

Bahrain thump New Zealand 45-16 in Asian Men's Handball Championship | P12

Japan confirms first case of infection with new China coronavirus

Reuters | Tokyo

Japan confirmed the first case of infection from the new China coronavirus that has killed one person and prompted a travel alert from the US State Department.

A man in his 30s from Kanagawa prefecture, next to Tokyo, tested positive, Japan's health ministry said in a statement yesterday. The man had been to the Chinese city of Wuhan, where there has been an outbreak of pneumonia believed to be caused by the new coronavirus strain, it said.

The State Department issued a health alert update on Wednesday about travel to the Wuhan region.

Lebanon close to forming new govt



Lebanese caretaker finance minister Ali Hassan Khalil

Reuters

Lebanon is on the brink of forming a new government, the country's caretaker finance minister Ali Hassan Khalil said yesterday.

The new cabinet would comprise 18 specialist ministers, Khalil added.

Lebanon has been without a government since Saad al-Hariri resigned as prime minister on Oct. 29 in the face of sweeping protests.



03 Bahrain shines in gender equality

04 Man gets 10 years in jail for bribery

08 RAMEZ Group opens new hypermarket

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US resumes joint military operations in Iraq: NYT

Washington

The United States on Wednesday resumed joint military operations with Iraq that had been put on pause after the US drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad, the *New York Times* reported.

Two US military officials quoted by the paper said the Pentagon wanted to resume these operations in order to pick up the fight against the Islamic State group.



A US soldier advises Iraqi forces in the city of Mosul in June 2017



Iraqi leaders have told privately they support the US troop presence, despite public appeals for them to leave

SECRETARY OF STATE MIKE POMPEO

Washington began the pause on January 5 two days after the

strike that killed Iranian general Qasem Soleimani at the Baghdad airport.

The same day of the suspension furious Iraqi lawmakers voted to expel the more than 5,000 US troops that are in Iraq.

It was not immediately clear if anyone in the Iraqi government had approved the resumption of the joint military operations, the *Times* reported.

The Pentagon said it had no information to provide concerning a resumption when contacted.

Haftar ready to join Libya talks

- Backs Libya ceasefire
- Haftar had walked away from Moscow talks

Berlin

Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar has agreed to abide by a ceasefire and said he was ready to participate in an international conference in Berlin on Sunday, Germany's foreign minister said.

Libya's UN-recognised government in Tripoli has been under attack since April from Haftar's forces, with clashes killing more than 280 civilians and 2,000 fighters and displacing tens of thousands.

The leaders of the North African state's warring factions were in Moscow early this week at talks aimed at finalising a ceasefire orchestrated by Russia and Turkey.

"During my visit to Libya today, General Haftar made clear: He wants to contribute to the success of the Libyan conference in Berlin and is in principle ready to participate in it. He has agreed to abide by the ongoing ceasefire," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas



German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Libya strongman Khalifa Haftar

tweeted after talks in Benghazi.

After the Moscow talks, Haftar had walked away without signing the permanent truce, sparking fears about the shaky ceasefire.

Maas had travelled to meet Haftar in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi -- one of the general's strongholds -- in a bid to persuade him to join in the peace initiative.

Battle for Tripoli

The trip came days after Maas spoke with Haftar's rival Fayeze al-Sarraj, who serves as head of the UN-recognised government in Tripoli.

Separately in Tripoli, Sarraj announced he would attend the Berlin talks held under the auspices of the United Nations.

The battle over Tripoli is the latest unrest to wrack Libya since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising killed dictator Moamer Kadhafi. Since then, Libya has been caught up in fighting between rival armed factions, including Islamist militants.

In his report to the UN Security Council late on Wednesday, UN chief Antonio Guterres urged all warring parties to stop fighting and "engage constructively towards that end, including within the Berlin process".

The Berlin conference will aim to agree six points including a permanent ceasefire, implementation of the arms embargo and a return to the political process for peace, Guterres said.

Dozens killed as Damascus presses Idlib offensive



Intense air strikes by Syrian government forces, which have shown no sign of abating despite Russia's announcement of a truce, have reduced swathes of Idlib's towns to rubble

Beirut

Dozens of fighters and civilians were killed in Syria's Idlib province as the government pressed a deadly offensive yesterday towards a key town in the country's last rebel bastion.

The latest violence, which followed air strikes that killed 19 civilians on Wednesday, buried a ceasefire deal announced by Russia and rebel backer Turkey that never really took hold.

"Clashes broke out around midnight on Wednesday south of the city of Maaret al-Numan, together with heavy bombardment despite the Russian-Turkish truce," Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said.

According to the Britain-based war monitor, the fighting raged in areas south of Maaret al-Numan, the key target of the Syrian government's latest military offensive.

At least 26 anti-government fighters were killed, most of them members of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a group that includes fighters from the former Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria.

The Observatory said 29 government troops and allied militia were also killed in the fighting.

The Syrian state news agency SANA later reported that at least four civilians were killed by rocket fire on the city of Aleppo.

Jihadist and rebel groups are present west of northern city, on which they routinely launch rocket attacks.

Record-baking effort

Sweet! Indian bakers make world's longest cake

Thrissur, India

It was a record-baking effort. Hundreds of bakers and chefs in southern India came together Wednesday to create what they said is the world's longest cake -- about 6.5 kilometres (four miles).

They spread chocolate ganache on the serpentine dessert stretched out on thousands

of tables and desks at a festival ground and adjoining roads in the coastal state of Kerala's Thrissur city.

The vanilla cake, four inches (10 centimetres) wide and thick, weighed in at about 27,000 kilograms (59,500 pounds).

About 1,500 bakers and chefs, wearing traditional whites and toque blanche caps, spent nearly four hours to put it together



The cake measures about 6.5 kilometres

using 12,000 kilograms of sugar and flour.

Large crowds watched the event organised by Bakers Association Kerala (BAKE).

The group's secretary general, Naushad, said Guinness World Records had assessed the cake as being 6,500 metres but their confirmation of the exact length was pending.