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The Peninsula

Local focus, Global vision

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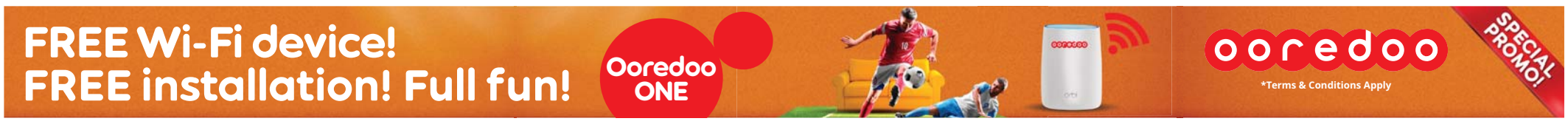
IMF delegation meets Lebanon Premier Diab over debt crisis

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Agar takes a hat-trick as Australia crush South Africa







Five QA Cargo planes depart to China with medical supplies

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The flights carrying approximately 300 tonnes of medical supplies departed one after the other bound for Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou as part of Qatar Airways' voluntary offer of free air cargo transportation for medical relief aid organised by Chinese Embassies and Consulates worldwide to fight the coronavirus emergency.



Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, H E Akbar Al Baker (third left); President of the Civil Aviation Authority, H E Abdulla bin Nasser Turki Al Subaey (third right); and Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Qatar, Zhou Jian (second left), witnessing Qatar Airways Cargo freighters depart to China.

Five Qatar Airways Cargo freighters departed to China yesterday carrying approximately 300 tonnes of medical supplies donated by the airline to support Cornavirus relief efforts.

The five flights departed one after the other bound for Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou as part of Qatar Airways' voluntary offer of free air cargo transportation for medical relief aid organised by Chinese Embassies and Consulates worldwide to fight the coronavirus emergency, said a Qatar Airways statement.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, H E Akbar Al Baker, said: "When this crisis began, we knew we had to support our friends in China. As one of the leading air cargo carriers in the world, we are in a unique position where we are able to provide immediate humanitarian support through the provision of aircraft and donating medical supplies as well as coordinating logistical arrangements."

"By working with the Chinese Embassy in Qatar we hope our combined efforts can help limit the spread of this virus, ease the burden on local medical personnel and provide relief to the impacted communities in China," he added.

The Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the State of Qatar, H E Zhou Jian, who attended the convoy's departure along with Qatar Airways' Group Chief Executive, said: "At this critical moment when Chinese people nationwide are fighting against the Coronavirus, Qatar Airways has opened a "Green Channel" for donating and transporting medical supplies to China. This is a channel of love, friendship, solidarity and hope. We are deeply grateful for that.

"The kindness of Qatar fully reflects the fraternal friendship the Qatari government and the people of Qatar have for the Chinese people. It is also a symbol of Qatar's internationalism, and a symbol of solidarity among the international community to stand together in the face of difficulties. On behalf of the Chinese government and the Chinese people. I would like to extend our most sincere thanks to the brotherly Qatari people."

Yesterday's convoy follows an earlier batch of critical medical relief aid transported by Qatar Airways Cargo to Shanghai on February 2. The shipment included 100,000 medical-grade N95 respiratory masks and 2,700 medical-grade disposable latex gloves, providing essential protection to healthcare professionals working around the clock at hospitals in Hubei Province, the epicentre of the virus. The airline is planning to transport additional donations in the coming weeks.

The 'Green Channel' initiative for complimentary air transportation was announced jointly by Qatar Airways and the Chinese Embassy in Qatar on February 7. Qatar Airways is the first international airline to volunteer emergency relief flight delivery.

Qatar Airways is also working closely with the World Health Organization and local authorities worldwide to safeguard the health and safety of its employees and passengers.

Its modern fleet is protected with High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filtration systems, eliminating 99.97% of fine airborne particles from circulating air in cabins, greatly restricting the spread of airborne fungi, viruses and bacteria.

Qatar's efforts to improve wellbeing of population lauded

FAZEENA SALEEM
THE PENINSULA

Qatar's efforts to significantly improve quality of healthcare and wellbeing of the population were lauded during a conference in Doha.

Healthcare in the country has seen a significant growth with implementation of strategies and policies providing population based care and prevention of diseases, said Dr Jeanelle de Gruchy, President, Association of Directors of Public Health in the UK, speaking on the sidelines of the 4th International Primary Health Care Conference – Qatar 2020.

"What impressed me in Qatar's public health was the vision, it is absolutely about how do we prevent diseases and enhance health and wellbeing of the population," she said speaking to *The Peninsula*.

"Too often people focus on healthcare which is very much treatment. What I liked about the strategies here is very much focused on prevention and health promotion. Focused on what particular groups of populations that have particular needs to be healthy and who are more at risk," she added.

To mention, the human development pillar of Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030 expresses Qatar's ambition to develop a healthy population, physically and mentally. It is within the context of progressing closer to QNV 2030 that the National Health Strategy (NHS) 2018-2022 directs the health sector's next period of growth, as one of eight sector strategies that comprise Qatar's National Development Strategy (NDS) 2018-2022.

Led by the Ministry of Public Health, the NHS 2018-2022 is an all-encompassing vision for Qatar's health sector, which sits above all other health strategies to guide the development of the healthcare system. ➔P3

Pompeo: US and Taliban reach understanding

QNA & ANATOLIA — WASHINGTON

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced yesterday that the US and the Taliban have reached an "understanding" that could result in a "reduction in violence" in Afghanistan. The US and Taliban are due to sign the agreement on 29 February.

"After decades of conflict, we have come to an understanding with the Taliban on a significant reduction in violence across Afghanistan," Pompeo wrote on Twitter

He described the latest development as an important step on a long road to peace, calling on Afghans to seize this opportunity.

An Afghan government official announced yesterday that the "reduction in violence" agreement between the Taliban, the United States, and the Afghan security forces will take place today. If the partial truce is implemented, it will be a historic step during the 18-year war in Afghanistan and could pave the way for an agreement that might allow an end to the war.

For more than a year, the US has been in talks with the Taliban to seek an agreement allowing it to withdraw thousands of its soldiers in exchange for security guarantees and obligations from the Taliban.

"The US and the Taliban have been engaged in extensive talks to facilitate a political settlement to end the war in Afghanistan, reduce US and Allied Forces presence, and ensure that no terrorist group ever uses Afghan soil to threaten the US or our allies," Pompeo said in a statement.

The initial deal gives the Taliban seven days, starting last night, to refrain from all violence. If the condition is met, the US and Taliban will move forward with a broader, permanent agreement.

The two parties reached an understanding of nationwide reduction in violence across Afghanistan after weeks of negotiations in Doha, he noted.

"Upon a successful implementation of this understanding, signing of the US-Taliban agreement is expected to move forward. We are preparing for the signing to take place on February 29.

"Intra-Afghan negotiations will start soon thereafter, and will build on this fundamental step to deliver a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire and the future political roadmap for Afghanistan. The only way to achieve a sustainable peace in Afghanistan is for Afghans to come together and agree on the way forward," Pompeo added.

Iraq and Kuwait on alert as coronavirus deaths rise in Iran

AFP — BAGHDAD

Iraqi and Kuwaiti authorities were on high alert yesterday after banning travel the previous day to and from Iran, where authorities say the death toll from the new coronavirus has hit four.

In the Middle East, two elderly men in Iran were the first confirmed deaths from the virus, which has also spread to the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Israel, which confirmed its first case yesterday.

Both Iraq and Kuwait, which respectively share land and maritime borders with Iran, have not confirmed any cases of the virus internally.

But the outbreak in the Islamic Republic has sparked alarm, especially since many of the coronavirus cases involved residents of the city of Qom, a popular destination for Kuwaiti and Iraqi Shias.

Iraq is a popular destination for millions of Iranian Shias, including religious scholars from Qom, who visit sites in the southern provinces of Najaf and Karabala. Iran is also the second-largest exporter of goods to Iraq, sending products to the value of around nine billion dollars annually.

➔P4,6.7,10 &11



Al Wasmi Garden Festival ends today

Schoolchildren visiting Al Wasmi Garden Festival organised by the Cultural Village Foundation Katara. After having witnessed large turnout of visitors in the past four days, the inaugural festival marks a successful conclusion today. ➔P2

Stage set for 'Messi10' by Cirque du Soleil's Asian debut in Doha

RAYNALD RIVERA
THE PENINSULA

The latest groundbreaking show "Messi10" by Cirque du Soleil is all set to take the breath away of thousands of football and circus fans in Doha as it marks its Asia premiere coming Thursday at Ali bin Hamad Al Attiyah Arena.

Doha is only the second city where the unique production inspired by the legendary sports icon Leo Messi will be staged, following its highly successful world premiere in Barcelona last year. "Doha is the first city in the Middle East that we chose to play Messi10 because Qatar is a huge fan of Messi, and Qatar loves sports specially football, that's why we're here. Doha is the second city that we chose to stage this amazing show after Barcelona," Dennis Pinero, publicist and spokesperson of Messi10 told *The Peninsula*.

Forty-seven artistes from 19 different countries will perform a total of 14 shows to be staged in 10 days from February 27 to March 7 in a show like no other.

"Messi10 is unique because it is the first Cirque du Soleil show that is combined with an actual sport. It is the only show about Messi, the best football player in the world today. It is also the only Cirque du Soleil production about a person who is still alive," noted Pinero. He stressed that "the show is about having fun. It's about Messi's qualities and how he focuses on his fans."

It took a lot of planning and dedication to put up the show, preparations for which took about two years from concept till the world premiere on October 10 last year in Barcelona, where Messi plays for its football club, he added.

Presented in partnership with Qatar National Tourism Council, Messi10 is an immersive experience which combines classical circus acts such as trampoline, trapeze and tightrope artists with never-before seen disciplines, audiovisual material and videos highlighting Messi's best plays, as well as exclusive images especially produced for the show. ➔P3

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR	04.47 am	SUNRISE	06.03 am
ZUHR	11.47 am	ASR	03.05 pm
MAGHRIB	05.34 pm	ISHA	07.04 pm

WEATHER TODAY

17°C Minimum | 24°C Maximum

Misty at places at first becomes moderate temperature daytime with some clouds, relatively cold by night.

HIGH TIDE 04:28 - 15:25 LOW TIDE 12:08 - 22:45

» ALRUWAIS: 17°↗21° » ALKHOR: 16°↗24° » DUKHAN: 16°↗22° » WAKRAH: 15°↗24° » MESAIEED 15°↗24° » ABUSAMRA 14°↗25°

Al Wasmi Garden Festival concludes today

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

After having witnessed a large turnout of visitors in the past four days, the inaugural Al Wasmi Garden Festival organised by the Cultural Village Foundation (Katara) marks a successful conclusion today.

The excellent organisation of the exhibition and activities in a fine weather and beautiful setting of colourful flowers which attracted many visitors have contributed to the success of the event, said organisers.

The festival is the first public event hosted on Katara South Hills, which is fast becoming a favourite destination for visitors at the Cultural Village.

During the festival, 20 stalls lined up along the southern side of the festival venue competed for the visitors' attention as they displayed various types of flowers and ornamental plants which have contributed to raising environmental awareness and promoting the culture and passion for gardening and floral decoration.

The flower market in the festival do not only present a wide variety of flowers and ornamental plants but also plastic, glass and metal pots in various shapes and sizes which people can use to start gardening.

Daily visits by schools to the festival provided children useful knowledge about taking care of the environment and gardening through a number of workshops.

While the five international gardens provided a perfect backdrop for photos, the stage performances of beloved fairy tales offered entertainment to children. Many visitors also thronged the food and beverage section which sells a wide variety of snacks.



A performance during Al Wasmi Garden Festival.



The Chairman of Qatar Chamber, Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim Al Thani, touring the pavilions of the 'Made in Qatar' exhibition being held in Kuwait.

'Made in Qatar' expo's Kuwait edition witnesses large turnout on third day

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Chairman of Qatar Chamber (QC), Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim Al Thani, toured the pavilions of the 'Made in Qatar' exhibition being held in Kuwait, where he was informed by the officials of Qatari exhibiting companies on their impression and outcomes of the expo.

Exhibitors informed the QC Chairman about their discussions with Kuwaiti companies. He was accompanied with QC Board Member, Dr. Khalid Al Hajri, and the Director General, Saleh bin Hamad Al Sharqi, and many businessmen.

The expo's third day saw large turnout from Kuwaiti businessmen and representatives of Kuwaiti companies of all sectors who were interested to visit the expo to review enhancing cooperation and building joint ventures in both countries. A number of Qatari exhibiting companies signed agreements and contracts to forge partnerships and alliances and establish commercial agencies for Kuwaiti companies in Qatar and for Qatari companies in Kuwait.

On the sidelines of the expo, Al Baida Group, a Qatar-based company and Kuwait-based Quest Medical Company signed an MoU to set up a company specials in hospitals management.

Ooredoo sponsors Premier Cricket League Inter-Hotel Cricket Tournament

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar's leading telecommunications operator has confirmed it is to be Official Telecommunications Sponsor for the upcoming 2020 Premier Cricket League Inter-Hotel Cricket Tournament 2020.

Organised by the Diplomatic Club, the event will be opened at an official ceremony at Asian Town International Cricket Stadium on February 22, 2020, which will also host the semi-finals, final and closing ceremony on March 21, 2020. League matches will take place at Lusail Grounds on February 29, March 7 and March 14. The Premier Cricket League Inter-Hotel Cricket Tournament aims to provide an opportunity for cricket enthusiasts working in hotels to compete against cricketers from other hotels in a fun, friendly tournament. Up to 30 of the top hotels in Doha are set to participate.

Speaking of the sponsorship, Manar Khalifa Al-Muraikhi – Director PR and Corporate Communications at Ooredoo – said: "We're delighted to support this great event that encourages community cohesion and promotes a healthy, active lifestyle, in line with our corporate social responsibility strategy. Workers in hotels contribute immensely to the economy and tourist industry in Qatar, and we're pleased to be able to work with the Diplomatic Club to give them this exciting opportunity. We wish all the teams the best of luck, and look forward to seeing some awesome cricket."

GAC wraps up workshop on cyber security

QNA — DOHA

The five-day regional training workshop organised by the General Authority of Customs (GAC), under the theme of "Cybersecurity, digital forensic analyzes and combating cybercrime" concluded on Thursday.

The Director of the Customs Training Center, Mubarak Ibrahim Al Buainain, said that the workshop comes within a regional plan approved by the authority in coordination with the World Customs Organization, indicating that these workshops benefit GAC's employees and the agencies operating in the state as well as many countries of the region.

Al Buainain explained that the subject of this workshop came at the right time due to the challenges posed by cybersecurity and the issues related to it, adding technology is a double-edged sword and there are people with bad intentions who use them in electronic crimes.

Marwan M Kraidy named Dean of Northwestern University-Qatar

THE PENINSULA — DOHA



Marwan M Kraidy **(pictured)** has been named dean and CEO of Northwestern University-Qatar (NU-Q), Provost Jonathan Holloway announced yesterday.

Kraidy, who serves as associate dean for administration and professor of global communication at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania (UPenn), will start as dean of NU-Q July 1. He will hold a named chair and a tenured appointment. Holloway said Kraidy emerged from a global search of highly respected, prominent candidates.

"I am very excited to appoint Marwan Kraidy as the dean of NU-Q," Holloway said. "In our search for a leader to fill this vitally important role, it quickly became clear that Marwan was the right person to guide NU-Q in this critical time. I am thrilled for Marwan and for our Qatar campus. I have the utmost confidence in his ability to lead and to advocate for all members of the NU-Q community."

Kraidy, who also serves as Annenberg's associate dean for graduate studies, is the Anthony Shadid Chair in Global Media, Politics & Culture at UPenn. In 2013 he founded the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication (CARGC), a leading institute for advanced study that hosts faculty, postdoctoral and undergraduate fellows, and publishes cutting-edge research. As CARGC's director, Kraidy led multidisciplinary teams of scholars in research on enduring issues in global media, politics and culture. A native of Lebanon and an authority on Arab media, Kraidy has for more than two decades taught and published award-winning research about the Middle East. He has a deep knowledge of the region and is fluent in Arabic and other languages.

"I am honored and delighted to be the next NU-Q dean." Kraidy said. "The future of education is global, interdisciplinary, and digital. With its formidable faculty, talented staff and bright students, NU-Q is uniquely positioned to shape that future. I look forward to leading this special community to new heights, and deepen our impact on Northwestern and the world."

He said that as NU-Q moves confidently into its second decade, it is poised to be an important catalyst in global education.

"As a campus of a preeminent US university embedded in a region with impressive and fast-changing media industries and educational institutions, NU-Q can play a transformative role in shaping the circulation of knowledge between Africa, Asia and the Americas, and in deepening mutual understanding between the United States and the Arab and Islamic worlds," Kraidy said.

Kraidy succeeds Craig LaMay, who has served as acting dean since December. LaMay, who served on the NU-Q dean search committee, will return to his duties as a professor in residence at NU-Q on July 1.

Qatari athletes visit horse breeding facility at Al Shaqab Arena



Qatari athletes and officials of the Qatar Olympic Committee during their visit at the world-class horse breeding facility in Al Shaqab Arena. The Qatari athletes praised the facilities at Al Shaqab Arena which is getting ready to host two top events in the coming two weeks.

QEERI providing key data for development of Al Kharsaah plant

THE PENINSULA — DOHA



The team from Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute at Al Kharsaah photovoltaic plant.

Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (QEERI), part of Hamad Bin Khalifa University, is playing an integral role in conducting key research in helping the country harness the power of the sun, which is in abundance all year round.

In January, Qatar announced its ambitious plans to develop the Al Kharsaah photovoltaic plant, a solar energy site that is the first step towards the country's long-term objective to produce 20 percent of its electricity through solar energy by 2030.

QEERI is working alongside the winning bidders – France's Total and Japan's Marubeni – and Kahramaa to provide key data and measurability to ensure optimisation in developing the solar plant as part of the Siraj project.

Dr Antonio P. Sanfilippo, Dr. Veronica Bermudez and Dr. Cedric Andre Broussillou are the scientists at the helm of QEERI's involvement in the country's biggest solar project yet. Once fully operational, the 1000 hectares (10km^2) plant, estimated at costing QR1.7bn, is expected to produce 800 megawatts, accounting for a tenth of the country's current peak energy demand. The three scientists and their teams at QEERI's Energy Center have been involved in the project from the outset to ensure the provision of solar measurement data, which is one of the core functions of QEERI's energy management programme.

"We have very specialized equipment that records the various components of solar radiation in real-time, and we have 14 solar monitoring stations across Qatar, including one at the Al Kharsaah site," said Dr Sanfilippo.

"One key aspect of QEERI's involvement in this project is providing precise solar resource data to reduce the risk of error when calculating the bankability - i.e. how much the solar plant will be able to produce based on the amount of solar power that can be harnessed. In doing so, we provided bidders to Kahramaa's tender with four years of data from the physical solar stations as well as with data derived from the QEERI satellite receiver."

In addition to the data which assisted bidders to assess the bankability of their offers, QEERI has also developed a solar forecasting service and a solar atlas. The ability to forecast solar radiation minutes, hours, and days ahead is crucial to optimizing solar energy integration by ensuring grid stability and efficient use of diverse energy resources, and regulating energy markets.

SC Security Committee delegation concludes visit to Morocco

QNA — RABAT

Major General Al Rashed praised the positive cooperation by Moroccan officials and their keenness to support the Qatari efforts to organise a distinguished world cup championship.

A delegation from the Security Committee of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) concluded a visit to the Kingdom of Morocco, within the framework of enhancing joint cooperation between the two countries in the security field.

During the visit, the delegation, led by head of competition facilities security unit of the Security Committee Major General Ali Mohammed Al Rashid, discussed with the Moroccan side, which included national security and Royal Gendarmerie officials, ways to enhance bilateral cooperation between the concerned authorities in the two brotherly countries and the possibility of exchanging experiences in several fields, the most important of which is the exchange of information and the contribution to securing major sporting events, including the 2022 World Cup, in a way that achieves the best levels of sports security.

Major General Al Rashed praised the positive cooperation by Moroccan officials and their keenness to support the Qatari efforts to organise a distinguished world cup championship, adding that the brothers in the Kingdom of Morocco have distinct experience in the areas of sports security and keen to harness those capabilities in order to succeed this most important sporting event in the world.

Major General Al Rashed said this security cooperation constitutes the nucleus of more aspects of joint and continuous cooperation in the areas of sports security, which will reflect positively at the level of organisation in the upcoming sports tournaments.



The faculty of the College of Business and Economics at Qatar University at the event.

QU College of Business and Economics organises event to help students on their journey to success

QNA — DOHA

The College of Business and Economics (CBE) in Qatar University (QU) organised an event in collaboration with the CBE communication's office and the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Office, with assistance from CBE student Salma Ahmed Mohamed.

Three CBE faculty members shared their academic and life journeys to students: Assistant Professor of Marketing, Dalia Farrag; Assistant Professor of Management, Anas Al Bakri; and Assistant Professor of Accounting Emad Awadallah.

Through sharing their experiences, the professors aimed to educate students on the life lessons they learned and encouraged them to pursue their goals and aspirations despite life's challenges. The event also strengthened the student-professor relationship by creating a friendly environment to escape the formality of a regular academic environment. It also helped to guide students wishing to complete their postgraduate studies.

QU's Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, Dr. Maha Al-Thani commented on the event saying, "The younger generation are a great source of support for society in all fields. As a result, the College of Business and Economics communication office, with the support of the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Office, organized a number of workshops that aimed to connect students with their professors, which will consequently lead students to have a positive connection with their respective colleges. The workshops also aim to raise student morale and increase their academic efforts, and their sense of belonging in the university campus."

Qatar's Embassy in Beijing helps in coronavirus fight

THE PENINSULA — BEIJING

The State of Qatar's embassy in Beijing offered medical help to the People's Republic of China in its fight against the novel Coronavirus.

The Ambassador of the State of Qatar to China, H E Mohammed Abdullah Al Dehaimi, said that the country stands united with China in its fight against the virus. His Excellency expressed his confidence in the success of China in overcoming the crisis, praising the measures they took to contain it.

Payment exemptions for residents of Hamad City for 2020

QNA — GAZA

The Chairman of Qatar's Gaza Reconstruction Committee, Ambassador H E Mohammed Al Emadi, announced yesterday the postponement of monthly instalments for beneficiaries from the His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa City in Khan Yunis governorate in southern Gaza Strip for 2020.

Ambassador Al Emadi responded to the requests made by residents of the city, in light of the difficult economic conditions the people of Gaza are going through, which prompted them to request delaying the payment of installments.

His Excellency said that the social research conducted by the Housing and Works Ministry in Gaza will determine the rate of monthly installments exemption for the beneficiaries, noting that while some families will be partially exempted, the poorest families according to the ministry will be fully exempted from the payment, in light of the difficult economic conditions the residents are facing.

This is the third time that HE the ambassador announces the payment exemption for residents of Hamad City. They did not pay any installments in 2018 and 2019.

Acclaimed pianist to perform Brahms' Second Concerto

RAYNALD C RIVERA
THE PENINSULA

Internationally acclaimed German pianist Gerhard Oppitz **(pictured)**, famous for his unusually broad repertory, will play Johannes Brahms' Second Piano Concerto alongside Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra tonight at Katara Opera House.

A well-known Brahmsian pianist, Oppitz has Brahms' complete solo piano music among the 70 titles in his discography, and has been awarded the Brahms-Preis for his important contribution to the preservation of Brahms' artistic heritage.

Often referred to as one of the "Three Bs" of music alongside Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven, Brahms was a German composer and virtuoso pianist who wrote wide ranging compositions and worked with some of the leading performers of his time. He was the author of symphonies, concerti, chamber music pieces, piano works, choral compositions, and over 200 songs. Known for being a perfectionist, there is a 22-year gap between his first and second piano concerto.

"The second piano concerto by Brahms has been accompanying my life for almost 50 years and it has proved to be a wonderful source of inspiration during the past decades of my artistic development. I have had the pleasure and the privilege to perform this marvelous



composition about 250 times together with many different orchestras and conductors. Up to nowadays, I have never lost my great enthusiasm and my deep appreciation for this concerto, which I consider to be comparable to one of the eminent 8000m+ mountains within the entire repertory of piano concertos, or possibly the Mount Everest," said Oppitz. Unlike piano concertos by other composers, he pointed out that Brahms' Concerto No.2 is not just a concerto for solo piano with secondary orchestral accompaniment but a large-scale symphony for piano and orchestra with equally distributed roles for all participants. "The generous dimensions of this work allow the space for vivid conversation between all groups of involved musicians including the solo pianist. This music is based on acting and reacting, on listening to each other and on exchanging musical ideas with each other," he noted.

Oppitz has already performed two Mozart (No. 20 & 21) and two Beethoven Concertos (No. 4 & 5) with the Qatar Philharmonic since his first appearance in Qatar in 2011. "It has always been a pleasure to spend several days in Qatar and to make music together with the Philharmonic Orchestra. The fabulous members of the orchestra have been able to keep the high artistic level of their ensemble and to gain more and more experience on the various sectors of the great symphonic repertoire from the early classical period to the contemporary age," he said.

Led by Marcus Bosch, one of the most prominent figures in the German conducting scene, Qatar Philharmonic will also perform Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 6 tonight.

Stage set for 'Messi10' by Cirque du Soleil's Asian debut in Doha

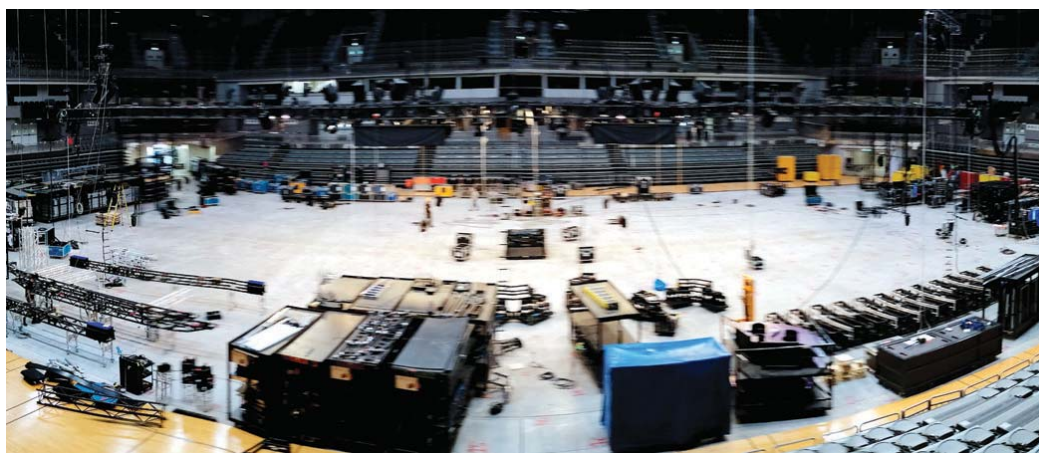
FROM PAGE 1

It tells the story of a young man with boundless ambition who overcomes all obstacles to become one of the greatest football players of his time.

"People can expect a very energetic, unique and innovative show because what we did is bring an innovative football stadium where people can see a real football game with many exciting features," he said.

As people in Qatar are receptive about Cirque du Soleil and Messi, he said they expect many people to come to watch the shows which will be staged at the Ali bin Hamad Al Attiyah Arena he describes as "amazing, huge and unique venue."

With 42 unique productions, Cirque du Soleil has brought wonder and delight to over 190 million spectators in 60 countries. It has staged several successful shows in Qatar in recent years.



Preparations under way yesterday at Ali bin Hamad Al Attiyah Indoor Arena, the venue of 'Messi10' by Cirque du Soleil. PIC: SALIM MATRAMKOT / THE PENINSULA

MESPAQ elects new office bearers



The members of MES Ponnani Alumni Association Qatar (MESPAQ) during the annual general body meeting at the Garden Village Restaurant in Doha recently. New panel of office bearers were approved at the meeting. The new office bearers are President Aslam Chandana; Vice-Presidents Rajesh Kuzhippattu and Shainy Kabeer; Secretary Ashraf Kadvandu; Joint Secretaries Sujeer, Shameer T T and Sajna Mansour; Treasurer, Abdul Kalam and Mansour; Coordinators Shameer T K, Saleem Kainikkara and Shashi Kala; Advisors, Ashraf Perumbadappu (Pearl School), Navas A M, Abdul Majeed. As a token of appreciation for his continuous support to the alumni, Navaz Musliyarakam presented a memento to Abdul Majeed.

VCUarts Qatar honours high achieving students

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) in Education City, a Qatar Foundation partner university, held a special event to honour the students whose hard work and excellent academic skills earned them a place on the Dean's List.

The families of the students were also in attendance for the special occasion as the students were awarded certificates honoring their outstanding academic achievements.

The Dean's List is a recognition of superior academic performance and only students with a Grade Point Average of 3.5 or higher qualify. Of the 105 outstanding Dean's list students, 24 are from the Art Foundation Program, 18 are from the Art History program, six are from the Fashion Design program, 29 are from the Graphic Design program, 13 are from the Interior Design program, and 15 are from the Painting and Printmaking program.

Amir Berbić, the Dean of VCUarts Qatar, welcomed the students and their families, saying, "You are the best and the brightest among our talented and dedicated students. It is no small honor to be on the Dean's List - as Dean's List students you are setting the standard for all other students. "As members of the Dean's List, your names have become part of the history of VCUarts Qatar. You have set yourselves up to be leaders at VCUarts Qatar and eventually leaders in in the community. Continue to lead in this way. We are looking forward to see what you do next - both as students here at VCUarts Qatar - and eventually as alumni.



Dr Jeanelle de Gruchy
PIC: BAHER AMIN/THE PENINSULA

Efforts of Qatar to improve wellbeing of population lauded

FROM PAGE 1

Dr. Gruchy also emphasised that Qatar's focus should continue on disease prevention and promotion of wellbeing of the population.

"Qatar has the real challenge not to get trapped into healthcare focused approach but create a healthy population," she said.

Dr Gruchy delivered a key note speech during the opening session of the 4th International Primary Health Care Conference – Qatar 2020 on 'Current challenges in health promotion and capacity building in primary health care setting'.

"The fundamental challenge in every healthcare system is how to fund resources to the needed groups. Through strategies Qatar has made a great start of having the vision to overcome challenges," said Dr Gruchy.

The 4th International Primary Health Care Conference – Qatar 2020 focuses on progress and embrace the future of primary healthcare, provides a platform to share knowledge, facilitates forums to discuss best practices and underline Qatar's legacy of promoting health and wellness by providing excellence in primary healthcare. The four-day conference will conclude today.

Conservatives tighten grip as Iran votes for parliament

AFP — TEHRAN

Authorities extended voting for two hours to allow more people to vote, before prolonging it by another two hours to 10pm.

Iran extended voting for a second time yesterday in an election expected to see conservatives tighten their grip on parliament, amid voter apathy after the disqualification of thousands of candidates.

The 11th parliamentary election since the 1979 Islamic Revolution comes after a surge in tensions between Tehran and Washington, and Iran's accidental downing of a Ukrainian airliner that sparked anti-government protests.

As he cast the first ballot in the election, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged all Iranians to take part, saying that doing so would "guarantee the country's national interests".

Voters formed long queues in the morning at polling stations in south Tehran, where conservatives have a solid support base. Far fewer were seen waiting to vote in upmarket northern neighbourhoods.

Turnout was estimated at around 40 percent nationwide and 30 percent in Tehran at 6pm (1430 GMT), according to *Fars* news agency, close to the ultra-conservatives. Fars said the official turnout figure would be released today.

Authorities extended voting for two hours to allow more people to vote, before prolonging it by another two hours to 10pm (1830 GMT).

State television showed images from more than 20 cities and towns of people still queued up to vote while announcing the second extension. Some voters in a downtown Tehran mosque said they had turned up late for voting as it was a last-minute decision. One official accused Iran's enemies of overplaying the spread of the disease in a bid to harm the credibility of the election. Experts had predicted a low turnout that they said would serve the conservatives at the expense of President Hassan Rouhani, re-elected in 2017 promising more freedoms and the benefits of engagement with the West.



Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei casts his ballot for the 11th Parliamentary elections at Hosseiniyeh Imam Khamenei polling station in Tehran, yesterday.

Iran fell into a deep recession after US President Donald Trump reimposed sanctions following Washington's unilateral withdrawal from a landmark nuclear deal in 2018.

Amir Bahador Marzpour, a humanities student in Tehran, was one of the many who shunned the election. "I didn't vote because politicians make promises they don't keep," the 18-year-old said, voicing concern about runaway inflation. "There are no jobs for young people, and when we finish our studies we won't have jobs."

Around half of the 16,033 hopefuls in the election were barred by the powerful Guardian Council, most of them moderates and reformists. Iran's beleaguered president, who has come under fire over the sluggish economy, took another hit yesterday as a multinational terrorism financing watchdog reinstated sanctions on the country.

The 38-nation Financial Action Task Force said Iran had not taken sufficient measures against money laundering and the financing of terrorist groups.

In a statement issued after a meeting in Paris, the FATF criticised the Islamic republic for failing to take the measures expected of it in these areas. According to the interior ministry, turnout has always been higher than 50 percent in the 10 previous legislative elections.

Many voters voiced disillusionment. Real estate worker Alireza Hashemi, 25, criticised Rouhani's government.

"After we elected Rouhani everything collapsed. He signed a very bad (nuclear) deal and looked to the West without any real guarantees," he said.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo meets with H M Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of Sultanate of Oman, at Al Alam palace in Muscat, Oman, yesterday.

Pompeo meets with Sultan of Oman amid US pressure on Iran

AP & AFP — DUBAI

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met yesterday with the new ruler of Oman, a Gulf Arab country that has close ties with both Washington and Tehran and that has previously provided a back channel for talks between the adversaries.

Pompeo's stop in Oman to meet H M Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said is the highest level US visit to the country since he was selected successor to longtime ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who died on January 10 after 50 years in power.

Oman supported the Obama administration's nuclear agreement with Iran and world powers, from which President Donald Trump withdrew the US.

Oman, like other Gulf Arab countries, is concerned that rising tensions in the region and the Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign against Iran could harm tourism and economic growth, and impact the flow of oil through the narrow Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman.

The new sultan of Oman has vowed to uphold his predecessor's foreign policy approach, which was based on non-interference. Oman did not join Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in their war in Yemen, keeping its border open with the impoverished country. It also did not join in a Saudi and UAE-led siege against the state of Qatar. While a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Oman has maintained ties with Iran.

Oman's foreign affairs minister, Yusuf bin Alawi Abdullah, greeted Pompeo upon his arrival in Muscat yesterday. He has been quoted as saying that his government is in touch with the US and Iran and believes the possibility exists for dialogue between them.

Meanwhile, the US military accused Tehran of delivering weapons to Yemen's Houthi rebels, following a second interception in less than three months of what Washington said were Iranian arms.

"The seizure is consistent with a historical pattern of Iranian smuggling of advanced weapons to the Houthis in Yemen," said Captain Bill Urban of US Central Command, which is responsible for US forces in the Middle East, during a briefing at the Pentagon on the latest interdiction.

Both interceptions were in the Gulf region and involved dhow vessels that were sailing without a flag, the first occurring on November 25 and the second on February 9.

In the latest seizure, the USS Normandy found 150 "Dhelavieh," Iranian-made copies of the Russian Kornet anti-tank guided missile and three Iranian-designed and manufactured "358" surface-to-air missiles, he said.

The weapons seized in November included the same type of missiles plus a large number of spare parts for cruise missiles.

Watchdog toughens global financial scrutiny of Iran

REUTERS — PARIS

The global dirty money watchdog placed Iran on its blacklist yesterday after it failed to comply with international anti-terrorism financing norms, a move that will deepen the country's isolation from financial markets.

The decision came after more than three years of warnings from the Paris-based Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) urging the Islamic Republic to either enact terrorist financing conventions or see its reprieve from the blacklist lifted and some counter-measures imposed.

"Given Iran's failure to enact the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions in line with the FATF Standards, the FATF fully lifts the suspension of counter-measures and calls on its members and urges all jurisdictions to apply effective counter-measures," the group's 39 members said in a statement after a week-long plenary session. These would entail more scrutiny of transactions with Iran, tougher external auditing of financing firms operating in the country and extra pressure on the few foreign banks and businesses still dealing with Iran.

"The consequence of (Iran's) inaction is higher costs of borrowing and isolation from the financial system," a Western diplomat said.

However, the FATF appeared to leave the door open for some engagement with Iran saying in its statement: "Countries should also be able to apply countermeasures independently of any call by the FATF to do so."

"It's a middle solution. A sort of a fudge to leave the door open for the Iranians," said one of the diplomats.

Foreign businesses say Iran's compliance with FATF rules is essential if it wants to attract investors, especially since the United States reimposed sanctions on Tehran in 2018 after quitting a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and other big powers. Iran's leaders have been divided over approach to the FATF.

Supporters of cooperation say it could ease foreign trade with Europe and Asia, offsetting US sanctions. Hardliners argue that passing legislation to join the FATF could hamper Iran's support for its allies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Israel to probe failed company of Netanyahu's challenger

AP — TEL AVIV

Israeli prosecutors yesterday announced the opening of a criminal investigation into the failed start-up of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's challenger, shaking up the final days of what has been a bitter and tumultuous election campaign.

The announcement did not say whether Benny Gantz is a suspect. But it came less than two weeks before the March 2 election and during a campaign in which Gantz's Blue and White party has painted itself as a clean and scandal-free alternative to Netanyahu, who is to go on trial for corruption next month.

In a statement, the Justice Ministry said that after examining documents and considering other evidence, "the acting state prosecutor has decided to move the subject of the suspicions surrounding the company 'Fifth Dimension' to a criminal investigation."

"The investigation will be conducted by Israeli police," it added. After retiring from the army, Gantz headed Fifth Dimension, a cybersecurity company that entered talks with Israeli police over the sale of its product.

According to Israel's state comptroller, a governmental watchdog, the police may have violated acquisition laws by granting the company a multimillion dollar contract without a public tender. Fifth Dimension later went bankrupt.

Gantz did not immediately comment. But earlier in the day, amid reports that a criminal probe was imminent, he denied any wrongdoing.

"It all sounds like political pressure to get this thing on the public's agenda," Gantz told Israel's Army Radio.

Iraq's Hashd Al Shaabi names new deputy leader

ANATOLIA — BAGHDAD

Iraq's Hashd Al Shaabi (Popular Mobilization) forces yesterday named Abdulaziz Al Mohammadawi their new deputy leader.

Al Mohammadawi succeeds former leader Abu Mahdi Al Muhandis who was slain in a US airstrike on January 3 which also killed Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani, who was then head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' elite Quds Force.

"The Hashd Al Shaabi leaders agreed, during a meeting, to choose commander Abdulaziz Al Mohammadawi, as the chief of staff to succeed al-Muhandis," senior member Abu Ali Al Basri, told state-run TV.

The decision will be approved in the coming days by caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi, according to Al Basri.

Al Mohammadawi is a leading member of the Iran-linked Iraqi Hezbollah group.

The US accuses Hezbollah of firing rockets on the American Embassy in Baghdad and military bases accommodating American soldiers.

Iran reports two more deaths and 13 new cases of coronavirus; Lebanon confirms first case

AGENCIES — TEHRAN/BEIRUT

New coronavirus cases surged across the Middle East yesterday, after a rapid spread in Iran, where authorities say the death toll from the virus has hit four, prompting alarm and travel bans.

Iranian health authorities yesterday reported two more deaths from the new virus that emerged in China and said the fatalities were from among 13 new confirmed cases of the virus in Iran.

The report by the semi-official *Mehr* news agency came as Iranians voted in nationwide parliamentary elections. After authorities reported two earlier deaths this week, the death toll from COVID-19, the illness caused by virus, stands at four in Iran. So far, 18 cases have been confirmed in Iran, including the four who died.

Lebanon confirmed its first coronavirus case yesterday and said it was monitoring two other potential cases after a 45-year-old woman arriving from Iran on Thursday tested positive, Health Minister Hamad Hassan said. Addressing a news conference, Hassan said the patient was taken directly to isolation from a plane arriving from the Iranian city of Qom after exhibiting symptoms of the virus. The patient is being quarantined at Rafik Hariri University Hospital in Beirut and two other individuals from the Qom flight and suspected of carrying the virus would be transferred to the hospital for quarantine as well, Hassan said.



Young women wearing protective masks walk out of the Rafik Hariri University Hospital in the southern outskirts of the Lebanese capital Beirut yesterday, where a woman is treated for coronavirus, the first case in the country.

A coronavirus outbreak in Iran, which has so far seen four people die, began in the Shi'ite Muslim holy city of Qom, authorities in Iran said. The spokesman of the Iran's health ministry, Kianoush Jahanpour, said the newly detected cases are all linked with city of Qom where the first two elderly patients died on Wednesday. Jahanpour said the new cases were either from Qom or had visited the city recently. He said four of them have been hospitalized in the capital, Tehran, and two in northern province of Gilan.

Israel: Cruise passenger flown home from Japan has virus

AP — TEL AVIV

One of the 11 Israelis who were flown home after being quarantined on a cruise ship in Japan has tested positive for the new virus that emerged in China late last year, the first case to be reported inside Israel, officials said.

The Israeli cruise ship passengers, who had all initially tested negative for the new coronavirus, arrived on a charter plane overnight. They were met by medics in protection suits and immediately taken to the Sheba Hospital near Tel Aviv, where they will be kept in quarantine. Dr. Gili Regev-Yochay, director of the infectious disease unit at the hospital, said all 11 were tested again upon arrival. She said a woman tested positive as a carrier of the virus but is "totally healthy" and is not exhibiting any symptoms.

Northwest Syria fighting could end in bloodbath: UN

REUTERS — GENEVA/DAMASCUS

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to halt the Syrian regime's violence in Idlib as efforts intensified to avoid more bloodshed in the final rebel holdout. Erdogan also held a three-way call with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The United Nations warned yesterday that fighting in northwest Syria could "end in a bloodbath" and called again for a ceasefire, while Moscow denied reports of a mass flight of civilians from a Russian-led Syrian government offensive.

Syrian troops backed by Russian air power have been battling since December to eliminate the last rebel strongholds in the region in a war that has killed an estimated 400,000 Syrians, displaced millions more and left much of the country in ruins.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to halt the Syrian regime's violence in Idlib yesterday as efforts intensified to avoid more bloodshed in the final rebel holdout.

Russian air strikes in the northwestern province of Idlib are bolstering a Syrian government offensive that has forced nearly one million civilians to flee — the biggest wave of displacement of the nine-year conflict.

"The president during the call stressed that the regime should be restrained in Idlib and that the humanitarian crisis must be stopped," the Turkish presidency said in a statement after the two leaders spoke by phone.

Erdogan told Putin the solution was to return to the Sochi agreement they signed in 2018, which allowed Turkey to establish military posts across Idlib designed to prevent a regime assault.

That deal has been increasingly set aside as Syrian forces advance steadily into the region.

Turkey, which backs some rebel groups in the province, has lost 16 military personnel this month in clashes with Syrian troops. It has reinforced its positions and called on President Bashar Al Assad to pull his forces back.

Erdogan also held a three-way call with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in which he called for "concrete actions to prevent a humanitarian crisis".

The latest offensive in the regions of Aleppo and Idlib has uprooted nearly 1 million people - most of them women and children - who have fled clashes to seek sanctuary further north, near the Turkish border.

The UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said 60% of the 900,000 people trapped in a shrinking space after fleeing are children.

Libya truce talks back on track in Geneva

AGENCIES — GENEVA

The United Nations said yesterday ceasefire talks were back on track between the forces fighting over Libya's capital, days after the internationally recognised government pulled out of the negotiations as its foes shelled Tripoli's port.

There was no immediate comment from the Government of National Accord (GNA), which withdrew from the talks on Tuesday.Its rival—Libyan National Army commander Khalifa Haftar —told Russia's *RIA* news agency a ceasefire would only be possible if Turkish and Syrian fighters stopped supporting the GNA.

Turkey has backed the Government of National Accord to fend off the Libyan National Army, which is backed by the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

"A ceasefire (would be) the result of a number of conditions being fulfilled...the withdrawal of Syrian and Turkish mercenaries, an end to Turkish arms supplies to Tripoli, and the liquidation of terrorist groups (in Tripoli)," Haftar told the agency in an interview.

Five military officers from both sides have been holding indirect talks meeting in separate rooms with the UN envoy Ghassan Salame shuttling between them but with no sign of any progress on the ground.

The United Nations said the talks had resumed on Thursday. "The talks will continue and they will be getting under way shortly. So things are still happening on that front," UN spokesman Rheal LeBlanc told reporters in Geneva.

The UN envoy attempting to mediate between Libya's warring sides had said on Thursday that his mission to secure a lasting ceasefire and eventually a political solution for the conflict-torn country was extremely difficult, but "possible".



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right), shaking hands with the head of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA), Fayez Al Sarraj, during their meeting at Dolmabahce Palace in Istanbul.

Erdogan meets Libya's Sarraj in Istanbul

ANATOLIA — ISTANBUL

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan received Fayez Al Sarraj, head of Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

The close-door meeting was held in Dolmabahce Palace, Istanbul.

Since the ouster of late ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, two seats of power have emerged in Libya: Haftar in eastern Libya, supported mainly by Egypt and United Arab Emirates, and the GNA in Tripoli, which enjoys UN and international recognition.

The GNA has been under attack by Haftar since last April, with more than 1,000 lives lost in the violence.

Ghassan Salame succeeded Thursday in kickstarting military-level negotiations between Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) and the forces of eastern military commander Khalifa Haftar, days after they collapsed.

The GNA slammed the door on a second round of indirect talks shortly after they began in Geneva Tuesday, after a barrage of rocket fire hit a port in the capital Tripoli — the target of a months-long operation by Haftar's forces.

"The representatives of GNA returned this morning after a short, 24-hour interruption," Salame said in an interview.

"I am very happy that both delegations came back this morning with even more energy towards finding a deal," he said, describing success in talks towards a military settlement for Libya as "essential".

Libya has been in turmoil since a 2011 Nato-backed uprising killed longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi, with rival armed factions still vying for power.

In the latest outbreak of fighting, Haftar launched his offensive on Tripoli last April but after rapid advances his forces stalled on the edges of the capital.

The fighting has left more than 1,000 people dead and displaced some 140,000, according to the United Nations.

A first round of military talks ended with no result earlier this month, but Salame, who has been shuttling between the two delegations of high-level military officers, has said there was "more hope" this time. That is mainly because of the approval last week of a UN Security Council resolution calling for a "lasting ceasefire".

Algerians flood streets to mark year of protests; demand more reforms

REUTERS — ALGIERS

Several thousand Algerians demonstrated yesterday to mark the first anniversary of protests that ousted President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, demanding the removal of allies of the former leader who are still in power and more steps towards democracy.

"We broke the wall of fear a year ago. We will continue," the protesters chanted as they marched through the streets of the capital Algiers.

The protests broke out on February 22, 2019, to reject Bouteflika's plan to seek a fifth term in office and demand the prosecution of people involved in corruption as well as political reforms. He resigned in April last year but protests have still been held every week.

Two former prime ministers, several ex-ministers and prominent businessmen have been detained in anti-graft investigations since Bouteflika's resignation.



Algerian students gather during their weekly anti-government demonstration in the capital Algiers, yesterday.

But demonstrators are now seeking the removal of Bouteflika allies who remain in power. They also want more steps towards democracy and better living standards.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has released dozens of people detained during the protests and announced plans to amend the constitution to allow a greater role for the parliament and government.

Tebboune, elected in last December in a vote largely opposed by demonstrators, on Thursday praised the protest movement and promised to meet all demands. But he warned against any attempt to infiltrate the demonstrations that could lead to violence.

He has also offered dialogue with the leaderless movement, which is known as "hirak", and the number of demonstrators has gone down since the election.

The political crisis adds to economic problems the authorities are facing after a fall in energy earnings, the main source of state finances, and foreign exchange reserves.

53 people injured in anti-army protests in Sudan

ANATOLIA — KHARTOUM

At least 53 protesters were injured in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum in clashes erupted between the police and demonstrators, the Sudanese Health Ministry said.

In a statement, the ministry added that many women and children were among the injured. Meanwhile, the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) has condemned the violence, calling for dismissing the minister of interior as well as the police inspector.

"This attitude against the protesters resembles the misdeeds of the old regime, so we demand the Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok to fire the police inspector and the interior minister," said the SPA which was the main mobilizer for the protests that ousted the former regime of Omar Al Bashir. The Sudanese government, for its part, condemned the use of violence, stressing that all those responsible would be punished.

Faisal Mohamed Salih, the government spokesman, said morning on Friday that the right of protest in the country should be guaranteed describing that as a "gain of the Sudanese revolution" Thousands of protesters have marched in Khartoum on Thursday, calling for restructuring the national army and returning the recently dismissed officers.

On Tuesday, the head of the Sovereign Council and of the army Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan dismissed dozens of army officers. The protesters say that many of the dismissed officers are being punished for "showing solidarity with the anti-Bashir protests."

Al Bashir, who ruled Sudan since 1989, was ousted by the military in April, 2019 after mass protests against his rule. In December, the former president was sentenced to two years in prison for corruption. He is also facing charges of undermining the constitution over the 1989 military coup he led.

Palestinian boy shot at by Israeli police loses eye sight

AP — OCCUPIED JERUSALEM

A nine-year-old Palestinian boy who was shot in the face by Israeli police in a tense east Jerusalem neighbourhood last week will not regain vision in his left eye despite surgery, a local community leader who is in touch with the family said.

Malik Eissa was hospitalised after being struck by what appeared to be a rubber-tipped or sponge munition on Saturday. Residents say he had just gotten off a school bus in the Issawiya neighborhood when Israeli police opened fire.

Police said at the time that they had responded to "riots" in the neighbourhood and used what they describe as non-lethal weapons, which usually refers to rubber-tipped bullets and sponge rounds that can cause serious and sometimes fatal injuries.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said an investigation into the incident is underway.

Mohammed Abu Al Hummus, a community leader who has been regularly visiting the family at the hospital, said Malik lost vision in the eye following surgeries on Wednesday. He said doctors will operate again in the coming days to try and preserve the eye itself.

Issawiya residents say police have been carrying out near-daily raids in their neighbourhood for several months that frequently ignite demonstrations and clashes. The police blame the violence on local youths, who they accuse of throwing stones and firebombs at patrol vehicles.

Issawiya is part of east Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the 1967 war along with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, territories the Palestinians want for their future state.

Israel views the whole city as its unified capital, while the Palestinians want a capital in east Jerusalem.

South Sudan's Kiir reappoints rebel leader Machar as First Vice-President

ANATOLIA — JUBA

South Sudan's President Salva Kiir yesterday reappointed key opposition leader Riek Machar as first vice -president, in line with a revitalised peace agreement reached in September 2018.

Under the agreement, South Sudan will have five vice-presidents, including Machar.

The incumbent government will nominate two vice-presidents, while the South Sudan Opposition Alliance and the Former Detainees group will nominate one apiece.

The formation of the coalition government and subsequent full implementation of the peace accord is widely hoped to end the suffering of the people of South Sudan, a young nation that has faced years of conflict. On Thursday, the two leaders agreed to form a unity government on Saturday and resolve all pending issues after its formation.

The parties have been trying to agree on a number of issues, including the number of states and boundaries plus a security arrangement, but the president finally decided to return the country to a system of 10 states - rather than the current 32 - for the sake of peace. Kiir also said he will be responsible for the protection of all opposition leaders in the new government.



South Sudan's former Cice-President and former rebel leader Riek Machar, flanked by President Salva Kiir Mayardit, addressing a news conference at the State House in Juba, on Thursday.

The number and boundaries of regional states have been a major sticking point in the long, drawn-out disagreement between South Sudan's government and opposition forces on forming a transitional government of national unity.

Virus cases balloon in South Korea as outbreak shifts, spreads

The multiplying caseload in South Korea showed the ease with which the illness can spread. Though initial infections were linked to China, new ones have not involved international travel.

AP — SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

Schools were shuttered, churches told worshipers to stay away and some mass gatherings were banned as cases of a new virus swelled yesterday in South Korea, the newest front in a widening global outbreak.

The country said two people have died and 204 have been infected with the virus, quadruple the number of cases it had two days earlier, as a crisis centered in China has begun strongly reverberating elsewhere. The multiplying caseload in South Korea showed the ease with which the illness can spread. Though initial infections were linked to China, new ones have not involved international travel.

"We have entered an emergency phase," Prime Minister Chung Se-kyun said in televised comments at the start of a government meeting on the health emergency. "Our efforts until now had been focused on blocking the illness from entering the country. But we will now shift the focus on preventing the illness from spreading further in local communities." Daegu, a southeastern city of 2.5 million that is the country's fourth largest, emerged as the focus of government efforts to contain the disease known as COVID-19, and Chung promised support to ease a shortage in hospital beds, medical personnel and equipment. Mayor Kwon Young-jin of Daegu has urged residents to stay inside, even wearing masks at home, to stem further infection. The first case in Daegu was reported on Tuesday. By Friday, the city and its surrounding areas had 152, including South Korea's first two fatalities from COVID-19.

Nationwide, the numbers told of a ballooning problem. There were 20 new cases reported Wednesday, 53 on Thursday and 100 on Friday. The central government declared a "special management zone" around Daegu yesterday, which didn't restrict movement of residents or supersede local officials' power but served as official recognition of the problem.

Most of those cases have been linked to a single house of worship, a branch of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, where a woman in her 60s attended two services before testing positive for the virus.

About 1,000 others who attended services with the woman have been isolated in their homes for screening, and health authorities say they're trying to monitor thousands of other church members.

All 74 sites operated by the Shincheonji Church have been closed and worshipers have been told to instead watch services online for a sect, but who is dismissed by many outsiders as a cult leader. Its teachings revolve largely around the Book of Revelation, a chapter of the New Testament known mostly for its apocalyptic foreshadowing.

China withholds permission to India for delivering relief

IANS — NEW DELHI/BEIJING

China has decided to withhold permission to a special Indian flight that was to deliver medical and relief supplies and evacuate remaining Indians from Wuhan, the epicentre of Covid-19 epidemic.

Top sources told IANS that Beijing has not responded to India's "goodwill gesture for some odd reason". The behaviour of the Chinese authorities is quite strange and inexplicable, the sources said. On February 17m, India announced that it will send the Indian Air Force's largest plane C-17 Globemaster with medical supplies to Wuhan and evacuate its remaining citizens and of the neighbouring countries. China permitted two special Air India flights to evacuate 647 Indians and seven Maldivians earlier this month.



South Korean health officials spray disinfectant in front of the Daegu branch of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus in the southeastern city of Daegu, yesterday, as more than 80 members of Shincheonji have now been infected with the COVID-19.

Japan govt faces questions over coronavirus, Tokyo cancels events

REUTERS — TOKYO

Japan faced growing questions about whether it was doing enough to stop the spread of the coronavirus on Friday, as the Tokyo Metropolitan Government said it would cancel or postpone major indoor events it has sponsored for the next three weeks.

More than 400 Japanese and foreign passengers were set to disembark from the virus-hit Diamond Princess cruise ship near Tokyo after weeks aboard in quarantine, despite reports of new cases coming in from around Japan.

Over 600 people on the cruise liner, which has been quarantined off Yokohama since arriving on Feb. 3 carrying 3,700 people, have been infected with the virus. Two of them — both Japanese in their 80s — died on Thursday, and about 100 passengers are due to be transferred ashore in coming days for further quarantine because they were in close quarters with infected travellers.

Around Japan, more than 80 people have tested positive for the virus, including three more confirmed yesterday in the northern island of Hokkaido. Two are brothers in elementary school, recovering in hospital, with the third a quarantine officer, Hokkaido's governor said at a briefing.

Saitama prefecture, north of Tokyo, said it had confirmed that a preschool boy was infected. The boy and his father, who has already tested positive, returned to Japan from China on a chartered flight earlier this month, the prefecture said. Ishikawa prefecture, about 300km west of Tokyo, said it had confirmed its first case of the virus, in a man in his 50s.

In the latest in a series of sports events to be curtailed or cancelled, a women's marathon in the central Japanese city of Nagoya set for March 8 will be limited to elite runners only, while the Nagoya City Marathon scheduled for the same day has been cancelled, organisers said.

Both the Tokyo Marathon, which will be limited to elite runners, and the Nagoya race are Olympic qualifying events for Japanese marathon runners, deepening concern about whether the Summer Games set to start on July 24 will go ahead as planned.

Dozens of Rohingya face charges for illegal travel in Myanmar after fleeing Rakhine

REUTERS — YANGON

Dozens of Rohingya Muslims, including two children, appeared in court in Myanmar yesterday, the latest group to face charges after attempting to flee conflict-torn Rakhine state.

The group of about 20 were among 54 people from the Rohingya minority arrested on Wednesday on the outskirts of the commercial capital Yangon while trying to leave for Malaysia, according to judge Thida Aye.

"The immigration officer submitted the case because they found no identification cards from these people," she said.

Some were barefoot, others clothed in colourful headscarfs, as they were ushered into the small courtroom in Yangon. A small boy was naked from the waist down.

Defense lawyer Nay Myo Zar said they had fled Rakhine state, the western region where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya live in apartheid-like conditions and have come under increasing pressure as government troops battle ethnic rebels.

More than 730,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar to Bangladesh in 2017 to escape a military-led crackdown that UN investigators have said was carried out with "genocidal intent" and included mass killings.

Myanmar says the army was fighting a legitimate counter-insurgency campaign against militants who attacked security posts.

Some 600,000 Rohingya remain in the country, confined to camps and villages where they are unable to travel freely or access healthcare and education. The vast majority lack citizenship.

The government says it is working on a national strategy to close camps and that Rohingya would not face movement restrictions if they accepted a so-called national verification card, which many reject, saying it labels them foreigners.

Rakhine state has for the past year been rocked by increasingly intense clashes between government troops and fighters from the Arakan Army, an insurgent group comprised of ethnic Rakhine, another mostly Buddhist minority.

Myanmar's army said in a statement yesterday it would hold more court-martials over alleged abuses against Rohingya Muslims, after a government-appointed commission concluded soldiers committed war crimes.

For years, Rohingya on both sides of the border have attempted to flee for Thailand and Malaysia, some boarding boats organised by smugglers, a dangerous journey that has cost many lives.



Students paint on canvas faces of US President Donald Trump, his wife Melania, and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the street in Mumbai, yesterday, ahead of the visit of US President in India.

India tempers Trump's hopes of 'millions' in welcome parade

AFP — AHMEDABAD

It may be a misunderstanding, a translation error or his showman schtick, but Indian officials are tempering US President Donald Trump's expectations that millions of Indians will line up to welcome him next week — by a matter of zeroes.

On his first official visit to India, Trump is due to arrive in Ahmedabad on Monday and head to a rally with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

On Tuesday, Trump said that Modi "told me we'll have 7 million people" lining the route from the airport, and on Thursday at a rally in Colorado Springs the President went higher still, with "anywhere from six to 10 million people".

Indian officials have indeed organised a big "India Road Show" along the 22km stretch, including 28 stages for performing artists and decorations depicting the life of independence hero Mahatma Gandhi. But officials — including India's foreign secretary and a local member of Modi's party — were less optimistic, expecting anything from just a few thousand to around 100,000 at most.

The confusion may be down the common usage when talking big numbers in India of the words "lakh", meaning 100,000, and "crore", 10 million, including in English.

It is possible that Indian officials told their US counterparts there would be "five lakh" people to welcome Trump, equating to 500,000, but that in translation this somehow became five million.

Air India suspends China, Hong Kong operations till June 30

IANS — NEW DELHI

Air India has extended the suspension period for its Delhi-Shanghai and Delhi- Hong Kong services till June 30, owing to the outbreak of COVID-19.

Earlier, Air India had cancelled its flights to Shanghai from January 31 to February 14 and to Hong Kong from February 7 until March 28.

Many international airlines have either reduced or suspended their operations to China. According to the International Air Transport Association, COVID-19 is expected to cause a 13 percent full year loss of passenger demand for carriers in the Asia-Pacific region.

Considering that growth for the region's airlines was forecast to be 4.8 percent, the net impact will be an 8.2 per cent full-year contraction compared to 2019 demand levels, the IATA said. "In this scenario, that would translate into a $27.8bn revenue loss in 2020 for carriers in the Asia-Pacific region.

Flash flood leaves 6 students dead in Indonesia

AP — YOGYAKARTA

A flash flood hit hundreds of students and teachers who were hiking along a river on Indonesia's main island of Java, killing at least six of the students, officials said. Five others were reported missing.

The group of 250 junior high students was conducting scouting activities in Sleman district of Yogyakarta province and wasn't paying attention to weather conditions, National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman Agus Wibowo said.

Local military chief Lt. Col. Diantoro, who led the search and rescue operation, told TVOne that at least six bodies were found a short distance down the Sempor river from the site of the flood. He said a downpour burst the river's banks, causing the flood.

DIY virus protection: Hong Kongers making own masks

AFP — HONG KONG

With chronic face mask shortages in the midst of a virus outbreak, Hong Kongers have started making their own — with a pop-up production line and seamstresses churning them out on sewing machines.

In one of the most densely populated cities on earth, face masks have become hot property as people scramble for protection against the new deadly coronavirus. Long queues — sometimes thousands strong — routinely crop up outside pharmacies when supplies are in, and there is anger at the government's failure to have stockpiled.

Some are turning to DIY solutions — albeit of questionable quality. Judy, a 73-year-old out shopping in the district of Wanchai, was spotted in a homemade mask. "I found the material — my handkerchief, and some non-woven fabric — and I combined them and used some wire for the top, and some elastic," she said. While Hong Kong's economy reels, business has been brisk on one street in the working-class Sham Shui Po district that boasts many fabric and tailoring shops.

A colourful array of cloth masks hangs outside many of the cramped storefronts as shoppers haggle over the din of whirring sewing machines.

Elase Wong, a tailor, said she was giving away her face mask sewing design. "Some people couldn't buy any masks... So if they can make them themselves, that would be great," she said. The cost of masks has skyrocketed with scarcity and the government resisting price controls or rationing, as in nearby Macau and Taiwan.

A set of 50 simple surgical masks can sell for up to HK$300 ($40), while the top of the range N95 variety is going for as high as HK$1,800 a box. A film director surnamed Tong was putting the finishing touches to a face mask assembly line in an industrial building.

"I was shocked by the price of face masks," he said. "I did some research and realised that masks are not that difficult to make. Why do people have to bear such a high cost? Because there is no production line in Hong Kong".

Pakistan to stay on FATF's 'grey list' until June

REUTERS — PARIS

The FATF urged Pakistan to swiftly complete its full anti-terrorism action plan by June 2020.

Pakistan won an extra four months to meet international anti-terrorism financing norms yesterday when a global money-laundering watchdog decided to keep the country off its blacklist for now.

After Pakistan missed multiple previous deadlines, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) said it was concerned that Islamabad had again failed to complete an internationally agreed action plan.

"The FATF strongly urges Pakistan to swiftly complete its full action plan by June 2020," the FATF said in a statement issued after a meeting in Paris. "Otherwise, should significant and sustainable progress especially in prosecuting and penalising TF (terrorism financing) not be made by the next Plenary, the FATF will take action."

It said such action could include calling on its member states to order their financial institutions to give particularly rigorous attention to business relations and transactions with Pakistani clients.

Pakistan has long been accused of nurturing and supporting IS militant groups for use as proxies to project power in the South Asian region particularly towards its arch-rival India and in Afghanistan. Islamabad denies such accusations.

But with a minimum of three votes by FATF members needed to avoid the organisation's blacklist, Pakistan has been able to avoid punishment so far thanks to support from major ally China and other friendly countries including Malaysia and Turkey.

"China and other brotherly countries have supported Pakistan throughout the process in terms of guiding the country to improve its frameworks," Pakistani Finance Ministry adviser Abdul Hafeez Shaikh said in a statement in Islamabad before the FATF decision was made public.

Finance Ministry and counter-terrorism officials say Pakistan has done much under pressure to comply with FATF's 27-point agenda, which included an unprecedented conviction for terrorism financing of Hafiz Saeed, chief of the Pakistani Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militant group.

In 2018 the FATF placed Pakistan on its "grey list" of countries with inadequate controls over terrorism financing, which made foreign firms more cautious about investing in Pakistan.

Inclusion on the FATF blacklist would put Pakistan in company with Iran and North Korea and mean it would be shunned by international financial institutions.

That could deal the South Asian power a serious financial hit at a time when its economy is grappling with a balance of payments crisis.

The most crucial aspect of compliance with FATF in Pakistan's case would be steps to effectively prevent militant groups from openly operating and raising funds, as the LeT has done from charities.

The FATF has pushed Pakistan to adequately identify, assess and understand risks associated with jihadist groups present in the country such as LeT, IS militants, Al Qaeda, Jamat-ud-Dawa and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM).

Coronavirus infects 234 people in Chinese prisons

REUTERS — BEIJING

The coronavirus has infected hundreds of people in Chinese prisons, authorities said yesterday, contributing to a jump in reported cases beyond the epicentre in Hubei province, including 100 more in South Korea.

The 234 infections among prisoners outside Hubei ended 16 straight days of declines in new mainland cases excluding that province, where the virus first emerged in December in its now locked-down capital, Wuhan.

State television quoted Communist Party rulers as saying the outbreak had not yet peaked, and more than 30 cases in a hospital in Beijing highlighted a sharp jump in the tally there.

Total cases in the capital of the coronavirus — known as COVID-19 — were at 396 with four deaths, out of an official mainland toll of 75,400 cases and 2,236 deaths.

US stock index futures lurched downwards as the rise in infections sent investors looking for safer assets such as gold and government bonds.

Adding to the gloomy mood, data showed Japan's factory activity suffered its steepest contraction in seven years in February, underlining the risk of a recession there as the impact of the outbreak spreads. Asian and European stocks also fell.

With finance leaders from the Group of 20 major economies set to discuss risks to the world economy in Saudi Arabia at the weekend, the International Monetary Fund said it was too early to tell what impact the virus would have on global growth.

"COVID-19 anxiety has risen to a new level amid concerns of virus outbreaks in Beijing and outside of China," said Rodrigo Catril, a senior FX strategist at NAB.

Chinese Vice Science and Technology Minister Xu Nanping said China's earliest vaccine would be submitted for clinical trials around late April. That timetable is in line with research in other countries, and a World Health Organization (WHO) estimate of a vaccine reaching the market in about 18 months.

As international authorities seek to stop the virus from becoming a global pandemic, public health officials are hoping for signs that the arrival of warmer weather in the northern hemisphere might slow its spread.

The spike in cases in two jails outside Hubei — in the northern province of Shandong and Zhejiang in the east — made up most of the 258 newly confirmed Chinese infections outside the epicentre province yesterday.

Authorities said officials deemed responsible for the outbreaks had been fired and the government had sent a team to investigate the Shandong episode, media reported.

Hubei also reported 271 cases in its prisons. Provincial officials did not say when they had been diagnosed.

Data showed mainland China had 889 new confirmed cases and 118 deaths, with the most in Wuhan, which remains under virtual lockdown.



Volunteers and community workers deliver vegetables and goods to residents inside a residential compound at its entrance, in Xiangyang city of Hubei, in China, yesterday.

Malaysia probes dozens over virus misinformation

AFP — PUTRAJAYA

Malaysia is investigating 27 people for allegedly spreading misinformation about the deadly new coronavirus, officials said, as governments across Asia crack down on false claims about the epidemic.

The virus has so far killed more than 2,200 people and infected over 75,000, mostly in China, and spread to dozens of countries and territories including Malaysia, which has 22 confirmed cases.

It has triggered an explosion of false information online, from vastly inflated death tolls to vaccine conspiracies and misleading bat soup videos.

Several Asian countries have made arrests over the spread of falsehoods, and Singapore this week ordered Facebook to block an anti-government page in the city-state that it says was peddling misinformation about the pathogen.

Of the 27 people under investigation in Malaysia, four have already been charged in court and another four were expected to be charged, officials from the Communications Ministry and Prime Minister's department said.

No details were provided about the misinformation they are accused of spreading. Officials warned a broader crackdown was planned.

"If you are found to be involved in any act (of) spreading lies... we will go after you and we don't care who you are," Mohamed Hanipa Maidin, deputy minister in the prime minister's department, told reporters yesterday.

Pakistan opens health facility named for Turkish leader

ANATOLIA — KARACHI

Pakistan yesterday inaugurated a new health facility at a hospital named after Turkey's president and located in the northeastern Punjab province.

Imran Khan, Pakistan's Prime Minister, led the grand opening of the newly constructed facility at Recep Tayyip Erdogan Hospital Trust, raising the hospital's total capacity to 400 beds.

The hospital in the Muzaffargarh district, located some 380km from Lahore, was given as a gift from Turkey to Pakistan in 2014. It began its operations in July 2014 with 60 beds, adding another 40 a year later.

Punjab officials in January 2017 launched an expansion plan aiming to add 250 more beds to the hospital's existing capacity at a cost of nearly $60m.

The hospital provides free healthcare to all patients irrespective of their backgrounds.

Khan, in his remarks, thanked Ankara for its cooperation to improve healthcare facilities in Pakistan, state-run Pakistan Television reported.

He lauded the services of Recep Tayyip Erdogan Hospital Trust in the field of health and for providing free food and other facilities to the poor and destitute at shelter homes.

"The service of ailing, poor and the destitute by philanthropists was laudable."

Apart from Muzaffargarh, the trust is running five hospitals in Lahore — the capital of Punjab — and one in Multan.

It is also handling the management of two major blood transfusion centres in the Multan and Bahawalpur districts, under an agreement inked with the provincial government in April 2017.

Vietnam police charge 7 people over UK truck deaths

REUTERS — HANOI

Police in Vietnam have charged seven people in connection with the deaths of 39 migrants whose bodies were discovered in the back of a truck near London last year, authorities said.

The victims were mostly from two provinces in north-central Vietnam, where poor job prospects, encouragement by authorities, smuggling gangs and environmental issues have fuelled migration.

Seven defendants, including a Vietnamese woman living in China, were charged with creating immigration profiles for 67 people from different areas in Vietnam for illegal work in Britain and Europe, Ha Tinh province regional police said in a statement.

Police referred to the case of 26-year-old Pham Thi Tra My, who was one of the victims of the British truck deaths.

"They contacted the victim in late June, 2019 and charged her $22,000 to create immigration profiles," the statement said.

"The victim in September was then taken to China, France and the UK."

The truck deaths shone a spotlight on the illicit trade that sends the poor of Asia, Africa and the Middle East on perilous journeys to the West.

Police said in the statement that their investigation was continuing and would be expanded. They did not give details on any court appearance by those charged.

British police last week arrested two more people over the deaths. Autopsies concluded that the provisional cause of death of the 39 people was a combination of — oxygen deprivation — and hyperthermia — overheating — in an enclosed space.



Supporters give flowers to Future Forward Party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit as he arrives to give a speech, at the party's headquarters in Bangkok, yesterday.

Thai court dissolves key pro-democracy party

AFP — BANGKOK

A stridently anti-military Thai party was dissolved yesterday and its key members banned from politics for a decade over a $6m loan by its billionaire founder, a withering blow to the kingdom's pro-democracy movement.

The ruling could edge the politically febrile kingdom — whose economy is shrinking — closer to the street protests that have scored much of the last 15 years of Thai history.

The Future Forward Party (FFP), fronted by the charismatic auto-parts scion Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, emerged from nowhere in March last year to become Thailand's third biggest party in the first elections since a 2014 coup.

The party's radical agenda — calling for full democracy, an end to conscription and the removal of the army from politics and business — won it 6.3 million votes and pitched it against the powerful, conservative military.

But since their strong poll showing, Thanathorn and his 76 lawmakers have faced relentless rounds of legal cases in Thailand's courts.

Yesterday, the nine-member constitutional court dissolved FFP, ruling a $6m loan by Thanathorn breached the law governing political parties.

The loan exceeded the $315,000 limit on donations to parties by an individual, one judge said.

Sixteen party executives, including founder Thanathorn, were also "banned for running for political office for 10 years," judge Nakarin Mektriarat added.

Malaysia PM gets coalition support to stay in power through November 2020

BLOOMBERG — KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad **(pictured)** won't hand over power before the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meetings this year, and he retains the authority to decide whether he would step down at all.

The ruling Pakatan Harapan coalition unanimously agreed on the plan in a late yesterday meeting attended by Anwar Ibrahim, who has been expected to succeed Mahathir as premier.

"There were two opinions, but in the end — and I'm proud of this — in the end it was all up to me, whatever I say, they will follow," Mahathir said to reporters in Putrajaya.

"And I said, the transition will happen after APEC. No time, no date, no nothing. Only after APEC."

When asked whether the agreement means Mahathir could choose not to step down, he said the decision would be his to make. "It returns to me," he said. "They give full confidence in me."

Malaysia's government has been hounded by questions of when and how Mahathir would keep his campaign promise of serving as an interim prime minister and handing the reins over to coalition leader Anwar.

Last year, Mahathir signaled his intent to stay for much of this year when he referred to himself as the only prime minister set to host APEC twice.

The APEC leaders summit is set to happen in November.

"I myself proposed that Mahathir be given a chance to govern," Anwar said.

"Then when he sets an appropriate time, only then. So meanwhile I have to be patient."

Mahathir was appointed prime minister in 1981, retired in 2003, and returned to the office in 2018.

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EDITORIAL

Preparing the community

THE preparation for 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar is under way at an amazing pace from construction of stadiums to development of other infrastructure projects like road networks to host a memorable sporting event in the country.

As authorities concerned – the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, Ashghal among others – are fast completing World Cup-related construction projects, the Ministry of Interior is also giving shapes to the arrangements needed to make the mega sport event highly safe.

The Establishments and Authorities Security Department at the Ministry of Interior has now launched an initiative 'Anta Muhim' (You Are Important) to ensure the safety and security of 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar and other sport events in the country with the help of the community. The initiative, implemented by Stadiums' Security Section at the Department, will educate students of schools and colleges, members of sport clubs and spectators on the importance of partnership of security and sport.

The Director of Public Security, Staff Major General Saad bin Jassim Al Khulaifi, also released a T-shirt printed with the logo of the campaign in a ceremony held at Qatar National Theatre.

Undersecretary at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh Al Nuaimi, said that the initiative is aimed at preparing Qatari community of all sections to cooperate with the Establishments and Authorities Security Department and police personnel in maintaining the security. Director of the Establishments and Authorities Security Department, Brigadier General Ali Khajim Al Adhbi, said that the initiative 'You Are Important' is an advanced community engagement model to create awareness on the importance of partnership between security and sport.

A delegation from the Security Committee of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) also concluded a visit, recently, to the Kingdom of Morocco, within the framework of enhancing joint cooperation between the two countries in the security field.

During the visit, the delegation, led by head of competition facilities security unit of the Security Committee Major General Ali Mohammed Al Rashid, discussed with the Moroccan side, which included national security and Royal Gendarmerie officials, ways to enhance bilateral cooperation between the concerned authorities in the two brotherly countries and the possibility of exchanging experiences in several fields, the most important of which is the exchange of information and the contribution to securing major sporting events, including the 2022 FIFA World Cup, in a way that achieves the best levels of sports security.

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Community staff members delivering foods to residents in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province, yesterday.

Fears over coronavirus threaten globalisation rule book



PETER APPS
REUTERS

As with Ebola, however, the world is already responding by attempting to completely isolate the affected areas, regardless of whether or not that is something the science yet deems necessary. Much of that is down to outright fear, with alarming signs that it might sometimes be deliberately exacerbated to stoke tensions and alarm.

As the Ebola virus ravaged West Africa in 2014, civilian air traffic in and out of the most affected countries of Sierra Leone and Liberia almost completely ceased. That decision, however, was not taken by international health officials. Instead, it came from airline cleaners and other staff, who simply refused to have anything to do with planes in and out of the region.

In many respects, the 2013-16 West African Ebola outbreak, believed to have caused around 11,000 deaths from 28,000 cases, was very different to the current coronavirus epidemic. The diseases are different - Ebola killed roughly one in four of those it infected. So are the areas affected, and their connections to the outside world. The forests and cities of West Africa were much less central to the world economy than China, where the outbreak is already seen having a significant impact on global growth.

As with Ebola, however, the world is already responding by attempting to completely isolate the affected areas, regardless of whether or not that is something the science yet deems necessary. Much of that is down to outright fear, with alarming signs that it might sometimes be deliberately exacerbated to stoke tensions and alarm.

In Ukraine this week, dozens of protesters attacked buses carrying evacuees from China as they were bought to a hospital in the town of Novi Sanzhary, where they were to be held in quarantine for 14 days. Ukraine's security services said a fake email claiming to be from the health ministry said some evacuees had already contracted the virus, something they said was simply not true.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy called on protesters to show empathy, reminding them the evacuees were "human beings". One of the things most striking about the epidemic so far, however, has been how fast countries have been willing to rip up what would often be deemed basic human rights in their wish to control its spread.

To what extent this is been truly justified may never really be known - although if worldwide spread can be limited it will almost certainly be seen justified. That would likely make it the model for any future crises. China has repeatedly changed the way in which it categorises and counts cases, but says the number so far exceeds 75,000 with 2,200 deaths.

Ironically, that relatively low fatality rate - around 3% - is one of the characteristics that makes containing the virus so difficult. Many of those infected have relatively mild symptoms, some may not report it at all. Still, that still brings with it the risk of a global pandemic that could kill several million - leaving governments unusually open to doing whatever they believe is necessary to stop it.

In China itself, where millions have now often found themselves quarantined at once, kept either in their houses or makeshift rapidly constructed camps and hospitals, the government has had no qualms in showcasing just how draconian it can be.

Given the nature of China's government, particularly in the last few years, that's hardly a surprise. But Western states such as Britain and Australia, however, have also been taking often unprecedented steps to ensure those who have travelled in affected regions are kept away from others.

As with the 2015 Ebola-outbreak - as well as other epidemics of much-feared disease - one aspect that is particularly striking is the speed with which countries and companies are willing to lock down economic and business activity in the hope of halting a wider pandemic. Bookings with airlines show passengers avoiding huge swathes of Asia well outside affected parts of China, while the most affected Hubei province now has almost no public or private transport travelling to it at all.

Insiders say that after a high-profile outbreak aboard the cruise ship Diamond Princess, cruise firms are dramatically scaling back operations in Asia. The Diamond Princess has been the scene of one of the largest outbreaks outside China - and another ship, the Westerdam, was denied permission to dock in five countries despite having not a single proven case.

Such worries are hardly new - the word "quarantine" comes from the 40-day waiting period mediaeval Italian ports would impose on visiting ships during times of plague to prove they were uninfected.

Peter Apps is global defence correspondent for Reuters news.

The Afghan war, by numbers

AFP — WASHINGTON

The war in Afghanistan -- launched on October 7, 2001 in the wake of the 9/11 attacks — is the longest ever waged by the United States.

Here are a few key figures about the conflict, which a historic agreement between Washington and the Taliban seeks to end:

Boots on the ground

The Nato alliance committed to the Afghan conflict in December 2001, but the United States has always provided the largest military contingent. At its peak, under president Barack Obama in 2011, the US had 98,000 personnel on the ground, according to Pentagon figures.

As of February 2020, there are about 16,500 military personnel from 38 countries in Afghanistan as part of Nato's Operation Resolute Support, according to the latest data from the alliance. Officially, that mission is now only for training and support of the Afghan army.

The United States makes up roughly half of the force with 8,000 soldiers, followed by Germany (1,300), Britain (1,100), Italy (900), Georgia (870) and Romania (800).

France, which has 4,000 soldiers in Afghanistan in 2010, pulled out of the country in 2012. Beyond the US participation in Resolute Support, there are several thousand US forces on the ground taking part in Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

The Pentagon does not provide exact figures for that anti-jihadist mission, but it estimates the total US deployment in Afghanistan at "about 14,000." President Donald Trump has often mentioned 13,000 as a total figure.

Losses

The United States has paid the highest price in terms of foreign fatalities in Afghanistan, with 1,909 military personnel killed and more than 20,700 wounded as of February 20, the Pentagon says.

As for other Nato coalition members, Britain has lost 454 personnel, followed by Canada (157) and France (89 dead), according to icasualties.org, which monitors the dead and wounded in the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

The Afghan government no longer publishes data for losses within its army, which are significant. The United Nations estimates that 32,000-60,000 Afghan civilians have been killed in the conflict.

How much does the war cost?

As of September 30, 2019, the Pentagon officially estimated the cost of US operations in Afghanistan at $776bn since 2001. Of that total, $197.3bn has been earmarked for reconstruction of the war-ravaged country and its institutions.

But according to a study done by Brown University and published late last year, the cost of America's wars exceeds the Pentagon's estimate, as State Department aid is not taken in account, nor are any intelligence operations or the medical costs of wounded veterans.

Factoring in all those costs, the Brown researchers say the US "wars on terror" in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan since 2001 have cost $6.4 trillion



Quote of the day

We call for an immediate ceasefire in Syria to prevent further suffering and what we fear may end in a bloodbath.

Jens Laerke, UN's humanitarian agency OCHA Spokesman

Germany races to act on far-right threat after deadly shootings

AFP — BERLIN

German ministers promised yesterday to ramp up security and put more police on the streets to quell public fears, two days after a racist gunman killed nine people.

Thousands joined vigils on Thursday night to show solidarity with the victims of the right-wing extremist attack at a shisha club and cafe in the city of Hanau, which sparked debates over gun laws and protection of migrants and minorities.

Announcing an "increased police presence" at mosques, train stations, airports and borders, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said right-wing extremism was the "biggest security threat facing Germany".

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said that right-wing extremism was the "biggest security threat facing Germany".

"The police have told us there'll be a patrol car here for at least a few minutes every Friday during prayers, so people feel safe," Hanau mosque head Memduh Emdef said.

Seehofer said the far right had left "a trail of blood" in recent months — two people died in an attack on a synagogue in the city of Halle in October and a pro-migrant politician was murdered at his home in June.

Separately, 12 men were arrested across Germany a week ago on suspicion of planning attacks on mosques aimed at bringing about "a civil-war-like situation" in Germany.

Late Wednesday, the Hanau gunman opened fire on unsuspecting patrons at a shisha club and cafe at two separate locations, killing nine people — all with migrant backgrounds —and wounding six more, including one gravely.

Police found the suspect and his mother shot dead in his flat hours later in an apparent murder-suicide, also recovering weapons and ammunition from the home and his car.

"Muslims in this country are afraid not only for their mosques, but for their children and families," Zekeriya Altug of the Muslim Coordination Council told reporters in Berlin following Seehofer's announcement of tougher security measures.

"It's up to the authorities to ensure Muslims' security... politicians continue not only to play down the problem, but to keep mum about islamophobia," Altug added.

Seehofer insisted that "in this government... no-one is blind" to the threat from the extreme right.

He and Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht pointed out that Germany has updated its law on firearms licensing in recent weeks and a new bill targeting online hate speech is being considered.

In December, Seehofer also announced hundreds of new posts for federal police and security services to strengthen surveillance of the far-right scene.

But he warned that, "despite all our efforts, we cannot completely rule out such terrible crimes".

Federal police chief Holger Muench said "around half" of those who carry out attacks with extreme-right motivations were previously unknown to his officers.

The suspects in both the Halle synagogue attack and the Hanau shootings appear to have been radicalised largely online, publishing racist screeds only shortly before their attacks.

"The problem is perpetrators who act almost without any structure behind them, practically with only an internet connection... how can potential perpetrators be identified, that's the big challenge," Muench said.

Such people were "time bombs", justice minister Lambrecht said.

King's College London counter-terror expert Peter Neumann told *Die Welt* daily that "what is already happening regarding jihadism must happen regarding right-wing extremism".

The Hanau shooter legally owned firearms, dragging Germany's gun licensing laws into the focus of public debate.

There are thought to be around 5.4 million weapons in circulation in Germany, according to Bild newspaper.

Increasing numbers of guns are being seized from radical-right suspects, mounting to 1,091 in 2018 compared with 676 the previous year.



German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (second left) leaves after attending to the press conference at the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government of Germany in Berlin, yesterday.



People paying their respect at a makeshift memorial set up at the market square (Marktplatz) in Hanau near Frankfurt, western Germany, yesterday.

Police officers in Greece implicated in passport scam

AP — ATHENS

Six police officers and 27 other people are under investigation in a major passport fraud case that included issuing Greek state identity documents under false pretenses to criminal fugitives from abroad, Greek authorities said yesterday.

The police's internal affairs division said 38 state identity cards and 31 passports issued between 2016 and 2018 had been canceled as a result of the investigation.

Payments of between $5,400 and $43,200 were allegedly made for each illegal identity document, most issued using the names of Greek citizens living abroad who had not renewed their passports.

Greece remains the busiest illegal entry point for migrants and refugees trying to reach the EU.

Police did not say whether any of the 33 suspects have been formally arrested.

Albania police crack down on illegal betting shops

AP — TIRANA

Albanian police said yesterday they have cracked down on people operating betting shops, more than a year after they were banned in one of Europe's poorest countries.

More than 1,500 police took part in the operation in the capital, Tirana, and seven other cities as Europa League soccer matches took place on Thursday evening.

A statement said police arrested 115 people and 26 others are being investigated. They are the owners, managers or employees of the shops. Police also confiscated $150,000 and hundreds of computers and other electronic devices. They also sequestered a main controlling office that checked the operation of the shops.

In 2018, Albania's parliament voted to remove gambling from residential areas to curb its spread.

Norway rejects Moscow's claim it violated Svalbard Treaty

REUTERS — OSLO

Norway has rejected Russian accusations of violating the terms of an international treaty regulating activities on the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard, as a diplomatic spat over Russian operations there escalated.

Russia complained earlier in February that Oslo-imposed rules were restricting activities of Russian organisations there, calling for bilateral consultations, and on Thursday accused Norway of violating the Svalbard Treaty.

But in an e-mail to *Reuters* yesterday, the Norwegian foreign ministry said Norway was pursuing a consistent and predictable Svalbard policy which was fully in line with a long-agreed treaty.

Separately, Norway's Defence Minister Frank Bakke-Jense told Norwegian public broadcaster NRK that Svalbard was Norwegian territory according to the treaty.

"At the same time, those who accede to the treaty must be treated equally. We do this to the highest degree."

The latest escalation comes amid growing tensions in the Arctic between the West and Russia, both of which have been building up their military presence there as climate change opens up new shipping routes and creates opportunities to explore for natural resources.

Norway has sovereignty over Svalbard under a 100-year-old treaty but citizens of all its signatory countries, including Russia, can settle and conduct business there on an equal basis.

A Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman told a news briefing on Thursday that Norway had been "practically violating the treaty" in recent years, harming bilateral relations, after Oslo rejected calls for talks.

Moscow didn't question Norway's sovereignty over Svalbard, but wanted to address specific challenges, she added.

Hundreds of Russians are registered as living on Svalbard and a Russian coal mining company has for decades operated in the town of Barentsburg.

Moscow had long-term plans to strengthen and diversify its presence in Svalbard, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Norway in a letter on February 3.



Supporters of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange stage a demonstration in support of him, ahead of the preliminary hearing, in front of 'Westminster Magistrates Court' in London, on Wednesday.

WikiLeaks' Assange may seek asylum in France

REUTERS — PARIS

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is jailed in Britain fighting extradition to the United States for espionage and computer hacking, may seek asylum in France, his lawyer Eric Dupond-Moretti said yesterday.

Dupond-Moretti told Europe 1 radio that Assange's legal team would be in contact with French President Emmanuel Macron to make the case for Assange to get asylum in France. Assange has said that his youngest child and the child's mother are French.

Assange's lawyers noted the request for asylum was "not an ordinary demand" because Assange is not on French soil.

Dupond-Moretti said the French asylum request would be based on humanitarian and health grounds, arguing that Assange was showing signs of "psychological torture".

"Article 53 of our constitution also allows for France to give refuge to a man who is being threatened on reasons of his freedom of expression," he told Europe 1.

The 48-year old Assange, who spent seven years holed up in Ecuador's London embassy before he was dragged out last April, is wanted in the United States on 18 counts, including conspiring to hack government computers and violating an espionage law. He could spend decades behind bars if convicted.

Assange is currently in jail in London, and Judge Vanessa Baraitser will hear arguments next week as to why he should or should not be sent to the United States.

Australian-born Assange made global headlines in early 2010 when WikiLeaks published a classified US military video showing a 2007 attack by Apache helicopters in Baghdad that killed a dozen people.

An earlier request made in 2015 by Assange to get asylum in France was rejected.

Greenpeace activists break into Tricastin nuclear plant

REUTERS — PARIS

Greenpeace activists broke into an ageing Tricastin nuclear plant in France yesterday to demand its closure, a day ahead of the planned shutdown the country's oldest nuclear reactor at Fessenheim near the German border.

About 50 Greenpeace militants broke into the grounds of the Tricastin power station in southern France armed with jackhammers made from foam for a mock dismantling of the plant.

State-run utility EDF PA› confirmed there had been an unauthorised entry into the administrative area of Tricastin, and said 18 activists were arrested. EDF said there was no intrusion into the nuclear part of the plant and its safety was not compromised.

All four reactors at the Tricastin nuclear power plant with a total capacity of 3,600 MW , were online at 0950 GMT, according data from French electricity grid operator RTE.

France gets about 75% of its electricity from nuclear plants, but many are old and the country has set a target of reducing this to 50% by 2035, bringing in more renewable power.

"We are protesting and drawing attention to an aging nuclear power plant that is dangerous and should be shut down," said Greenpeace spokeswoman Cecile Genot.

Greenpeace said in a statement Tricastin, like Fessenheim's number 1 reactor, would reach its 40-year lifespan this year and should be unplugged.

"40 years is the maximum operating time for which French reactors have been designed and tested," Greenpeace said. "Beyond 40 years, the consequences of aging power plants are unpredictable."

Last June, EDF carried out maintenance and upgrade works at the Tricastin's 900-megawatt (MW) reactor number 1, which it said would enable it operate for another ten years.

French nuclear safety authority ASN, will rule by the end of the year on the potential lifespan extension of 32 of EDF's 900-megawatt capacity reactors. This would be followed by in depth assessment, reactor by reactor starting with Tricastin 1.

The closure of Fessenheim comes at a time of intense debate in France over the future role of nuclear in the country's energy mix as well as efforts to curb carbon emissions while ensuring power supply.

After 43 years of service, Fessenheim's number 1 reactor will be powered down and disconnected from the electricity grid today. Fessenheim 2 will shutdown on June 30.

Those against the shutdown of Fessenheim, particularly from nuclear industry, France's third largest industrial sector, say the move could jeopardise the security of electricity supply, and the availability of cheap low-carbon energy.

Fessenheim's two reactors produce around 12 terawatt hour (TWh) of electricity per year, equivalent to about 3% of output.

Russia denies interfering US presidential campaign

REUTERS — MOSCOW

The Kremlin yesterday denied it was interfering in the 2020 US presidential campaign to boost Republican President Donald Trump's re-election chances following reports that American intelligence officials warned Congress about the election threat last week.

US intelligence officials told members of the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee in a classified briefing last week that Russia was again interfering in American politics ahead of November's election, a person familiar with the discussion said.

US officials have long warned that Russia and other countries would seek to interfere in the November 3 presidential election, following Russia's meddling in the 2016 campaign that ended with Trump's surprise victory over Democratic rival Hillary Clinton.

Dmitry Peskov said the allegations were "like the usual paranoid announcements, which unfortunately will multiply as we get closer to the election."

The US intelligence community concluded that the Kremlin used fake news reports, cyber attacks and other methods in its 2016 operation in an effort to boost Trump, an allegation that Russia denies.

Trump has also repeatedly questioned the finding.

Yesterday, the Kremlin said the latest allegations were false.

"These are more paranoid announcements which, to our regret, will multiply as we get closer to the (US) election," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. "They have nothing to do with the truth."

Russia's alleged interference sparked a two-year-long US investigation headed by Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

Mueller found no conclusive evidence of coordination between Russia and the Trump campaign. He also pointed at 10 instances in which Trump may have attempted to obstruct his investigation, as Democrats alleged, but left any finding of obstruction to Congress.

Trump is seeking a second term in office.

Last July, he called on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to investigate one of his potential Democratic rivals, former Vice President Joe Biden, sparking his impeachment in the Democratic-controlled House.

Trump, who was later acquitted by the Republican-led US Senate, has also publicly called on China to probe Biden.

Last week's classified congressional briefing sparked a sharp response by Trump, who rebuked acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire for allowing his staff to brief the lawmakers, including Democratic panel Chairman Adam Schiff, who led the impeachment inquiry, the *New York Times* reported, quoting five people familiar with the matter.

Trump then dismissed Maguire, abruptly announcing this week that Richard Grenell, a Trump loyalist, would be the acting intelligence chief, even as he continues serving as US ambassador to Germany.

His appointment drew sharp rebukes from Democrats and other critics who said Grenell lacked intelligence experience.

"American voters should decide American elections — not Vladimir Putin," US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi wrote in a post on Twitter late on Thursday, referring to Russia's president.

She called on lawmakers to condemn Trump's "reported efforts to dismiss threats to the integrity of our democracy & to politicise our intel community."

"If reports are true and the president is interfering with that, he is again jeopardizing our efforts to stop foreign meddling. Exactly as we warned he would do," Schiff said Thursday night.

Trump's last full-time director of national intelligence, former Republican Senator Dan Coats, resigned last year after his differences with the president over Russia's role in the 2016 election became public.

Trump has repeatedly called the US Russia probe and the impeachment inquiry a "witch hunt."

His fellow Republicans at last week's briefing questioned the information, according to the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the matter's sensitivity.

Republican members of the panel did not respond to a request for comment.

Britain's far-right leader charged with terror offense

ANATOLIA — LONDON

The leader of the far-right Britain First group was charged with a terrorist offense yesterday.

Paul Golding, 38, refused to give police access and passwords to his phone and electronic devices.

He was charged with refusing to comply with Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act, and is due to appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court on February 27.

Last October, officers from the Metropolitan Police department's counter-terrorism branch stopped Golding at Heathrow Airport.

He was returning to the UK from a visit to the Russian parliament in Moscow.

Schedule 7 gives police the power to search, detain, and interrogate people coming into the UK for up to six hours. It gives police time to decide whether the person is preparing or instigating terrorist acts.

Golding said in a statement that the charges were an "abuse of legislation" and that he was not a terrorist.

Britain First is well known in the UK for anti-Islam outbursts, anti-mosque protests, and street and online provocations. It was founded by former members of the British National Party in year 2011.

Golding and his former deputy Jayda Fransen were been arrested numerous times and both received convictions.

In Germany, a 43-year-old far-right extremist attacked two shisha cafes on Wednesday night in the western town of Hanau, killing nine people with migrant backgrounds and wounding six others.



Members of Ukraine's National Guard close the gate of a sanatorium where the evacuees from coronavirus-hit Hubei province are quarantined, in the village of Novi Sanzhary in Poltava region, yesterday.

Ukraine condemns virus unrest as Italy seeks self-quarantines

AP — NOVI SANZHARY

A Ukrainian village where residents clashed with riot police and threw rocks at buses while protesting the local quarantine of people evacuated from China is under control, but the unrest may continue, Ukraine's prime minister said yesterday.

The daylong protests broke out after the government announced that more than 70 evacuees would spend two weeks in a sanatorium in the village of Novi Sanzhary to make sure they weren't infected with the virus from China.

Several hundred villagers put up road blocks, burned tires and hurled stones at buses arriving with the people evacuated from the city of Wuhan, the epicenter of the virus outbreak. Ukrainian Health Minister Zoryana Skaletska voluntarily joined the evacuees for the 14-day quarantine to help assuage local residents' concerns.

Nine police officers and one civilian were hospitalised as a result of Thursday's turmoil, and 24 protesters were detained. Ukraine does not have any confirmed cases of the new coronavirus that has infected more than 75,000 people in mainland China.

Ukraine's Security Service said Thursday they were investigating fake e-mails about the coronavirus spreading in Ukraine allegedly sent on behalf of the country's Health Ministry. The disinformation campaign was traced back to foreign servers and may have been one of the reasons for the unrest, officials said.

In Italy, meanwhile, health officials reported the country's first cases of contagion in people who had not been in China. The three new cases bring to six the number of people in Italy known to be infected with the virus.

Indicating how seriously the Italian government saw the domestically acquired infections, the Italian Health Ministry ordered anyone who had been in direct contact with the three new patients to be quarantined for 14 days, and called for all residents of the two Lombardy towns where they lived to stay home.

The first of the three to test positive for the virus was a 38-year-old Italian man who held several meetings with someone who had recently been in China, Lombardy welfare chief Giulio Gallera said. The man's wife subsequently tested positive, as did a person who came into contact with the man while doing sports.

Russia makes new proposal to Belarus for oil supply terms

REUTERS — MINSK



Russia has proposed new terms for future oil supplies to Belarus to partially compensate Minsk for the cost of taxes introduced last year, Moscow said yesterday, in a sign of potential progress in a two-month row between the two countries.

Minsk and Moscow have been at loggerheads since January 1, when they failed to agree on oil delivery terms for 2020 and major Russian oil companies suspended pipeline oil supplies to Belarus.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said yesterday that proposals by Russian companies for a price formula mechanism for Belarus oil purchases had been sent to Minsk.

Moscow had been supplying crude oil and oil products to Minsk with no export fee under a duty-free deal between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

But it amended its tax code in 2019 to halt that arrangement.

The Russian tax changes cost Belarus $330m in 2019, Belarus said this month. The country's state budget lost $130m, while Belarusian oil refineries lost $200m.

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko **(pictured)** said yesterday that his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin had proposed to compensate Minsk for $300m of the 2019 losses. He also said Moscow was ready to keep oil supply terms for 2020 the same as they were last year.

"It was an unexpected proposal," Lukashenko said when meeting one of Russia's regional officials in Minsk.

Russia and Belarus have not reached any firm agreement on the terms of oil supplies to Belarus, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a conference call.

The Russian tax changes would cost Belarus $420-430m in 2020 if Russia supplies the country with 24 million tonnes of oil, Lukashenko said later on yesterday, adding that Russian companies could refund Minsk this money.

"It is some kind of forward progress. We are going to work in this direction," he said.

Safmar Group companies, Russneft and Neftisa, are currently the only suppliers of Russian oil to Belarus, forcing Minsk to look for crude from other countries.

Belarus relies on Russia for more than 80 percent of its energy needs.

Since the Kremlin stopped sending oil, Lukashenko has vowed to find alternative suppliers. He boasted about warming ties with the West in an apparent bid to win concessions from Russia.

So far, Belarus has secured a shipment of oil from Norway and is negotiating supplies from Kazakhstan.

German doctor who killed step-daughter released from jail

AFP — MULHOUSE

An octogenarian German ex-doctor imprisoned in France for killing his 14-year-old step-daughter 38 years ago was freed yesterday for medical reasons, a source close to the case said.

This brings to a close a dramatic story that saw the former cardiologist, Dieter Krombach, kidnapped in Germany by his victim's father and brought to France to stand trial.

Krombach was convicted by a French court in 2011 and given a 15-year prison term.

Last October, a parole committee decreed his sentence should be suspended on medical grounds, which resulted in the doctor, now 84, taken away by ambulance from a prison near Paris yesterday morning.

A German investigation in 1987 had found there was not enough evidence to charge Krombach of the murder of Kalinka Bamberski, found dead in her bed during the summer holidays of 1982.

But the doctor's credibility was damaged when in 1997 he was found guilty of drugging and abusing a 16-year-old patient, emboldening Bamberski's biological father, Andre, in his campaign to see Krombach arrested.

Frustrated with Germany's refusal to hand Krombach over, Bamberski hired a kidnap team to snatch the doctor from his home in Scheidegg, Bavaria, and bring him to France.

The doctor was left, bound and gagged, near a courthouse in the border town of Mulhouse, and later put on trial.

After Krombach was convicted by a French court in 2011, Kalinka's father was also put on trial and convicted in 2014 over the kidnapping. He was handed a suspended one-year jail sentence.

The two men who carried out the kidnapping — Anton Krasniqi of Kosovo and Georgian Kacha Bablovani — were sentenced to a year in prison each.

Slovaks remember murdered scribe, as polls loom

REUTERS — BRATISLAVA

Thousands of people across Slovakia held gatherings yesterday to mark the second anniversary of the murder of an investigative journalist that shook the country's political scene and may redraw the political map in next week's election.

Jan Kuciak and his fiancee were shot dead on February 21, 2018 in a case that prosecutors traced to an influential businessman, who is now standing trial for procuring the murder. Three others are charged with helping organise and carry out the murder.

The businessman, Marian Kocner, has denied the charges. One of the others charged has admitted to shooting the couple, while the two others have pleaded not guilty.

Another man was sentenced to 15 years after a deal with the prosecution under which he admitted to helping facilitate the murder.

Prosecutors have said evidence showed Kocner had communicated with figures in state bodies and the justice system, and several senior officials were forced to resign.

"They uncovered scandals, theft, corruption on the highest levels," said Iveta Kovacova, one of those gathered at a commemoration in the capital, Bratislava, holding a banner mourning the slain young couple.

"But I think a lot of work still must be done for this country to run normally."



Demonstrators light candles during a protest rally marking the second anniversary of the murder of the investigative reporter Jan Kuciak and his fiancee Martina Kusnirova, in Bratislava, yesterday.

Prime Minister Robert Fico was forced to resign after the murders but his centre-left Smer party stayed in power and remains the most popular group.

Still, the party has lost a large part of its support ahead of the February 29 parliamentary election.

Final opinion polls last week showed a group of five to six opposition parties ranging from progressives to conservatives may try to join forces to oust Smer from power, with anti-graft movement Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLANO) closing in on Smer.

Kuciak's father, Jozef Kuciak, called on people to vote.

"I want to ask you all to take part in the election, and chose with your heart and your head," he said at one of the commemoration events in the capital.

Democrats elbow for breakout moment in Nevada and beyond

AFP — LAS VEGAS

Democratic White House hopefuls make their final pitches to Nevada voters on the eve of the latest contest in the nomination race, as the state seeks to avoid the chaos that marred voting in Iowa.

The battle to see who challenges Republican President Donald Trump in November has entered an urgent phase, with eight candidates including late entrant Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire former mayor of New York, scrambling for advantage.

Senator Bernie Sanders is the shock frontrunner, with rivals including a struggling Joe Biden and a re-invigorated Elizabeth Warren desperate to blunt the leftist firebrand's momentum.

Compounding the gravity, chilling warnings have emanated from Washington's intelligence community that Russia is interfering in the campaign to try to get Trump re-elected, much as it did in 2016.

Trump, who was impeached in December over accusations that he tried to coerce ally Ukraine into helping him win the 2020 election, reportedly erupted in anger about a congressional briefing on the threat and sacked Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire.

Eager to steal some of the Nevada spotlight, Trump was headed to a campaign rally in Las Vegas, where several Democratic candidates were converging for their own events.

For some, Nevada — or South Carolina, which votes on February 29 — is a make-or-break moment before the race takes on a national dynamic on March 3's "Super Tuesday," when 14 states vote. Several contenders are facing fundraising hurdles and Nevada and South Carolina are likely to be the end of the road for some.

The battle to see who challenges Republican President Donald Trump in November has entered an urgent phase, with eight candidates including late entrant Michael Bloomberg scrambling for advantage.

Bloomberg has no such troubles. He has already spent a staggering $364m, a campaign record, from his personal fortune on campaign advertising, according to Advertising Analytics. Bloomberg chose to unconventionally skip the first four nominating contests and make a splash in Super Tuesday states where he has blanketed the airwaves with unprecedented ad spending.

Rivals have revolted against the strongarm tactics. "We are a democracy. One person, one vote — not a guy worth $60bn buying an election," fumed Sanders in an interview with CBS. Sanders added that he was surprised at Bloomberg's ineffective debate performance Wednesday, when the media tycoon suffered a full-on assault from rivals.

Should Bloomberg — currently third in national polling behind Sanders and Biden — become the nominee, Sanders warned, "Trump will chew him up and spit him out."

Warren, whose campaign sagged after mediocre showings Iowa and New Hampshire, eviscerated Bloomberg during the debate, leading to a much-needed injection of campaign donations — more than $5m since the debate, she said.

Another candidate under pressure to turn his sinking campaign around is Biden, the former vice president who performed dreadfully in the opening contests.

Biden must bounce back in Nevada and South Carolina, two states with diverse demographics that could boost the former frontrunner. The Silver State's voting format is a caucus. Unlike a primary, where voters pick a candidate by secret ballot, caucusgoers attend precinct gatherings where they vote publicly by standing with fellow supporters of their chosen candidate.

That process in Iowa devolved into chaos when online applications malfunctioned. Nevada is under immense pressure to avoid a similar debacle. "What we've been doing here at the party is making sure that, number one, what happened in Iowa will not happen in Nevada," the state's Democratic Party chairman William McCurdy told CNN.



Democratic presidential candidate Senator Elizabeth Warren speaks to Chris Matthews of MSNBC inside the spin room at Bally's Las Vegas Hotel after the Democratic presidential primary debate in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Warren, worried campaign will run out of cash, taps $3m loan

REUTERS – NEW YORK

US Senator Elizabeth Warren raised more money than most of her Democratic presidential rivals in the weeks before the Iowa caucuses, but spent so heavily that her campaign took out a $3m loan fearing she would run out of cash.

Warren raised $10.4m in contributions in January — more than former Vice President Joe Biden's $9m and former South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg's $6m — but ended the month with only $2.3m in cash, according to disclosures filed on Thursday.

All of the presidential hopefuls were required to submit financial disclosures on Thursday, public documents that offer insights into how they are managing their multi-million campaign operations. The ability to raise cash and manage allocations is an important test for candidates to remain competitive as the nominating contest drags on for weeks.

At least two of the candidates are enjoying comfortable cash positions. Billionaire Michael Bloomberg is self-funding his campaign, contributing more than $460m of his own wealth. US Senator Bernie Sanders raised $25m in January and finished the month with $17m in cash. Democrats who are still competing for their party's nomination have raised $1.2bn so far this election, both in donations and from their own money.

Warren became the first candidate in the top tier to turn to borrowing money after having spent nearly 97% of her warchest — the highest rate in the field. Her campaign said while she took out a $3m loan, she only accessed $400,000.

Warren eked out a third-place finish in Iowa and fourth-place finish in New Hampshire. Her widely praised performance in a debate this week buoyed her fundraising.

That may be in part thanks to her decision to increase her spending on payroll in January. While other campaigns were ramping up television advertising, Warren instead spent on staff.

She increased her payroll by 83%, hoping to turn her fortunes around by flooding Iowa with organizers instead of television ads. She spent $3.2m on staff in December and $5.9m in January, giving her the largest payroll.

Canadians evacuated from Japan virus ship return home

AFP — OTTAWA

A chartered plane carrying 129 Canadians evacuated from the coronavirus-quarantined Diamond Princess cruise ship docked in Japan landed at a military base in Ontario province early yesterday.

All of the passengers who arrived at Canadian Forces Base Trenton, 200km southwest of Ottawa, had tested negative for the COVID-19 illness, the government said.

They will however be quarantined for another 14 days at the Nav Centre in Cornwall -- a hotel and conference center that has been used before by the government as an emergency shelter.

In online posts, the evacuees said medics in protective gear served them breakfast on the plane -- while checking each passenger's temperature for signs of fever.

The Diamond Princess, which is moored in Yokohama near Tokyo, is the biggest coronavirus cluster outside the Chinese epicenter, with more than 600 cases confirmed among the 3,700 passengers and crew.

The ship was quarantined on February 5 when a passenger who left in Hong Kong was confirmed to be infected with the virus.

Passengers were confined to cabins except for brief trips on deck wearing masks and gloves, when they were told to keep their distance from others.

Hundreds of passengers have since been allowed to disembark this week after testing negative for the deadly virus.

Of the 246 Canadians originally on board, 47 have contracted the new coronavirus, Canada's public broadcaster CBC said, but they were not on the evacuation flight.

It was the third flight to evacuate Canadians from coronavirus quarantine, after two earlier ones from the outbreak epicenter in Wuhan, China.

About 300 Canadians who were quarantined at CFB Trenton after arriving on the first plane from Wuhan on February 7 and a separate US charter flight were released from the base yesterday, an official said.



A truck passes through a tunnel under a Canadian National Railway (CN Rail) train, halted near a Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory camp next to a railway crossing, in Tyendinaga, Ontario, yesterday.

Canada urges end to rail blockade

AFP — MONTREAL

The Canadian government called for indigenous demonstrators to halt railroad blockades set up as part of a pipeline protest, as police withdrew from their traditional lands in a conciliatory gesture.

For approximately two weeks, demonstrators across Canada, many of them from the country's indigenous groups, have protested in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en people in British Columbia, bringing passenger and freight traffic to a halt in eastern Canada.

The Wet'suwet'en are upset over a proposed gas pipeline that would stretch across their territory and have made withdrawal of police from their land a prerequisite for any negotiation with the government.

"We have said we believe the conditions for resolution of this have been met," Bill Blair, Canada's minister of public safety, said during an interview with broadcaster CBC.

"We have said we believe it's time for those blockades to come down." He added that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's decision to withdraw from the Wet'suwet'en people's land "was made completely independent of and on their own based on their assessment of their legal responsibilities and the situation on the ground." "They believe this is the appropriate thing to do," he said.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who has been pressured by his political opponents to lift the blockades, met on Thursday with the leaders of Canada's provinces to discuss the crisis.

Trump scoffs at 'Parasite' Oscar win

AFP — COLORADO SPRINGS

President Donald Trump on Thursday scorned the best picture Oscar for South Korean film "Parasite", asking how a foreign movie could get the honour. "How bad was the Academy Awards this year?" Trump asked the crowd at a packed reelection campaign rally here.

"We got enough problems with South Korea, with trade. On top of it, they give them the best movie of the year?" Trump asked in disbelief. Saying "was it good? I don't know," Trump seemed to indicate he had not watched the film.

Neon, the US distributor for "Parasite," answered the president on Twitter, saying his opposition to the subtitled film was "Understandable, he can't read." Trump, whose presidency has been built on a nationalist "America first" slogan, said it was time to bring back classics from Hollywood's golden age.

"Let's get 'Gone With the Wind.' Can we get 'Gone With the Wind' back please? 'Sunset Boulevard?'" he said. Trump also took a crack at Best Supporting Actor winner Brad Pitt, calling him "a little wiseguy".

Many Americans face coronavirus quarantine stigma

REUTERS — AUSTIN

When Esther Tebeka, one of more than 1,000 Americans evacuated from China due to the coronavirus outbreak, ended her 14-day quarantine with no signs of the disease, she thought she could get on with her life.

Instead, she has had people refuse to come near her or cover their faces with surgical masks due to unfounded fears that she is a coronavirus carrier - making her one of a growing number of Americans who report being shunned or shamed after quarantine.

"How many times can I tell people I'm not sick?" said Tebeka, who runs a Chinese medicine clinic in Palo Alto, California, and has seen patients suddenly cancel appointments. "We're not the walking dead."

She and her 15-year-old daughter Chaya were among Americans evacuated from Wuhan, China and Tokyo, Japan, then quarantined on military bases in California, Texas and Nebraska. Hundreds more travelers are self quarantining at home after arriving on commercial flights from affected areas, according to state health departments.

Health officials say Americans undergoing daily testing, observation and health precautions of quarantine are among the least likely to transmit the virus. Yet these people are being outed by neighbours, ostracized online and alienated by friends.

The WHO and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have said 14 days represents the outer limits of the virus' possible incubation period. But research this month from China's National Health Commission suggested the incubation period could be as long as 24 days.

Healthy commercial airline passengers returning to the United States from coronavirus-affected areas who come down with certain symptoms within 14 days are required to participate in monitoring by health officials, and some may have their movement restricted or be asked to limit contact with others, according to the CDC.

US travellers, including Amy Deng who underwent home quarantine with her daughter Daisy, 8, said they got no official guidance on arrival to restrict their movement but did so out of a sense of responsibility to their communities.

They avoided close contact with people for two weeks after they returned from visiting family in Guangzhou, China, over 800km south of Wuhan.

That did not stop neighbors calling police over concerns they would spread coronavirus, Deng said. "People were already panicked, then they made up this rumor and spread it, telling us not to even live in the community," said Deng, 45, a Santa Rosa, California, acupuncturist.

Since Deng returned on February 4, she has been asked not to enter her office to even pick up a notebook by a woman whose business shares the same lobby space. Deng's two-week isolation ended this week.

Other than evacuated passengers from the Diamond Princess cruise ship, there are only 15 US cases of coronavirus — just two from person-to-person transmission after return — and no deaths.

Most of those infected had travelled to the Wuhan area. That is still a fraction of the 14,000 flu deaths in the United States this season, according to CDC. With reports of such experiences, people still in isolation are fearful of what lies ahead. Some were unwilling to discuss their concerns for fear of drawing attention to themselves.

Trump eyeing four candidates for intelligence chief

REUTERS – WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that he had four candidates under consideration to be the next US intelligence chief and that a decision would be made soon, even as one potential candidate said he was not interested in the job.

Trump abruptly dismissed acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire this week and replaced him with Richard Grenell, a controversial Trump loyalist who is also serving as the US ambassador to Germany.

But Grenell was also tapped to serve in an acting capacity, and Trump is searching for someone to nominate to be the director of national intelligence, or DNI, on a permanent basis. "Four great candidates are under consideration at DNI," Trump wrote on Twitter. "Decision within next few weeks!" Trump told reporters he was considering Republican Representative Doug Collins for the job. But Collins said yesterday that he was not interested and planned to pursue a candidacy for a US Senate seat.

"I know the problems of our intelligence community, but this is not a job that is of interest to me. At this time, it's not one that I would accept," the Georgia congressman told Fox Business Network.

Former Republican Senator Dan Coats was Trump's last full-time spy chief, but he resigned last July after differences with the President over the role Russia played in the 2016 election became public.

Maguire, a career intelligence officer, had served in an acting capacity since then. His deputy, Andrew Hallman, is also leaving the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The post of director of national intelligence, which was created after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the US, oversees the 17 U.S. civilian and military intelligence agencies, including the CIA.

Bolivia electoral body blocks Morales Senate run

REUTERS – LA PAZ

Bolivia's electoral body said that former president Evo Morales was ineligible to run for a Senate position in a May election re-run of a voided vote late last year that sparked a political crisis and led to the leftist leader's resignation.

Salvador Romero, the head of the country's electoral tribunal, said that Morales did not meet the requirements to be a Senate candidate for his Movement for Socialism (MAS) party, which is currently leading in the polls.

Morales stepped down in November after the disputed October 20 election sparked widespread protests and led to allies and security forces pulling their support for the long-standing leader who led the country for almost 14 years.

The former president, now in exile in Argentina, is orchestrating his party's election campaign ahead of the May 3 vote, with his former economy minister Luis Arce at the top of the ticket. Morales had been eying a Senate role.

The landlocked South American nation, which is grappling with economic slowdown, was plunged into political crisis last year over allegations of electoral fraud after Morales won an election handing him a fourth term in defiance of term limits.

Morales' party is now facing a fragmented opposition, including current caretaker President Jeanine Anez, who took over in a political vacuum after his resignation last year.

Romero said the block on Morales' candidacy was down to his not being a permanent resident in Bolivia, adding that the decision could not be appealed.

Morales responded in a post on Twitter saying that he met the necessary requirements for a Senate position and that the block against his candidacy was aimed at weakening his MAS party.

US counter-terror analyst pleads guilty to leaking secret information

AFP – WASHINGTON

A counter-terrorism analyst at the US Defence Intelligence Agency pleaded guilty on Thursday to leaking secret information to journalists, including details about foreign countries' weapons systems.

Henry Kyle Frese, 31, who was arrested in October, faces a maximum of 10 years in prison when he is sentenced in June, the Department of Justice said in a statement.

It detailed how Frese had leaked information to two unnamed journalists, one of whom he lived with, in 2018 and 2019. One news outlet, which was also not named, published eight articles containing classified information. Frese searched restricted government computer systems at least 30 times in 2018 for information to pass on verbally to the two journalists. He also sent some secret information via private messages on social media, the Department of Justice said.

"He alerted our country's adversaries to sensitive national defense information, putting the nation's security at risk," Assistant Attorney-General for National Security John Demers said.

The journalists involved appeared to work for CNBC and NBC News. Frese was a contractor with DIA from January 2017 to February 2018, and then a full-fledged DIA employee, with clearance ranging up to top secret level, officials said. The DIA is the US military's intelligence service.

Quadruple murderer executed in Tennessee

AFP – WASHINGTON

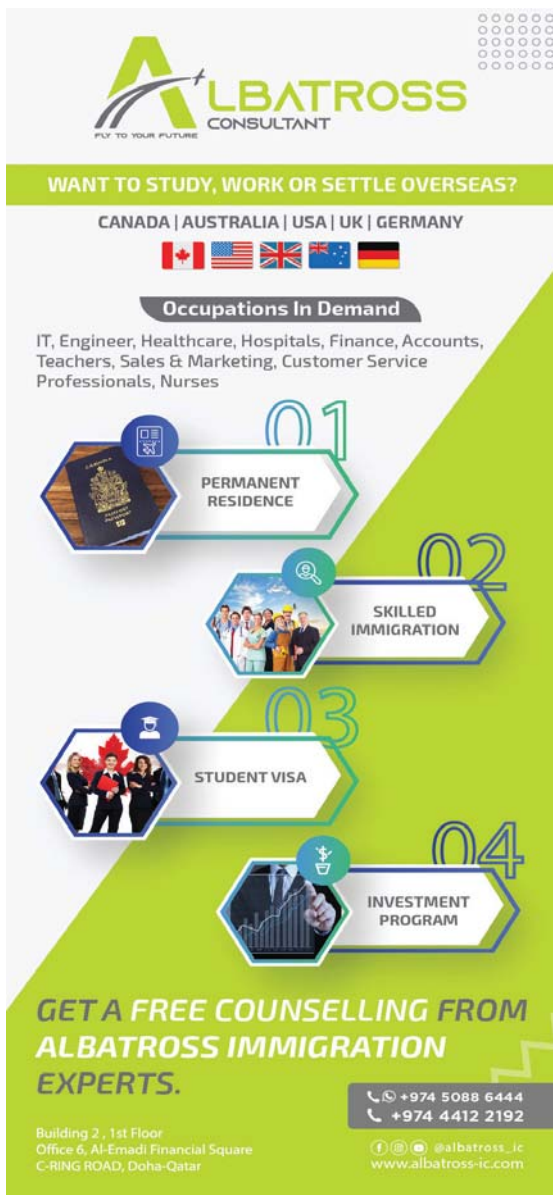
A quadruple murderer was put to death in Tennessee late on Thursday despite lawyers asking the US Supreme Court for a stay of execution.

Nicholas Sutton, 58, was found guilty of stabbing a fellow inmate to death in 1985. At that time, Sutton was serving a life sentence for killing his grandmother, who had raised him, in 1979 when he was 18 years of age.

Sutton later led police to the bodies of two other people whom he confessed to killing. Sutton's lawyers in January asked the state's Republican governor, Bill Lee, to grant clemency, citing expressions of support for Sutton from prison officials.







NOTICE

MR. PRAKASH PANERU

HOLDER OF NEPAL PASSPORT NO. 06561017 QATAR ID NO. 27752407816

The said person is leaving for good on 01/03/2020.



Anybody having any claim should contact us within two (2) days from the date of this notice. We will not be held responsible for any dealings any one may have with the above mentioned person, from the date of this notice.

Contact No.: 55508534

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Aromal Puthiya Purayil,
holder of India Passport
No. M6183839
(Qatar ID No. 30535601722)
hereby change my name to
AROMAL NARAYANAN.

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

I, Huda Mohammed Anees Ansari,
holder of India Passport
No. J6063350
(Qatar ID No. 28535630706)
hereby change my name to
HUDA ANSARI.

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

I, Kavibharathe Adhikesavelu,
holder of India Passport
No. J4410827
(Qatar ID No. 28035601832)
hereby change my name to
KAVIBHARATHI SENTHIL KUMAR.

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

I, Silvery Simmison,
holder of India Passport
No. J5372688
(Qatar ID No. 27335618180)
hereby change my name to
SIMMISON SILVERY.

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

I, Cherka Parambil Abdulla Moosa,
holder of India Passport
No. U0583564
(Qatar ID No. 25935600892)
hereby change my name to
MOOSA CERUNGAPARAMBIL ABDULLA.

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

I, Marakar Parambil Abdul Rasheed Safeer
holder of India Passport
No. H5885064
(Qatar ID No. 27635607846)
hereby change my name to
MUHAMMED SAFEER ABDUL RASHEED.

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

I, Kottikkal Yasar Arafath,
holder of India Passport
No. U0741912
(Qatar ID No. 28135618660)
hereby change my name to
YASAR ARAFATH KOTTIKKAL.

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

I, Imran Muhammad Allahditta,
holder of Pakistan Passport
No. BZ1220173
(Qatar ID No. 27958602192)
hereby change my name to
MUHAMMAD IMRAN ALLAHDITTA.

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

I, Chevendra Maruthikumar ,
holder of India Passport
No. Z2107111
(Qatar ID No.27135608307)
hereby change my name to
MARUTHI KUMAR VENKATACHALAM CHEVENDRA.

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

I, Altaf Hussain Hussain,
holder of India Passport
No. M3968797
(Qatar ID No. 27235631269)
hereby change my name to
ALTAF HUSSAIN.

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

I, Birendra Chaudhary Jay,
holder of Nepal Passport
No. 08172216
(Qatar ID No. 28152414245)
hereby change my name to
BIRENDRA CHAUDHARY.

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

I, Samundra Dhakal Harka Bahadur Dhakal,
holder of Nepal Passport
No. 09080107
(Qatar ID No. 28652419254)
hereby change my name to
SAMUNDRA DHAKAL.

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