASHINGTON

John Delaney, the first candidate to join the 2020 race, is ending his presidential campaign only days before the first-in-the-nation Iowa caucuses.

The former three-term Maryland congressman said he made the decision because he realised that he would not reach 15% in any precinct in Iowa — the threshold for being awarded any delegates — and that he would take away votes from other moderate candidates.

"I will support whoever our nominee is. And I think any of our nominees can win," Delaney said. But while mentioned several moderate candidates by name including Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar, he said that some from the more progressive wing of the party, such as Bernie Sanders, make Democrats' "job harder at beating Donald Trump."

Delaney, 56 , was unable to gain traction in polls or fundraising. Although he participated in the first two Democratic debates, he failed to meet the tougher criteria for the third in Houston in September.

During the campaign, he positioned himself as a moderate and a firm believer in bipartisanship. In the second Democratic debate in Detroit in July, he had a heated exchange with Elizabeth Warren after he suggested that Democrats win "when we run on things that are workable, not fairy tale economics."

Warren responded: "I don't understand why anybody goes to all the trouble of running for president of the United States just to talk about what we really can't do and shouldn't fight for."

Delaney favours a universal health care system but wants to maintain Medicare for those over 65. In July, he was booed at the California Democrats State Convention when he said Medicare For All "is actually not good policy, nor is it good politics."

In announcing he was dropping out of the race yesterday, Delaney said in a statement, "I leave this race with a profound sense of gratitude to the voters who shared with me their hopes and concerns for our magnificent country, in admiration for the other contenders for the nomination and proud of the work we did to change the debate."

"This race was never about me, but about ideas and doing what's right for our nation," Delaney said. "Let's stop the nonsense of unrealistic and divisive campaign promises and be the party the American people need — a decent, unifying, future-focused and common-sense party."

Delaney announced his candidacy on July 28, 2017, more than three years before the 2020 election.

Second CIA contractor testifies in 9/11 case at Guantanamo

AP — FORT MEADE

John Bruce Jessen, a former Air Force psychologist, said the survival training provided to American pilots and other members of the military was intended to help them recover more quickly if they were subjected to brutal treatment when captured.

A former CIA contractor who helped design the agency's harsh interrogation program following the September 11 attacks pushed back yesterday on the notion that the survival training for US service members, which became the basis for the "enhanced" techniques used on American captives, amounted to torture.

John Bruce Jessen, a former Air Force psychologist, said the survival training provided to American pilots and other members of the military was intended to help them recover more quickly if they were subjected to brutal treatment when captured.

"The US government wouldn't torture their own people," he said. The techniques "were designed to teach students they could handle tough times." Jessen was called as a witness by lawyers for the Guantanamo prisoners facing war crimes charges for their alleged roles in the September 11 plot. His early testimony focused on the roots of what Bush administration officials called "enhanced interrogation" and many critics call torture.

It's an important issue now as lawyers for the five men charged in the attacks seek to exclude a key piece of evidence against them: Statements they gave voluntarily to FBI agents after they were moved from CIA custody to Guantanamo in September 2006. Their death penalty trial is scheduled to start at the base next January.

Jessen took the stand after his partner, fellow former contractor James Mitchell, testified over eight days, providing the first public details about a CIA interrogation program that has long been shrouded in secrecy.

As he took the stand yesterday morning, Jessen made it clear that his participation was limited. "My position is that I'll come for two weeks and that is all and then I'm done," he said soon after taking the stand. "I hope you'll remember that."

A retired psychologist who lives in Washington state, Jessen created the interrogation program with Mitchell based on the experience both men had training Air Force pilots to put up resistance to the enemy if captured. Their company received $81 million from the CIA, according to a 2014 Senate report on the program.

Mitchell earlier defended the interrogation program, though he conceded that some interrogators used unapproved methods or that some techniques were used even when not necessary because detainees were cooperating.

The methods they developed included sleep deprivation for days at a time, confinement in small spaces, painful shackling, forced standing in the nude, being plunged into icy water and the simulated drowning known as waterboarding.



Maduro greets Supreme Court members

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro greets members of the Venezuela's Supreme Court during the ceremony marking the opening of the new court term in Caracas, yesterday.

After crackdown, Mexico President sees caravans as waning

AP— MEXICO CITY

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said yesterday that he expects more caravans of Central American migrants and asylum seekers to emerge, but he sees the phenomenon which became a political football in the United States in recent years as waning.

A week after armored National Guard troops and immigration agents broke up what was left of the most recent caravan in southern Mexico, loading men, women and children onto buses for likely deportation, López Obrador suggested that fewer will come in future groups.

"Surely they are organizing other caravans.... Only each time they have fewer migrants," he said. "There is more and more information." Hours earlier a group numbering in just the low dozens set out before dawn from the bus terminal in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in response to the latest call for a caravan, a far cry from the kind of numbers seen previously. Mexico has made clear that it will no longer allow large caravans to pass through its territory, following intense pressure and threatened trade tariffs from Washington last year.

Early caravans beginning in late 2018 were largely permitted passage, at times receiving humanitarian aid and transportation from local communities and governments.

But now Mexico has thousands of National Guard troops deployed to support immigration enforcement, and Guatemala, too, returned hundreds from the most recent caravan to Honduras.

When negotiations with a de facto spokesman for the caravan broke down along a highway in the southern state of Chiapas last week, Mexican guardsmen banging batons against riot shields advanced and engaged. There was shoving and pepper spray in the chaos. Many sobbed as they allowed themselves to be escorted to the buses, while others fled or resisted and were cornered or subdued.

López Obrador praised the troops, saying, "The National Guard behaved very well. It resisted, it held firm, it did not give in to provocations." The president also said there were no human rights violations. Some human rights groups have expressed concerns about the operation, including the detention of children and other vulnerable people in the caravan.

López Obrador said 5,000 people from its various splinters, most of whom were from Honduras, had been returned home. He alleged that they had been "lied to" about a supposed agreement for them to advance through Mexico to the US border.

Colombia rebuffs Maduro offer to restore diplomatic ties

AFP — BOGOTA

Colombian President Ivan Duque dismissed an offer by his Venezuela counterpart Nicolas Maduro to restore diplomatic relations in order to deal with the case of a detained, fugitive ex-lawmaker.

Aida Merlano, who is Colombian, was detained by Venezuelan security forces in the northwestern city of Maracaibo after illegally crossing into Venezuela, police there said on Monday.

She was serving a 15-year prison sentence in Colombia for vote-buying when she staged a spectacular escape in October, giving her guards the slip while visiting a dentist.

Colombia said on Tuesday it would submit an extradition request to Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido, since it does not recognize Maduro's government.

Maduro described the request as ridiculous since Guaido — who declared himself acting president last January in a challenge to the socialist leader's authority — holds no real power.

But on Wednesday, Maduro offered to restore diplomatic relations that he broke off last February when Colombia tried to help Guaido force desperately needed humanitarian aid into crisis-wracked Venezuela as security forces loyal to Maduro blocked it.

"We see there are very few guarantees in Venezuela for the provision of consular and other services, due to the dictatorship's constant aggression," said Duque.

"It was the dictator who expelled (Colombian diplomats) and who broke off relations, so don't come here now pretending to be a dove of peace."

Brazilians sent to Mexico by US say they don't understand why

REUTERS — CIUDAD JUAREZ

Bewildered, sad and disappointed, Brazilians migrants sent from the United States to Mexico this week were left wondering how they had ended up in another country whose language they do not understand.

The United States on Wednesday began sending some Brazilian migrants who had crossed the border with Mexico back there to await their US court hearings under a program known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP).

It is one of several moves by the administration of US President Donald Trump aimed at reducing the number of people seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border. Since the program began a year ago, more than 57,000 non-Mexican migrants have been returned to Mexico.

"I don't understand why I was sent here," said Brazilian migrant Tania Costa, adding that she did not understand Spanish and had been unable to communicate with Mexican officials. "Why did they return me to Mexico and not Brazil?" She said US officials had not explained to her that she would be sent to Mexico. Ten Brazilian migrants were sent to Mexico under MPP on Wednesday, according to Enrique Valenzuela, who heads the civil protection services in Chihuahua state. The program was previously limited to Spanish speakers.

Among them were Costa and her six-year old daughter. They had left Belo Horizonte in the south-western state Minas Gerais, Brazil just over a week ago, she said. "I had heard of people who managed, so I tried as well," she said. "I had a court date, everything was scheduled, but they didn't let me stay there." She was getting death threats because of her inability to pay her debt, she said, and that she had no job. "They said since we don't want to go back to Brazil, because we're being threatened, then we have to return to Mexico," she said.

Canada gets China nod to bring home citizens

AFP — OTTAWA

Canada's top diplomat has gotten a nod from his Chinese counterpart to bring home nearly 200 Canadians from Wuhan — the epicenter of the coronavirus epidemic — his office said yesterday.

In a rare telephone call with Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Canada's Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne "asked for the collaboration of the Chinese government in helping those Canadian citizens who want to depart the region." Wang "responded positively," he said. Ottawa chartered a plane to bring back 196 Canadians who asked to be repatriated, but the airlift had remained in limbo this week.





CHANGE OF NAME

I, Mohammed Alin Kanjirathinkal Sunil, holder of India Passport No. R2280735 (Qatar ID No. 30235602266) hereby change my name to

ALIN KANJIRATHINKAL SUNIL.

Any objection, please contact the Immigration and Passport Office within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

I, Mohammed Aman Kanjirathinkal Sunil, holder of India Passport No. R2280582 (Qatar ID No. 30035602173) hereby change my name to

AMAN KANJIRATHINKAL SUNIL.

Any objection, please contact the Immigration and Passport Office within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

I, Tamara Issa, holder of Serbia Passport No. 014495461 (Qatar ID No. 28489000006) hereby change my name to

TAMARA ISSA DORDEVIC.

Any objection, please contact the Immigration and Passport Office within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

I, Juzette Bliluran Sumira, holder of Philippines Passport No. EC1440476 (Qatar ID No. 26760800250) hereby change my name to

JUZETTE BULURAN SOMERA.

Any objection, please contact the Immigration and Passport Office within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

I, Zjbrail Ansari, holder of Nepal Passport No. 08155750 (Qatar ID No. 28852405902) hereby change my name to

ZIBRAIL ANSARI.

Any objection, please contact the Immigration and Passport Office within 15 days from the publication of this notice.