

De Vries lifts HH Shaikh Nasser Cup

Dutch jockey Adrie De Vries stole the show yesterday at Rashid Equestrian and Horseracing Club (REHC), winning three of the seven races including the main event for the HH Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa Cup. **P12**

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Drug-trafficking gang arrested

Manama

The Director-General of Criminal Investigation and Forensic Science yesterday announced the arrest of five members (Bahrainis and GCC nationals) of a drug trafficking gang.

Narcotics worth BD72,000 were confiscated, he said, noting that follow up operations led to the gang that is specialised in drug trafficking and dealing.

The gangsters were identified and arrested and Hashish and Shabu were seized from them.

Legal proceedings are being taken to refer the case to the Public Prosecution, he added.

Winning start for Bahrain

TDT | Manama

Hesham Sarhan buried a go-ahead three-pointer with 1.2 seconds remaining to lift Bahrain to a dramatic, come-from-behind 68-67 victory over India last night.

The result gave the Bahrainis a winning start to their qualifying campaign for the 2021 Fiba Asia Cup.

Sarhan fired in the winning basket from the left corner off an assist from court general Mohammed Hussain.

Bahrain's next qualifier is against Lebanon on Monday in Beirut. **Full report Page 12**



02 Hanau shooting condemned

03 New details on Lyrica peddling ring 'come to the fore' as trial progresses

04 Another 'impressive' drug seizure by HMS Montrose

210 fils (includes VAT)



US-Taliban truce paves the way for peace in Afghanistan

Kabul

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that a new truce with the Taliban is "an important step" as an agreed reduction in violence throughout the country took effect at midnight on Friday.

Spokesman for the Afghan National Security Council, Jawed Faisal, announced the truce would begin as planned, and said the council hoped the Taliban would "reduce violence as per the commitments".

The US and the Taliban have agreed to a seven-day reduction in violence ahead of signing a peace deal, which will pave the way to end America's longest



"This is an important step on a long road to peace and I call on all Afghans to seize this opportunity."

MR POMPEO

war in history - and almost two decades of US forces in Afghanistan.

"After decades of conflict, we have come to an understanding with the Taliban on a significant reduction in violence across Af-

ghanistan. This is an important step on a long road to peace and I call on all Afghans to seize this opportunity," Mr Pompeo said in a post on social media.

While a vague term, the agreement means that the Taliban

will not launch attacks in cities, on highways or against US bases, as well as the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. The US will monitor developments throughout the next seven days.

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg on Friday said a historic US-Taliban agreement had opened a route to sustainable peace in Afghanistan. "This could pave the way for negotiations among Afghans, sustainable peace, and ensuring the country is never again a safe haven for terrorists," Stoltenberg said in a statement.

Afghanistan's capital Kabul remained quiet after today's announcement.

If successful, the signing of

the peace deal will see the beginning of US troop withdrawal. It will also trigger direct talks between the Taliban and the US-backed Afghan government in an effort to secure lasting peace.

"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 US State Department said.

The 'inhuman act'

UK envoy slams Russian 'lack of humanity' in Syria

● **The envoy accused Assad of using the blocking of vital medical supplies to those in need.**

● **She called on Vladimir Putin and Assad to "end indiscriminate and inhumane attacks".**

London

Russia has been accused of a "lack of humanity" in the Syrian conflict by the UK's Ambassador to the UN Karen Pierce after it was revealed that more than half of displaced people in Idlib province are children.

Pierce said the UN had recently been given a "sobering and frightening" briefing about the humanitarian crisis in Syria, where nearly one million people have been forced to flee Idlib since Dec 1 amid attacks by regime forces supported by Russia.

She added that the report had revealed that more than 900,000



Thousands of people have fled Idlib province fearing a fully-fledged war.

people were in "grave danger" as they escaped from the attacks in freezing winter conditions. Around 60 per cent of that number are children.

Pierce, the UK's ambassador-designate to the US, has been consistently critical of Russia's involvement in the conflict, and accused Moscow of abusing the UN veto system to protect and

help Syrian President Bashar Assad, who she said was "attacking his own people."

She called on Russian President Vladimir Putin and Assad to "end indiscriminate and inhumane attacks" in the northwest of the country, which have led to innocent civilian casualties.

Pierce told Sky News: "I think it's cynical of the Russians. I

think it shows the lack of humanity. They would've seen the same footage and the scenes you've just shown your viewers, and yet they don't want to do anything to try to protect civilians."

She said the UN was ready and willing to back a cease-fire, but it could not happen until Moscow agreed to back it too.

"The UN wants to act and 13

900,000 people were in grave danger as they escaped from the attacks in freezing winter conditions, the envoy says.

members of the Security Council want to act, but we're stopped from acting because of Russia, supported by China," Pierce added.

"That's the main thing — to get the Russians to restrain the Syrians and stop aiding them in the bombings that they're doing, including the bombing of hospitals, which is against the Geneva Convention. Russia and the Syria regime don't really care what price has to be paid by civilians."

She also accused Assad of using the blocking of vital medical supplies to those in need as leverage in an attempt to regain control of rebel-held areas of the country.

PROBE ON

Qatar's BeIN chairman, two others indicted in bribery case

Geneva

Paris Saint-Germain president Nasser Al Khelaifi was charged yesterday by Swiss federal prosecutors in connection with a wider bribery investigation linked to World Cup television rights.

The office of Switzerland's attorney general filed an indictment charging Al Khelaifi with inciting former FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke

"to commit aggravated criminal mismanagement."

The Qatari football and television executive, however, no longer faces an accusation of bribery.

Following a three-year investigation, FIFA reached an "amicable agreement" with Al Khelaifi last month, prosecutors said, to drop its criminal complaint relating to the awarding of 2026 and 2030 World Cup rights to Qatari broadcaster



Mr Al Khelaifi is the head of Doha-based BeIN Sports.

BeIN Sports.

Mr Al Khelaifi is the head of Doha-based BeIN Sports and also a member of the UEFA executive committee.

Mr Al Khelaifi was indicted for his alleged part in providing Mr Valcke — who had influence over the awarding of World Cup rights until being removed from office in 2015 — with use of a luxury villa in Sardinia without paying rent valued at up to €1.8 million (\$1.94 million).

Mr Valcke was charged with accepting bribes, "several counts of aggravated criminal mismanagement ... and falsification of documents."

For the first time in the five-year investigation of FIFA business, Swiss prosecutors revealed that they believe Valcke received kickbacks totalling €1.25 million to steer World Cup rights toward favoured broadcasters in Italy and Greece.