



**ELSEWHERE**

**Kashmir journalist wins AFP's Kate Webb Prize**

**HONG KONG**  
Ahmer Khan, a 27-year-old Indian freelance reporter, was named the winner of the 2019 Agence France-Presse Kate Webb Prize on Thursday for his coverage on the ground in Kashmir during the lockdown of the region. The award recognises journalism by locally hired reporters in Asia operating in difficult conditions. AFP

**Trump names Grenell as top intel official**

**WASHINGTON**  
President Donald Trump announced that Richard Grenell, the U.S. Ambassador to Germany, will become acting director of national intelligence, a move that puts a staunch Trump ally in charge of the nation's 17 spy agencies, which the President has only tepidly embraced. AP

**Japan firm lands massive Sri Lanka airport contract**

**COLOMBO**  
Japanese firm Taisei Corporation was chosen by Colombo on Thursday to build a new \$570 million terminal for Sri Lanka's main airport, as Tokyo re-emerges as a key infrastructure backer amid a raft of Chinese projects. The new terminal is expected to double capacity at the Bandaranaike International Airport to around 20 million passengers a year. AFP

**Turkey, Russia to continue talks on Syria**

**ANKARA**  
Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that Turkey and Russia have inched closer toward each other's positions during talks in Moscow this week on restoring calm in Syria, but that their discussions have not produced the results yet that Ankara desires. He said talks would continue. AFP

# Bloomberg comes under attack at Democratic debate

The billionaire candidate was accused of trying to buy his way into White House

**REUTERS**  
**LAS VEGAS**

Michael Bloomberg faced a barrage of attacks at his first Democratic presidential debate on Wednesday, as his rivals assailed the freespending and fast-rising billionaire over his record on race, history of sexist comments and the use of his massive fortune to muscle his way into the contest.

In a rough debate debut that gave voters their first unscripted look at the media mogul and self-funding former New York Mayor, Mr. Bloomberg seemed uncomfortable and hesitant as he defended his record and argued that he is Democrats' best chance of beating Republican President Donald Trump in November.

Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Amy Klobuchar, Joe Biden and Pete Buttigieg all lined up to go after Mr. Bloomberg, who has surged in polls helped by an unprecedented advertising blitz. But they also heaped personal attacks on one another in the most contentious of the nine Democratic White House debates.

All of the contenders on the Las Vegas debate stage accused Mr. Bloomberg of trying to buy his way into the White House and said his record as Mayor and businessman was not good enough to beat Mr. Trump.

"We're running against a billionaire who calls women fat broads and horse-faced lesbians," said Ms. Warren, a Senator from Massachusetts. "And, no, I'm not talking about Donald Trump, I'm talking about Mayor Bloomberg."

"Democrats take a huge risk if we just substitute one



**Face to face:** Democratic presidential hopefuls, from left, Michael Bloomberg, Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar arriving for the Democratic primary debate in Las Vegas on Wednesday. AFP

arrogant billionaire for another," she added. Mr. Bloomberg has been accused over the years of many sexist and misogynistic comments, and several lawsuits have been filed alleging that women were discriminated against at his media company.

**Remarks about women**

He did not respond to Ms. Warren's comments about his alleged remarks about women, taken from a booklet given to him in 1990 that was said to be a compilation of his sayings over the years. A campaign spokesman said Mr. Bloomberg "simply did not say the things somebody wrote in this gag gift".

Mr. Bloomberg, who entered the race in November and is skipping the first four early voting states in February to focus on later nominating contests in March, has risen to No. 2 among Democrats behind Mr. Sanders, according to a Reuters/Ipsos national poll released on

Tuesday. Mr. Bloomberg said at the debate that he was using his money for an important cause. "I'm spending that money to get rid of Donald Trump, the worst president we've ever had. And if I can get that done, it will be a great contribution to America and to my kids."

Mr. Trump was happy to inject himself into the debate pile-on of Mr. Bloomberg, telling supporters at a rally in Phoenix: "I hear he's getting pounded tonight."

The debate came at a pivotal time, three days before Nevada's presidential caucuses, the third contest in the state-by-state race to find a challenger to Mr. Trump in the November 3 election.

**High stakes**

The high stakes were evident in the intensity of the exchanges, with Mr. Biden and Ms. Warren, in particular, facing the do-or-die task of reigniting their campaigns after poor showings in Iowa and New Hampshire earlier

this month. Both Ms. Warren and Mr. Biden, the former Vice-President and one-time front-runner who lost ground to Mr. Sanders and Mr. Bloomberg in recent weeks, criticised Mr. Bloomberg for his treatment of women, and asked him to commit to releasing women who had signed non-disclosure agreements to settle lawsuits.

Mr. Bloomberg refused, saying they were made "consensually" with the expectation they would stay private.

"We are not going to beat Donald Trump with a man who has who knows how many non-disclosure agreements, and the drip, drip, drip of stories of women saying they have been harassed and discriminated against," said Ms. Warren, who had her most aggressive debate.

Mr. Bloomberg said there were "very few" non-disclosure agreements. "None of them accuse me of anything," he said. "Maybe they didn't like the jokes I told."

# Merkel slams 'poison' of racism after nine killed in shooting

Suspect wanted to 'destroy' people from two dozen countries

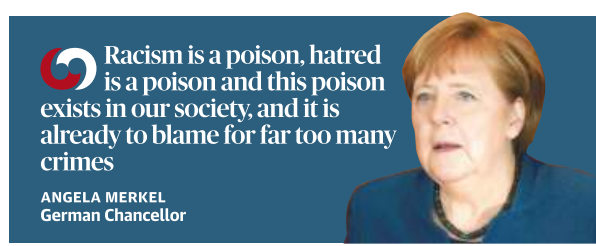
**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
**HANAU**

Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned the "poison" of racism on Thursday after a shooter with suspected far-right beliefs killed nine people at a shisha bar and a café in the German city of Hanau.

The suspect, identified as 43-year-old German Tobias R., was found dead at his home following an hours-long manhunt. The body of his 72-year-old mother was also found at the flat in what appeared to be a murder-suicide.

Federal counter-terror prosecutors investigating the case said they saw "a xenophobic motive" behind the shootings, the latest deadly attack blamed on the far right in Germany.

"Racism is a poison, hatred is a poison and this poison exists in our society, and it is already to blame for far too many crimes," Ms. Merkel said in Berlin.



**Racism is a poison, hatred is a poison and this poison exists in our society, and it is already to blame for far too many crimes**  
ANGELA MERKEL  
German Chancellor

Among the dead were "several victims of Kurdish origin", the Kon-Med association of Kurds in Germany said in a statement. The bloodshed plunged Germany into mourning, and rallies are scheduled in Berlin, Hanau and other cities on Thursday to honour the victims. Relatives and friends of the victims gathered at the Arena bar around midday Thursday, an AFP reporter said, embracing one another in tears.

**Killer's document**

In a rambling 24-page document seen by AFP, the alleged gunman wrote that pe-

ople from over two dozen countries should be "destroyed".

He also said he had never been with a woman, which he blamed on being "watched" by unspecified secret services.

Ms. Merkel pledged to fight back against "all those who try to divide Germany".

She cited the murders carried out by the neo-Nazi "NSU" cell between 2000 and 2007 as well as last June's killing of pro-migrant politician Walter Lübcke, and the deadly anti-Semitic attack in Halle in October as examples of the threat posed by the far right.

# 'Historic' pact with U.S. will be signed soon, says Taliban

Deputy leader says insurgents are 'fully committed' to deal

**REUTERS**  
**KABUL**

The Taliban's deputy leader said the group would soon sign an agreement with the U.S. to reduce violence for seven days, adding that militant commanders were "fully committed" to observing the "historic" accord.

"That we today stand at the threshold of a peace agreement with the United States is no small mile-

stone," Sirajuddin Haqqani wrote in an opinion piece in the *New York Times*, in the first significant public statement by a Taliban leader on the accord for a week-long reduction in violence.

The agreement in principle, which was struck during negotiations between U.S. and Taliban representatives in Qatar, could lead to a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan.

"Achieving the potential of the agreement, ensuring its success and earning lasting peace will depend on an equally scrupulous observance by the United States of each of its commitments," wrote Haqqani.

Clashes between Afghan forces and the Taliban have continued, but Afghanistan's Interior Minister said a deal to cut violence would be enforced within five days.

# Trump ally gets prison term for meddling in Russia probe

Judge to consider request for a new trial

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
**WASHINGTON**

Donald Trump's longtime ally Roger Stone was sentenced on Thursday to 40 months in prison for impeding a congressional investigation, in a case that ignited a firestorm over the U.S. President's political interference in the justice system.

Mr. Stone, a veteran Republican operative and one of Mr. Trump's oldest confidants, was convicted in November of lying to Congress, tampering with a witness and obstructing the House investigation into whether



Roger Stone

the Trump campaign conspired with Russia to cheat in the 2016 election.

"The truth still exists," said U.S. District Court judge Amy Berman Jackson as she handed down the sentence.

"The truth, still matters. Roger Stone's insistence that it doesn't, his belligerence, his pride in his own lies are a threat to our most funda-

mental institutions, to the very foundation of our democracy."

Mr. Stone was not immediately sent to prison as Ms. Jackson said implementation of the sentence would be delayed while she considered his request for a new trial.

Ms. Jackson's sentence fell well short of the seven to nine years initially recommended by the original prosecutors in the case before they were overruled by the Justice Department after Mr. Trump complained publicly. Those prosecutors quit the case.

The judge said such a sentence was "unnecessary" for Mr. Stone, who has no prior criminal record.

# 19 children died in Yemen air strikes: UN

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
**SANAA**

Nineteen children were among at least 31 civilians killed in air strikes on rebel-held northern Yemen last week, the United Nations said on Thursday.

"UNICEF is sad to confirm that the recent attack in Al-Jawf, north of Yemen, on February 15, took the lives of 19 children (eight boys and 11 girls) and injured another 18 (nine boys and another nine girls)," the UN children's agency said in a statement.

Saturday's air strikes came after the Iran-aligned rebels claimed to have shot down an aircraft of the Saudi-led coalition supporting the government.

# South Korea reports first virus death

Number of new COVID-19 cases drops in China

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
**BEIJING**

China on Thursday touted a big drop in new COVID-19 cases as proof its epidemic control efforts are working, but the toll grew abroad with deaths in Japan and South Korea.

Fatalities in China hit 2,118 as 114 more people died, but the number of new cases declined to 394, a notable shift from the 1,749 figure released a day earlier.

However, Beijing said it has again changed the method of counting patients. Last week, the National Health Commission said officials in Hubei, the epicentre of the outbreak, would record new



**Germ alert:** People waiting to undergo tests for COVID-19 at a medical centre in Daegu, South Korea, on Thursday. AP

infections without waiting for laboratory test results, relying instead on doctors' diagnoses and lung imaging. On Thursday though, it returned to its prior way of counting, a decision sure to aggravate observers who say consistency is key to understanding COVID-19's path.

More than 74,000 people have been infected in China, and hundreds more in over 25 countries. The number of

deaths outside mainland China climbed to 11.

Japan's toll rose to three as a man and a woman, in their 80s, who had been aboard a quarantined cruise ship died, while fears there mounted about other passengers who disembarked the *Diamond Princess* after testing negative. South Korea reported its first death, and the number of infections in the country nearly dou-

bled on Thursday to 104 – including 15 at a hospital in Cheongdo county. The Mayor of Daegu – South Korea's fourth-largest, with 2.5 million people – advised residents to stay indoors.

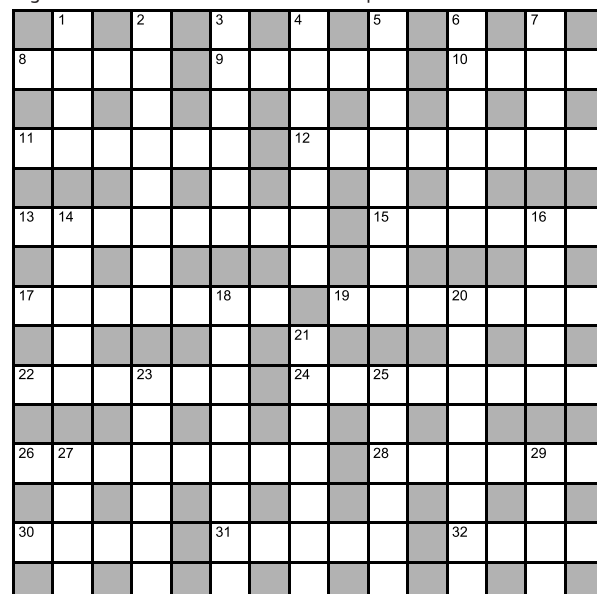
**Two deaths in Iran**

Iran reported two deaths on Wednesday, the first in West Asia. Deaths have previously been confirmed in France, the Philippines, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Chinese officials say the drastic containment efforts, including quarantining millions in Hubei and restricting movements in cities nationwide, have started to pay off. "Results show that our control efforts are working," Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at a special meeting on the virus with Southeast Asian counterparts in Laos.

## THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12864

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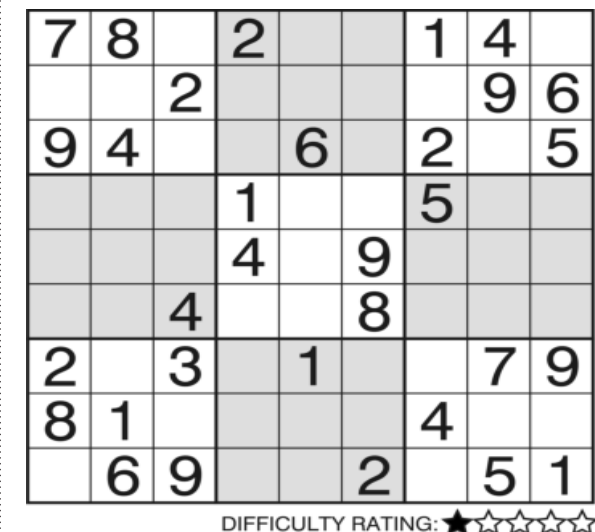
(set by Incognito)

- 13 Now, present book and sticker (8)
- 15 Portray German with ancient Scot (6)
- 17 Man from Kigali managed to hold magical stick (7)
- 19 Stern champ's pained expression (7)
- 22 Elves scamper around Saint's ship (6)
- 24 Look Duke! Stare! Possibly, it is Polaris (8)
- 26 Rich and excited flute fan (8)
- 28 Soon returns carrying special drug and traps (6)
- 30 Plot in Lapland (4)
- 31 Helpmates, not wayward pals, can be subject matter (5)
- 32 Smashing pie after end of dinner's ready to eat (4)
- 4 Fine writing instrument's with a lieutenant by end of day (7)
- 5 I smear Hawaiian, for example (8)
- 6 Dozing general's surrounded by snake (6)
- 7 Waterway in Dharwad, India (4)
- 14 Prescribed medicine quantity, including a drop of wine and divine groundwater (5)
- 16 Two military commanders get a drink (5)
- 18 Horribly laments about current diseases (8)
- 20 State: "Young woman and heavenly beauty, but not hot" (8)
- 21 Praise father consuming milky coffee (7)
- 23 South American queue to get sodium chloride solution (6)
- 25 Destroyed garden menace (6)
- 27 Touched soft material (4)
- 29 For starters, entertainer showed public yellow spot (4)

**DOWN**

- 1 Cab returns with hotel musician (4)
- 2 Wild animal consumes engineer and vegetable (4,4)
- 3 Gold ship that is from Down Under (6)

## SUDOKU



**Solution to puzzle 12863**

C	A	F	I	G	D							
B	O	W	S	I	N	S	P	I	T	E	O	F
N	T	N	O	N	N	J						
A	S	S	I	T	E	N	N	Y	S	O	N	
T	S	O	A									
P	A	W	S	H	O	P	B	L	O	O	D	Y
N	O		E	A	W							
S	T	A	T	U	E	G	R	A	N	D	P	A
A	R	A	T	S	H	R	A	P	N	E	L	
M	A	R	E	A								
M	A	R	L	A	N	D	D	E	S	I	G	N
M	O	P	C	I	U	E						
S	U	B	T	O	T	A	L	S	M	A	R	Y
S	D	R	H	O	S							

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

8	1	6	5	2	9	3	7	4
2	5	3	6	7	4	9	8	1
4	9	7	3	8	1	2	6	5
9	2	5	1	4	7	8	3	6
7	3	4	8	6	2	5	1	9
1	6	8	9	5	3	7	4	2
3	8	9	2	1	6	4	5	7
6	4	2	7	3	5	1	9	8
5	7	1	4	9	8	6	2	3



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