

US Secretary of State John Kerry talks with members of his delegation after a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and other officials at the Beau Rivage Palace Hotel in Lausanne, Switzerland. Inset, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif (R) and Head of Iranian Atomic Energy Organization Ali Akbar Salehi (3R) talk while other members of their delegation listen. PHOTO: AFP



IRAN NUKE TALKS KEY ISSUES

BREAK-OUT TIME
The goal of the negotiations is an arrangement whereby Iran would need at least one year to produce enough fissile material -- high enriched uranium or plutonium -- for a single atomic weapon, should Tehran choose to produce one. That is known as the "break-out" time.

DURATION OF DEAL
US President Barack Obama has said that Iran will need to accept limits on its nuclear programme for at least 10 years. Recently Iran had wanted eight years and the US 20 years. They have compromised at 10 years.

URANIUM ENRICHMENT
Originally Iran wanted to maintain all of its uranium enrichment centrifuges, machines that purify uranium for use as fuel in power plants or, if very highly enriched, in weapons. That was around 10,000 operational out of nearly 20,000. The US and others wanted to reduce that number to several hundred. Now, Iran wants to keep around 9,000 while western officials are talking 6,000.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
Iran's desire to pursue research and development into advanced centrifuges is one of the biggest sticking points in the talks. Western powers are extremely uncomfortable with allowing Tehran to continue developing more efficient centrifuges that would shorten the break-out time.

PLUTONIUM
Western powers had originally wanted Iran to dismantle a heavy-water reactor at Arak that could yield significant quantities of plutonium. Tehran refused to do so but has agreed to the idea of converting or operating it in a way that ensures the amount of plutonium it could yield would be insignificant. Iran has also agreed not to pursue technology for extracting plutonium from spent fuel.

FORDOW
An underground enrichment plant that Iranian officials say they have agreed to convert into an R&D plant. Western officials would like this site converted into something that has nothing to do with enrichment.

STOCKPILES
Iran's uranium stockpiles are an important issue because the less uranium Tehran has on hand, the more centrifuges it can maintain. Originally, Iran wanted to enrich 2.5 tonnes per year, but could settle at half a tonne. Western officials say that allowing Iran to produce more than 250 kg a year would be problematic. The remainder would be relocated to Russia or another country.

SANCTIONS
The speed of lifting sanctions is another major sticking point in the talks. Iran wants all US, European Union and United Nations sanctions lifted immediately. US says sanctions should be lifted gradually. This has become a sensitive issue in the US, as Republicans have threatened to impose new sanctions on Tehran against the advice of Obama.

POSSIBLE MILITARY DIMENSIONS
The Western powers say it is vital that Iran fully cooperate with a U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) investigation into past nuclear activities that could be related to making weapons. Iran has said these "possible military dimensions" (PMD) are an issue it will not budge on.

MONITORING
Any deal would require a vigorous monitoring framework to ensure Iranian compliance. Iranian officials say they reject Western demands unlimited inspection powers for the IAEA.

PLANE CRASH IN FRENCH ALPS Probe eyes beyond co-pilot's illness

The personality of a co-pilot suspected of deliberately flying a Germanwings passenger jet into a mountainside in the Alps is a "serious lead" in the inquiry but not the only one, a French investigator said Saturday. "We have a certain number of elements which allow us to make progress on this lead, which is a serious lead but which can't be the only one," police chief Jean-Pierre Michel told AFP in the western German city of Duesseldorf. The investigation so far has not turned up a "particular element" in the life of co-pilot Andreas Lubitz which could explain his alleged action in the ill-fated Airbus plane, he added. The black box voice recorder indicates that Lubitz, 27, locked his captain out of the cockpit of the Germanwings jet and deliberately flew Flight 4U 9525 into a mountainside, French officials said. German prosecutors believe Lubitz hid an illness from his airline. They said Friday that searches of his homes netted "medical documents that suggest an existing illness and appropriate medical treatment", including "torn-up and current sick leave notes, among them one covering the day of the crash". They did not specify the illness but media reports say he was severely depressed.

Iran talks go into top gear

Reports says parties close in on 2-3 page nuke deal

REUTERS, Lausanne
Iran and major powers are close to agreeing a two-or three-page accord with specific numbers as the basis of a resolution of a 12-year standoff over Tehran's nuclear ambitions, officials have told Reuters. As the French and German Foreign Ministers arrived in Switzerland on Saturday to join talks between U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Western and Iranian officials familiar with the negotiations cautioned that they could still fail. Kerry and Zarif have been in Lausanne for days to try to reach an outline agreement by a self-imposed deadline of March 31 between Iran on the one hand and the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China on the other. "The sides are very, very close to the final step and it could be signed or agreed and announced verbally," a

senior Iranian official familiar with the talks told Reuters. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told reporters on arrival: "I hope we can get a robust agreement. Iran has the right to civil nuclear power, but with regard to the atomic bomb, it's 'no'." "The talks were long and difficult," he added. "We have moved forward on certain points, but on others not enough." The negotiations, under way for nearly 18 months, aim to hammer out an accord under which Iran, which denies any ambition to build nuclear weapons, halts sensitive nuclear work in exchange for the lifting of sanctions, with the ultimate aim of reducing the risk of a war in the Middle East. If agreed, the document would cover key numbers for a comprehensive agreement between Iran and the six powers, such as the maximum number and types of uranium enrichment centrifuges Iran could operate,

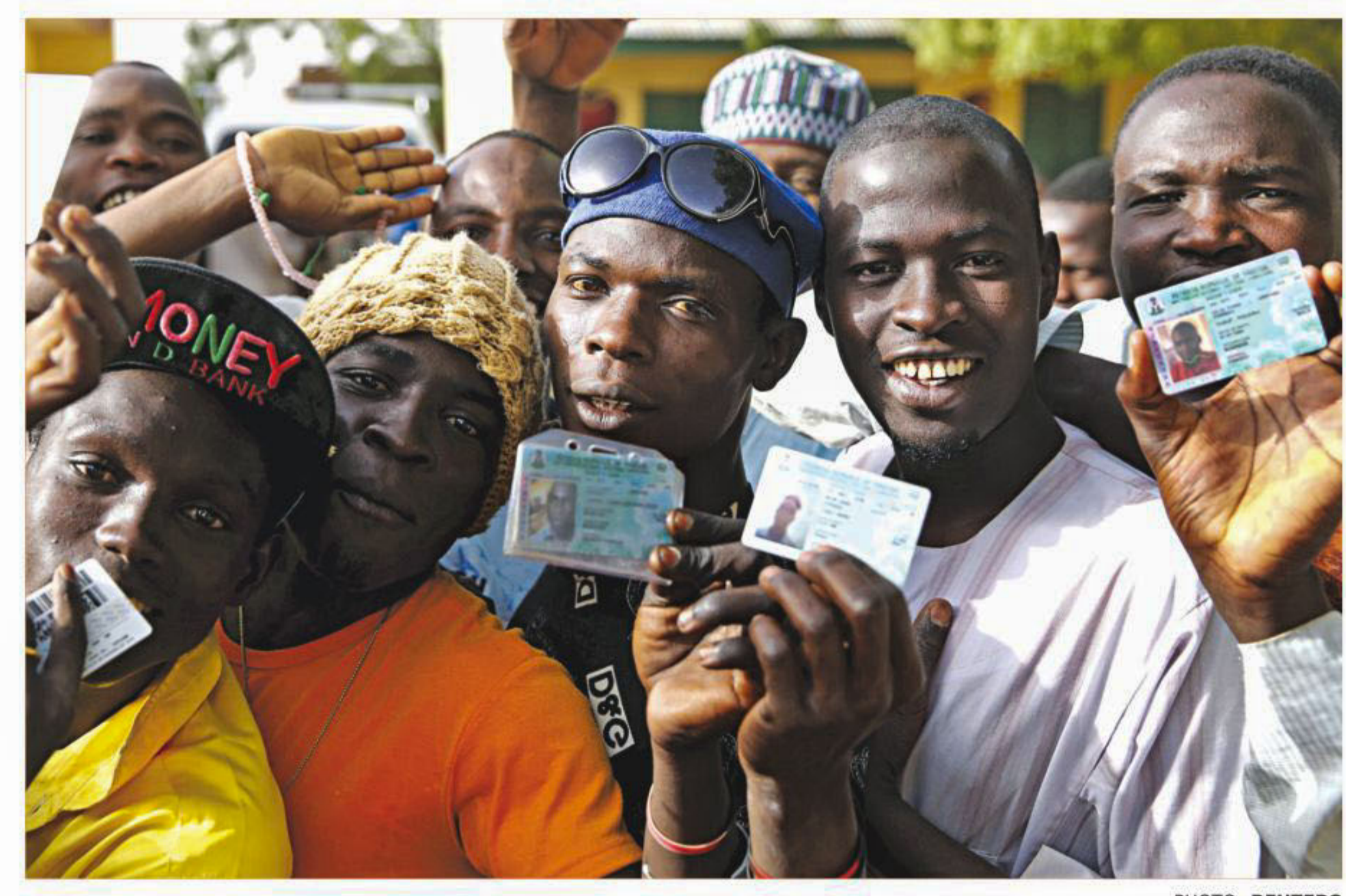
the size of uranium stockpiles it could maintain, the types of atomic research and development it could undertake, and details on the lifting of international sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy. One of the key numbers is expected to be the duration of the agreement, which the officials said would have to be in place for more than 10 years. Once it expired, there would probably be a period of special UN monitoring of Tehran's nuclear programme. The framework accord should be followed by a comprehensive deal by June 30 that includes full technical details on the limits set for Iran's sensitive nuclear activities. It remains unclear whether the framework deal will be formally signed or agreed verbally. The Iranians have expressed concern that a written agreement would limit their negotiating space when the technical details are worked out.

NEWS IN brief

UNSC holds Libya arms embargo in place
AFP, United Nations
The UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution on Friday to step up the fight against Islamic extremists in Libya but without lifting the arms embargo. Libya, backed by Egypt, had asked for an end to the arms embargo to allow the embattled government to build up its army and take on groups such as Islamic State (IS).
Somalia hotel attack toll hits 14
AFP, Mogadishu
The death toll in a gun and bomb attack by Somalia's al-Qaeda-affiliated Shebab militants on a Mogadishu hotel used by the country's leaders has risen to 14, police said yesterday. The war-torn country's ambassador to Switzerland was among the dead in Friday's dramatic assault on the Maka al Mukarama hotel, which is used by politicians, diplomats and businessmen, officials said.

Nigeria votes in key polls

Technical problems, violence extend voting
BBC ONLINE
Problems with new technology yesterday forced a 24-hour extension to the presidential election in Africa's most populous nation, Nigeria, and renewed Boko Haram violence hit the knife-edge vote. The delays were "not widespread" but were still "a matter of concern", an election official told the BBC. Technical problems with new biometric cards slowed down voter registration, even affecting President Goodluck Jonathan. More than 20 people have reportedly been killed in various attacks by unknown gunmen. Jonathan is facing a strong challenge from Muhammadu Buhari. The election is said to be the most closely fought since independence. It was postponed from mid-February to allow the army time to recapture territory from the Islamist militants of Boko Haram. The two main candidates had pledged to prevent violence during and in the aftermath of the elections. But several hours after voting started, reports came in of violent incidents at polling stations in which at least 24 were reported to have been killed. Thousands of Nigerians turned out to vote, despite threats from Boko Haram to disrupt the poll. "We have suffered enough, fled our homes after many attacks," said Roda Umar, a housewife from the former militant headquarters of Gwoza. "I'm ready to endure the pain to vote." Voters are also electing members of the house of representatives and the senate. Voters need to register using biometric cards with their fingerprints before they can cast their vote. However, there have been problems with card readers at many polling stations. President Jonathan tried for some 50 minutes to register in his home village of Otuoke, before coming back a second time. When the electronic registration failed again, he had to be accredited manually before casting his ballot paper. Problems were also reported from the north's biggest city of Kano, where thousands of voters waited for election officials and voting materials to arrive.



Men holds ID cards as they wait in line to register to vote in a polling station during elections in Kano, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Saudi envoy to return to Sweden

AFP, Stockholm
Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Sweden will soon return to Stockholm, Swedish officials said yesterday, more than two weeks after he was recalled home amid a diplomatic spat over human rights. The announcement followed a visit to Riyadh by Swedish government envoy Bjoern von Sydow on Friday, where he met with Saudi Arabia's King Salman.

Swedish MPs meet Snowden in Moscow

AFP, Stockholm
Three Swedish members of parliament met with fugitive US intelligence agent Edward Snowden at a secret location in Moscow on Friday to discuss mass surveillance, Swedish media reported.

Apple CEO to donate most of his fortune

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
The Apple CEO and multimillionaire Tim Cook will join Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and other members of the super-rich community donating most of their fortune to charity. Cook told Fortune magazine he plans to give away the majority of his wealth before he dies after paying for his ten-year-old nephew's university education and has already started quietly donating money to philanthropic causes. A substantial part of the 54-year-old's fortune is tied up in an Apple stock grant currently worth an estimated £570 million, which Cook received in 2011 when he succeeded Steve Jobs as Apple's chief executive, according to the Press Association. Cook's admission follows initiatives set by other executives to encourage the wealthiest to donate their money, such as those led by billionaire investor Warren Buffett and Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who jointly launched The Giving Pledge. Pledgers, such as Facebook founder Zuckerberg, commit to dedicating the majority of their wealth to philanthropy. Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan also recently donated a reported \$75 million (£50 million) to a San Francisco hospital. A forthcoming book about Jobs also includes the claim that Cook offered a partial liver transplant to Jobs after his health declined in 2009, an offer which he reportedly denied.



Tim Cook

US, allies target ISIS in Iraq

REUTERS, Washington
US and coalition forces conducted 18 air strikes against Islamic State fighters in Iraq during a 24-hour period, with eight strikes near militant-held Tikrit, the US military said yesterday. The Tikrit strikes destroyed 11 fighting positions, a vehicle, and a potential car bomb, it said in a statement. Some strikes also hit three Islamic State fighting and tactical units. Elsewhere in Iraq, forces struck targets near Fallujah, Mosul, Tal Afar, Ar Rutbah and Baiji, as well, it said. The strikes in Syria, all near Kobani, hit two Islamic State tactical units and destroyed two anti-aircraft machine guns, three vehicles and one excavator, according to a statement. Meanwhile, the head of the United Nations cultural body yesterday vowed in Baghdad to step up measures aimed at protecting Iraq's heritage, which has been systematically targeted by jihadist militants.

Amanda Knox acquitted of killing Meredith Kercher

AFP, Rome
Italy's top court has thrown out Amanda Knox's conviction for the 2007 murder of British student Meredith Kercher, bringing a sensational end to an eight-year legal drama that has gripped a global audience. Judges at the Court of Cassation on Friday also quashed all charges against Knox's Italian ex-boyfriend Raffaele Sollecito after ten hours of deliberations in Rome. Knox said she was "tremendously relieved and grateful" for the court's decision. "Meredith was my friend, she deserved so much in this life. I'm the lucky one," a tearful Knox told reporters in Seattle. The 27-year-old, who served four years in prison before being freed on appeal in 2011, said: "The knowledge of my innocence has given me strength in the darkest times of this ordeal." However Kercher's mother said she was "surprised and very shocked" at the ruling. Arline Kercher called the decision "odd" given the pair had been convicted twice following the British student's killing in 2007. Sollecito, 31, learned of the verdict at his home in Puglia in southern Italy, where he had driven after attending the final hearing in the high court review on Friday morning.

The shock verdict was greeted with chaotic, jubilant scenes in the great hall of the Roman courthouse. One of Knox's lawyers, Luciano Girgha, admitted he had been surprised by the verdict, but said it had restored the battered credibility of Italy's judicial system. Kercher, 21, died after being stabbed 47 times and having her throat slashed. Her half-naked body was found in a pool of blood in a back room of the house she shared with Knox.



Ivory Coast-born drifter Rudy Guede was jailed for the murder in 2008 but, in a judgement that was to have serious implications for Knox and Sollecito, the judge in his trial ruled that he could not have acted alone. Prosecutors maintained to the end that Knox and Sollecito fatally slashed Kercher while Guede held her down.

New Ebola treatment cures UK nurse

AFP, London
A British army reservist who contracted Ebola while working as a volunteer nurse in Sierra Leone has fully recovered after becoming the first patient in the world to receive an experimental new treatment. Anna Cross, 25, was discharged on Friday from the Royal Free Hospital in London where she was taken earlier this month after being evacuated from west Africa on a military plane. Doctors said the new treatment was produced in China and was similar to ZMapp, a cocktail of three antibodies that cling to the virus and inhibit its reproduction. Since the outbreak began in December 2013, 24,753 people in nine countries have been infected with the virus, and 10,236 of them have died, according to the latest figures. All but 15 of those deaths have occurred in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.