

END WOMEN INEQUALITY: UN CHIEF

Women's inequality should shame everyone in the 21st century as it is 'stupid' and 'unacceptable', UN chief Antonio Guterres has said, as he called for removing this stain. He declared himself a proud feminist and called for men everywhere to support women's rights. "Just as slavery and colonialism were a stain on previous centuries, women's inequality should shame us all in the 21st century. Because it is not only unacceptable; it is stupid," the Secretary General said

TOP OF THE WORLD



Jimmy Lai

HONG KONG Publisher held over protest march

Hong Kong: Hong Kong's *Apple Daily* newspaper says the outspoken head of its publishing group, Jimmy Lai, has been held by police Friday over his participation in a protest march in August that was part of a months-long pro-democracy movement. The paper said Lai, the founder of Next Media, was picked up from his home by officers at around 7 am and taken to a police station. It also said the vice chairman of the opposition Labour Party, Lee Cheuk-yan, and others were also detained at in connection with an August 31 march, which led to violence between protesters and police.

MEXICO Man jailed for murder of journalist

Culiacan: One of the murderers of acclaimed journalist and AFP contributor Javier Valdez Cardenas was sentenced Thursday to 14 years and eight months in prison by a Mexican court. Heriberto Picos Barraza, nicknamed "El Koala", was one of the perpetrators of the crime committed in the north-western city of Culiacan in May 2017, according to the prosecution. He had served as a driver for two men, Juan Francisco Picos Barrueto and Luis Idefonso Sanchez, who shot Valdez outside his office. Valdez, 50, was one of the most prominent chroniclers of Mexico's deadly drug war.

USA Bloomberg might not spend to help Sanders

San Francisco: Billionaire Mike Bloomberg said Thursday he might not spend money to assist Bernie Sanders if Sanders is the Democratic presidential nominee, days after a Sanders adviser said they wouldn't want help. Sanders adviser Jeff Weaver said Tuesday that it would be a "hard no" on accepting Bloomberg's financial assistance. "What do you mean, I'm going to send a check to somebody and they're not going to cash the check? I think I wouldn't bother to send the check," Bloomberg said.

CANADA Govt to no longer pay for security of Harry, Meghan

Ottawa: Canada will no longer pick up the security tab for protecting Prince Harry and his wife Meghan starting in March, the office of Public Safety Minister Bill Blair said Thursday. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have been living in an oceanside mansion in westernmost British Columbia since November. Last month, they made a shock exit from life as working royals. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have provided security for the couple in this country under the internationally protected persons convention.

ANTI-RUSSIA PROTESTS IN ISTANBUL, ERDOGAN ON PHONE WITH PUTIN

Airstrike kills 33 Turkish troops in Idlib, NATO calls for de-escalation

Ankara says Russia knew of troop presence, did nothing to stop attack; Moscow rejects assertion

AGENCIES
ISTANBUL, FEBRUARY 28

Turkey vowed on Friday to resist further aggression against its troops in northwestern Syria, a day after Russian or Syrian air and artillery strikes killed 33 Turkish soldiers, bringing Russia and Turkey close to open conflict.

NATO ambassadors met on Friday in an emergency session called by Turkey, a member state. They expressed "solidarity" with Turkey, condemned the airstrikes, and called for a de-escalation of the conflict and for a renewed cease-fire. But they did not approve any military action, let alone the no-fly zone that Turkey has demanded over Idlib, the region where the strike occurred.

Turkish officials have warned that if the pressure in Idlib is not resolved, Turkey will not be able to hold back Syrian refugees from forging across borders into Europe, which officials in Brussels have interpreted as a veiled threat to leverage a refugee crisis for cooperation from NATO.



Turkish military forces in Syria's Idlib Province this week. AP

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and President Vladimir V Putin of Russia spoke to each other in an effort to calm tensions. According to the Russian side, they agreed to hold a summit meeting in the near future.

But emotions were still running high in Turkey on Friday. "We will not leave the blood of our brave soldiers on the ground," Fahrettin Altun, the director of communications in the Turkish

presidency, wrote in a thread of comments posted on Twitter. "The international community must act to protect civilians and impose a no-fly zone."

Turkish protesters in Istanbul converged on the Russian Consulate there early Friday, chanting "Murderer Russia! Murderer Putin!"

Russia denied any role in the attacks, saying on Friday that none of its jets were operating in

EXPLAINED NATO council faces tightrope walk

ANKARA'S ANGER over the attack has led to talk of whether Turkey would launch full-scale attacks on Russia-backed troops in Syria. In its emergency talks, NATO has avoided committing additional support for Turkey.

But with Ankara reportedly pressuring Europe by allowing refugees to enter Europe, the alliance faces a difficult situation. It is deeply divided about Turkey's role in Syria, and is reluctant about entering a conflict of Turkey's making, as per reports. Erdogan has also tested NATO by purchasing the Russian-made S400, which threatens the alliance's security. Now, while NATO has said it will protect its interests, experts said it must balance a need to reduce tensions as well as stave off internal crisis.

the area when they occurred. "Aircraft of the Russian Air Force did not engage in combat in the Behun vicinity," the Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Turkey has blamed the Syrian government for the strikes. But it has also indirectly blamed Russia, saying it knew of the presence of Turkish troops and did nothing to stop the attack even after being alerted. Turkey's defense minister, Hulusi Akar, said the attack

was carried out even though the Turkish troops had coordinated their location with Russian forces on the ground.

The Russian Defense Ministry rejected Turkey's assertion. "Immediately after obtaining information about injured Turkish servicemen, the Russian side took comprehensive measures to completely stop shelling by the Syrian military," its statement said.

Turkey opens border, migrants head to Europe

REUTERS
ANKARA/ISTANBUL, FEB 28

Hundreds of migrants in Turkey started arriving on the borders with Greece and Bulgaria on Friday after a senior Turkish official said Ankara would no longer abide by a 2016 EU deal and stop refugees from reaching Europe.

The migrants, some carrying small children and carrier bags, trekked along roads out of Istanbul and through fields, in scenes reminiscent of the 2015 refugee crisis, when more than a million people fleeing wars and poverty sought asylum in Europe.

Some wore face masks, in an apparent attempt to guard

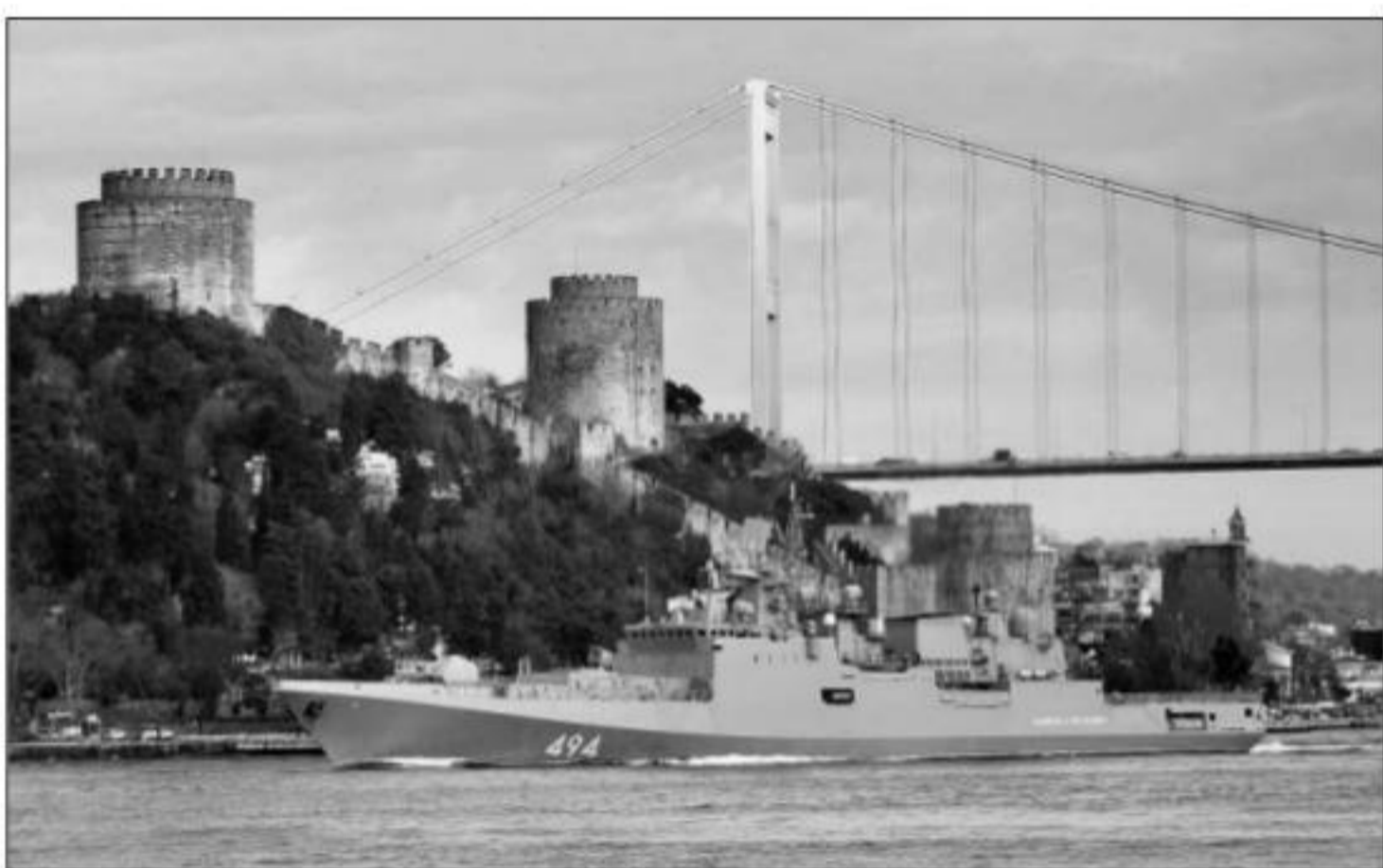
against the coronavirus outbreak now sweeping the world and adding to the concerns of hard-pressed European authorities.

Greece and Bulgaria, both European Union member states, vowed not to admit the migrants. Greek police used smoke grenades at one border crossing, while Bulgaria sent an extra 1,000 troops to its border with Turkey.

"There is no work (here in Turkey)," said Muhammed Abdullah, a 25-year-old Syrian queuing in Istanbul to board a bus bound for the Greek border.

"Turkey is not nice at all, Europe is nicer," he said, adding that he wanted to go to Germany.

Turkey already hosts some 3.7 million Syrian refugees and says it cannot handle any more.



RUSSIA WARSHIPS TRANSIT BOSPHORUS STRAIT: Two Russian warships armed with cruise missiles were on Friday transiting the Bosphorus Strait in Istanbul on their way to Mediterranean waters. Russian naval ships that pass through the Bosphorus normally head into the Mediterranean to back Moscow's operations in Syria. Reuters

Lawmakers call for assurances, transparency on Taliban peace deal

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 28

NEARLY TWO dozen American lawmakers have sought assurances and transparency prior to the signing of a landmark peace deal between the US and the Taliban to end the brutal war in Afghanistan, urging the Trump administration against making a commitment that would embolden America's adversaries and undermine its allies.

In a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the defense secretary, the Congressmen Thursday called for prioritisation of American security as the US pursued a peace agreement with the

Taliban. Dated February 27, the letter calls for transparency and highlights the importance of keeping the US safe.

Additionally, it outlines the need for certain security pledges, including that any deal between the US and the Taliban will be public and not contain secret annexes or side deals.

"We have serious concerns about reports that the United States is preparing to sign a deal with the Taliban, the terrorists who harboured al-Qaeda before and after the attacks of 9/11. President Trump has a proven track record of putting America's security first and ensuring our country stays out of bad deals that aid our adversaries," the letter said. PTI

United States invited to invest in CPEC project, says Pakistan

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 28

IN AN interesting move, cash-strapped Pakistan has invited the US to join the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, an ambitious infrastructure project looked with suspicion by the Trump administration for being non-transparent.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's adviser on commerce Abdul Razak Dawood on Thursday said the government made the offer during a meeting with the US trade delegation led by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross on Wednesday, *The Express Tribune* reported.

Interestingly last month, senior US diplomat Alice Wells said that there is not transparency in the



China has committed to invest over \$60 bn in CPEC

Razak said: "The US has shown interest in (Pakistan's) energy, oil and gas, agriculture and food processing". China has committed to invest over \$60 billion in Pakistan as part of the CPEC under which it planned to build a number of special economic zones.

India has objected to the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

The US Commerce Secretary's visit is the result of recently-held discussions between Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Donald Trump to promote bilateral trade and enhanced economic engagements, the report said. "Pakistan-US market access is the main point. We want access to the US market," Dawood said, adding that the US official has assured of his cooperation. PTI

CPEC and the firms blacklisted by the World Bank have got contracts under the project, which will increase Pakistan's debt burden.

Wells, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia was speaking at a think tank event during her four-day visit to Pakistan.

Khan's commerce advisor

IN MOVE TO COMBAT 'PERIOD POVERTY'

Scotland set to be first country to provide free pads, tampons

CEYLAN YEGINSU
LONDON, FEBRUARY 28

SCOTLAND IS poised to become the first country to end "period poverty" by providing free sanitary products to women of all ages in the country.

Free menstrual products are already available to students in high schools, colleges and universities in Scotland. And a bill passed by the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday will make pads and tampons free across the board.

Monica Lennon, the lawmaker who submitted the draft



The Bill is aimed at combating the culture of stigma surrounding menstruation, said supporters. Reuters/flip

proposal of the bill, said she was thrilled that it had attracted sup-

port across Scotland, including from civic groups and "individ-

uals who have had their own lived experience of period poverty and know what it is like not to have access to products when they need them."

Although the bill passed with 112 votes in favour, none against and one abstention, some lawmakers warned that the legislation faces a few hurdles before becoming law, though they were regarded as surmountable.

One of those is a yearly cost that the government puts at about \$31 million.

Tampons are taxed at 5 percent in Britain — a levy that the British government has been

unable to abolish because of European Union rules that class sanitary products as "luxury" products.

The bloc has pledged to remove all taxes on menstruation products by 2022.

About 62 million pounds, or \$80 million, collected in taxes on sales of sanitary products in Britain has been diverted to women's charities since 2015, the minister for civil society, Mims Davies, said last year.

Nearly 10 percent of girls in Britain have been unable to afford period products, and 19 percent have resorted to using substitutes like rags, newspapers

FEARS OF PANDEMIC GROW

'Very high': WHO raises global risk of coronavirus

REUTERS
GENEVA, FEBRUARY 28

THE RAPID spread of the coronavirus increased fears of a pandemic Friday, with six countries reporting their first cases and the World Health Organisation (WHO) raising its global spread and impact risk to "very high".

World shares fell again, winding up their worst week since the 2008 global financial crisis and bringing the global wipeout to \$6 trillion. Hopes that the epidemic that started in China late last year would be over in months, and that economic activity would quickly return to normal, have been shattered.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said his organisation was not underestimating the risk. "That is why we said today the global risk is very high," he told reporters in Geneva. "We increased it from 'high' to 'very high'."

WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier said the scenario of the coronavirus reaching multiple or all countries "is something we have been looking at and warning against since quite a while."

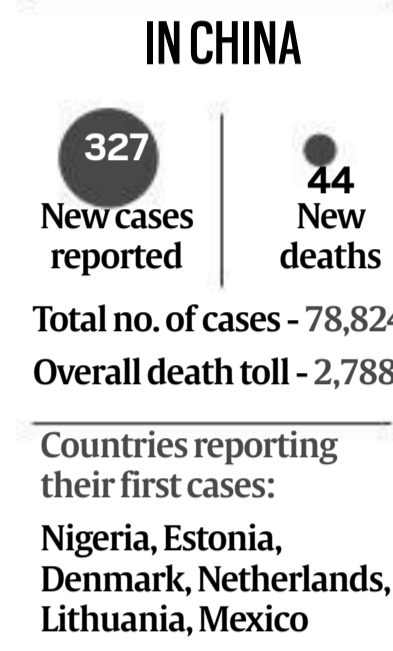
Mexico, Nigeria, Estonia, Denmark, the Netherlands and Lithuania reported their first cases, all with travel history connected to Italy, the worst-affected European country.

Countries other than China now account for about three-quarters of new infections.

A Chinese official said some recovered patients had been found to be infectious, suggesting the epidemic may be even harder to eradicate than previously thought. Lindmeier said the WHO was looking very care-



Hospital workers comfort each other in South Korea. Reuters



fully into reports of some people getting re-infected.

The death toll in Italy rose to 17 and those testing positive rose to 655. Germany has nearly 60 cases, France about 38 and Spain 23, according to a Reuters count. South Korea reported 571 new infections on Friday, bringing the total to 2,337, with 13 people killed.

The head of the WHO's emergency program, Dr Mike Ryan, said Iran's outbreak may be worse than realised - its toll of 34 dead is the highest outside China. Tedros said he expected a WHO team to be in Iran by Sunday or Monday.

US health workers lacked training, gear: Whistleblower

EMILY COCHRANE,
NOAH WEILAND &
MARGOT SANGER-KATZ
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 28

FEDERAL HEALTH employees interacted with Americans quarantined for possible exposure to the coronavirus without proper medical training or protective gear, then scattered into the general population, according to a government whistleblower who lawmakers say faced retaliation for reporting concerns.

The team was "improperly deployed" to two military bases in California to assist the processing of Americans who had been evacuated from coronavirus hot zones in China and elsewhere, according to a portion of a narrative account shared with Congress and obtained by *The New York Times* ahead of a formal complaint to the Office of the Special Counsel, an independent government agency.

Staff members from the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families were sent to Travis Air Force Base and March Air Reserve Base in late January and early February and

were ordered to enter quarantined areas, including a hangar where coronavirus evacuees were being received, the complaint said.

Without proper training or equipment, some of the exposed staff members moved freely around and off the bases, with at least one person staying in a nearby hotel and leaving California on a commercial flight. Many were unaware of the need to test their temperatures three times a day.

"I soon began to field panicked calls from my leadership team and deployed staff members expressing concerns with the lack of HHS communication and coordination, staff being sent into quarantined areas without personal protective equipment, training or experience in managing public health emergencies, safety protocols and the potential danger to both themselves and members of the public they come into contact with," the whistleblower wrote.

In a statement on Thursday, the Department of Health and Human Services acknowledged the complaint, which was first reported by *The Washington Post*, without elaborating. NYT