

TURKEY'S SYRIA OFFENSIVE
WORLD REACTIONS

World governments reacted with concern after Turkey launched a military offensive on Kurdish forces in northern Syria, while the UN Security Council plans to hold an emergency meeting to discuss the assault. Here are some of the initial comments following the start of the attack, called "Operation Peace Spring".

NATO, UN: 'ACT WITH RESTRAINT'
Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg urged Turkey, also a Nato to show "restraint", while acknowledging that Ankara had "legitimate security concerns". The UN Security Council's president, South African ambassador Jerry Matthews Matijila, also appealed to Turkey to "protect civilians" and exercise "maximum restraint".

TRUMP: 'BAD IDEA'
US President Donald Trump called the incursion into northern Syria a "bad idea". He insisted Washington "does not endorse this attack", despite having withdrawn US troops from the area in what was interpreted as a green light for Turkey to assault Kurdish militias previously allied with America.



RUSSIA: 'THINK CAREFULLY'
Ahead of the launch of the offensive, Russian President Vladimir Putin urged his Turkish counterpart President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to "think carefully" before taking any action "so as not to harm overall efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis". Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday said that Ankara and Damascus should discuss the issue of Kurdish forces in northeastern Syria directly, calling Turkey's cross-border assault a product of US policies.

EU: NO FUNDING FOR 'SAFE ZONE'
EU chief Jean-Claude Juncker demanded a halt to the operation, telling Ankara the bloc would not pay for any so-called "safe zone" that might be created. He told the European Parliament he recognised Turkey had "security concerns" along the border. But he warned that the military action would not lead to a "good result".

GERMANY: 'RISK OF RESURGENT IS'
Turkey "is willingly risking further destabilising the region and a resurgence of IS" (Islamic State) by attacking northeastern Syria, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said. Iraqi President Barham Saleh warned that Turkey's offensive would cause humanitarian suffering and "strengthen terrorist groups".

FRANCE: ASSAULT 'MUST STOP'
Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the assault against the Kurdish forces that led the fight against the Islamic State (IS) group in Syria "must stop" saying offensive risks undermining Europeans' security. France's foreign ministry summoned the Turkish ambassador to Paris to protest the offensive against Kurds in Syria.

UK: 'RISKS DESTABILISING THE REGION'
British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab expressed "serious concerns about the unilateral military action that Turkey has taken". The action "risks destabilising the region, exacerbating humanitarian suffering, and undermining the progress made against Daesh which should be our collective focus," he added in a statement.

ALREADY STRUGGLING POPULATION
The International Committee of the Red Cross said it was "deeply concerned that any escalation in the country's north-east could harm an already struggling population," stressing that "the humanitarian space" needs to be preserved.

CHINA: 'RESPECT' SYRIA'S SOVEREIGNTY
China said that Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity "must be respected". "China always believes that Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity must be respected and upheld," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a regular press conference yesterday.

Will flood EU with refugees

Threatens Erdogan over criticism of Turkey's Syria offensive against Kurdish forces

AFP, Ankara

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday warned the EU on that Ankara would allow millions of refugees to head to Europe if the bloc criticised Turkey's military offensive in Syria.

"Hey EU, wake up. I say it again: if you try to frame our operation there as an invasion, our task is simple: we will open the doors and send 3.6 million migrants to you," Erdogan said in a speech to his party.

Turkey launched an operation into Syrian territory on Wednesday, aimed at combating Kurdish militants tied to insurgents in its own territory.

Erdogan said 109 "terrorists" had been killed so far in the operation, which would soon cover ground from Manbij in northern Syria to the Iraqi border some 350 kilometres (220 miles) east.

"God willing, we will crush these snakes' heads quickly," he said.

"What we are trying to do is prevent the establishment of a terrorist state on our southern

Bipartisan US senators vow sanctions from hell to punish Ankara

Trump tries to defend his Syria decision by saying Kurds 'didn't help us' in WWII



border. This cannot happen."

Turkey currently hosts 3.6 million refugees from the eight-year conflict in Syria -- the highest number in the world.

Under a 2016 agreement with the EU, Turkey agreed to prevent refugees from leaving towards Europe in exchange for six billion euros and visa-free travel for its citizens, but has frequently criticised the lack of assistance from Brussels. EU has threatened to withhold 4 billion euros over the offensive.

One aim of the military operation is to establish a "safe zone" in which at least one million Syrian refugees can be repatriated, after the long-term presence of

refugees became an increasingly political liability.

Meanwhile, Turkey faced the threat of US "sanctions from hell".

Turkey pounded Syria with jets and artillery and sent in troops three days after Trump told his counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan that he would withdraw US troops effectively serving as a buffer.

While Trump has long sought to extricate the United States from Syria's civil war, his decision triggered furious criticism from US lawmakers hoping to protect the Kurdish forces, who led the fight against the Islamic State group in the country.

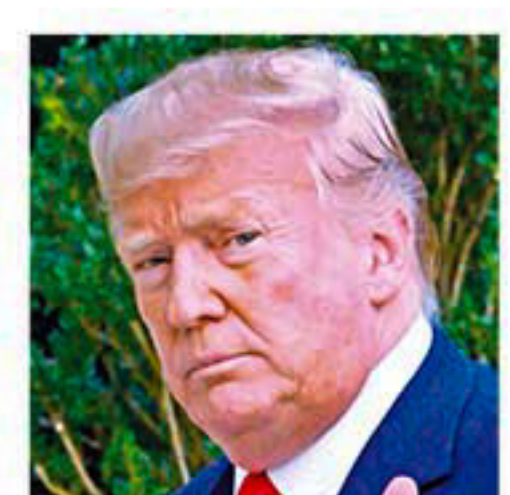
A bipartisan group of senators

introduced legislation that would freeze all US assets of Turkey's leadership, including Erdogan, and impose sanctions on entities that do business with Turkey's military until Ankara withdraws from Syria.

Lindsey Graham, a senior Republican senator who is usually a steadfast supporter of Trump, had warned Turkey of "sanctions from hell" if it went ahead with the invasion.

Faced with harsh rebukes, the mogul-turned-president -- already under pressure in an impeachment inquiry -- has sent mixed messages and threatened at the White House Wednesday to "wipe out" Turkey's economy if Ankara's assault was not carried out "in as humane a way as possible."

Again, he defended his decision to withdraw troops from Syria saying Kurds didn't "help us in Normandy". He was referring to Kurds role in World War II. But he also said the circumstances are different now as they are fighting for their land now.



US going into Middle East 'worst decision ever': Trump

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump said the US military becoming involved in the Middle East was the "worst decision ever made" and that he was ensuring the safe return of troops.

Trump has faced a bipartisan storm of criticism since a surprise announcement by the White House on Sunday that Washington was pulling back 50 to 100 "special operators" from Syria's northern frontier.

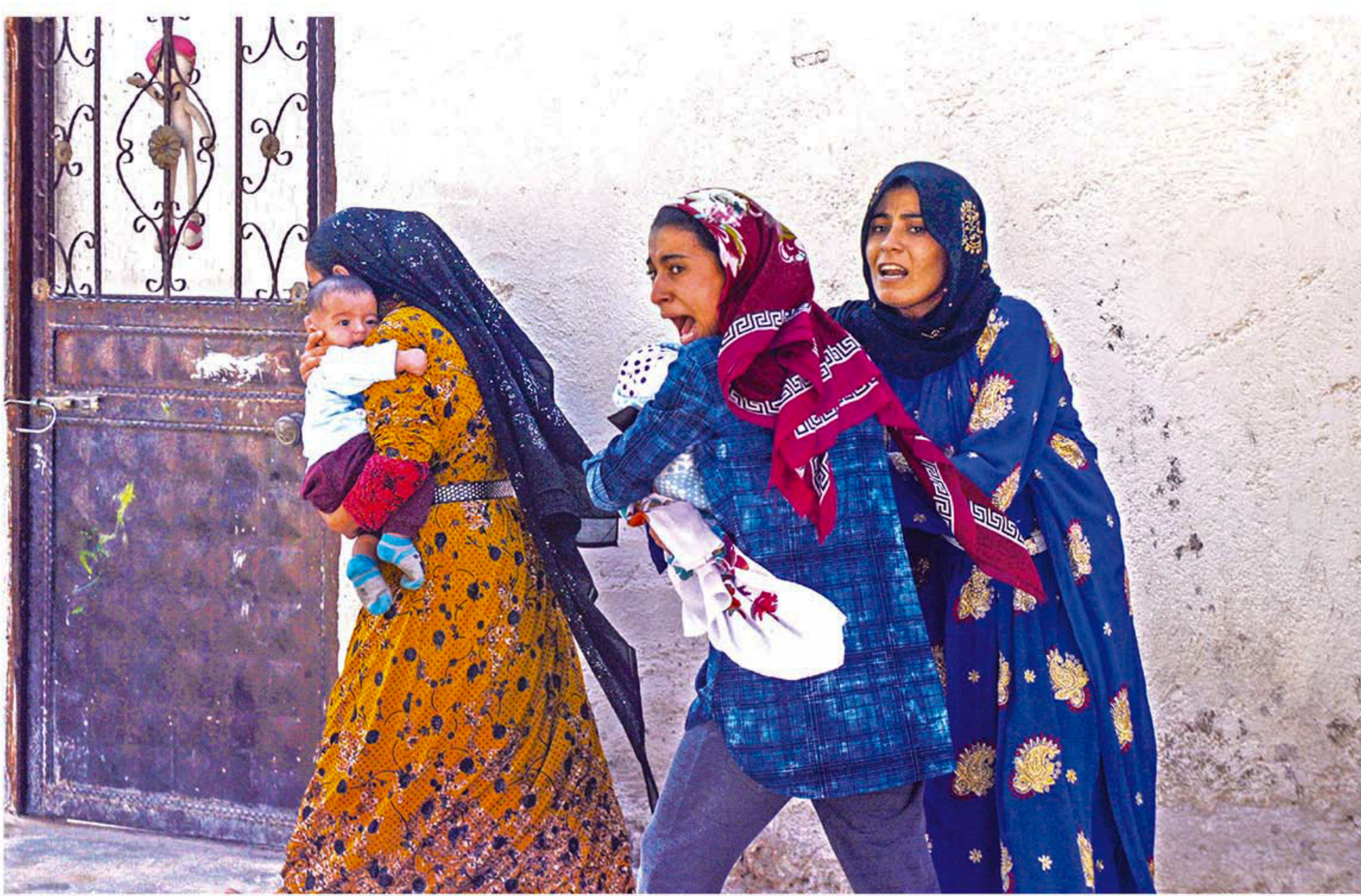
"GOING INTO THE MIDDLE EAST IS THE WORST DECISION EVER MADE IN THE HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY! We went to war under a false & now disproven premise, WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. There were NONE!" the president tweeted in reference to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

The United States is estimated to have between 60,000 and 80,000 troops across the area covered by US Central Command, which includes Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

Trump bemoaned what he called the "eight trillion-dollar" bill for "fighting and policing" in the Middle East, and the thousands of US soldiers who had been killed or wounded in battle.

"Now we are slowly & carefully bringing our great soldiers & military home. Our focus is on the BIG PICTURE! THE USA IS GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE!" Trump said.

Republicans savaged Trump Wednesday for allowing Turkey to attack US allies in Syria as the president offered varying reasons for giving Turkey the green light, including the fact that Kurds did not fight alongside the US in World War II.



Women run out of their home after a rocket fired from Syria landed in their neighborhood in the Turkish border town of Akcakale in Sanliurfa province, Turkey, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Impeachment probe should end

Says Trump after Ukraine president denies 'blackmail' by the US president; Biden joins impeachment call; Fox poll shows 51pc support impeachment

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump yesterday demanded that impeachment probe against him should end after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denied that Trump tried to blackmail him by withholding military aid to Kiev in a phone call between the two leaders.

"There was no blackmail," the comedian-turned-politician told a news conference. A transcript of the phone conversation on July 25 showed Trump asked Zelensky to investigate his political rival Joe Biden.

The US president's request that Zelensky probe the activities of Joe Biden's son Hunter has sparked an impeachment probe in the US, with the Democrats looking into whether Trump used a delayed aid package as leverage.

"Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told reporters Thursday his controversial July call with President Trump involved no bribe, blackmail or quid pro quo, as impeachment-minded Democrats claim," tweeted Trump.

"This should immediately end the talk

of impeachment!"

The development came a day after Democratic White House hopeful Joe Biden for the first time called for Trump's impeachment, saying the president "betrayed" the United States.

"To preserve our constitution, our



democracy, our basic integrity, he should be impeached," he said.

Trump wanted Kiev to investigate Hunter Biden's activities in Ukrainian gas firm Burisma.

"The story with Burisma has nothing to do with weapons," Zelensky told the press conference, held in a Kiev food court. The

sole aim of the phone call, he said, was to plan a meeting with Trump.

He added that there were no "conditions" from the US side to set up the meeting.

Meanwhile a poll by Fox News, a TV channel generally viewed as sympathetic to the president, showed that "a new high" of 51 percent of voters want Trump impeached and removed from office.

Having threatened a constitutional crisis by refusing to cooperate with the congressional investigation, Trump predicted that the row would end up "being a big Supreme Court case."

Even if the House impeaches Trump, it remains unlikely that the Republican-led Senate would convict him in the subsequent trial.

On Tuesday, the Trump administration blocked a potentially major witness, ambassador to EU Gordon Sondland, from testifying before Congress. Later the same day, the White House announced in a lengthy legal statement that it rejected any cooperation with the Democrats at all.

Saudi women now can join armed forces

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia announced Wednesday it will allow women in the ultra-conservative kingdom to serve in the armed forces as it embarks on a broad programme of economic and social reforms.

The move is the latest in a series of measures aimed at increasing the rights of women in the kingdom, even as rights groups accuse Riyadh of cracking down on women activists.

"Another step to empowerment," the foreign ministry wrote on Twitter, adding that women would be able to serve as private first class, corporal or sergeant.

Last year, Saudi Arabia authorised women to join its security forces.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, has approved a handful of reforms aimed at widening women's rights, including allowing them to drive and to travel abroad without consent from a male "guardian".

But he has at the same time overseen the arrest of several prominent women's rights campaigners, including activist Loujain al-Hathloul.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest crude exporter, is pushing to improve its image and attract tourists as part of a plan to diversify its economy away from oil.

In a reform drive, Saudi Arabia on Sunday announced it would allow unmarried foreign couples to rent hotel rooms together as the ultraconservative kingdom begins offering up tourist visas for the first time.



Mourners gather at the market square in Halle, Germany yesterday, after two people were killed in a shooting. The gunman, Stephan B., suspected of attacking a German synagogue wanted to commit a massacre and incite others by live-streaming his deadly rampage, Germany's federal prosecutor said yesterday. Sources say Stephan B., a man who was influenced by scary anti-Semitism, xenophobia and racism, was heavily armed with many weapons. Investigators found 4 kilograms of explosives in his car.

PHOTO: REUTERS

British, Irish PMs say could see 'pathway' to Brexit deal

AFP, Birkenhead

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his Irish counterpart Leo Varadkar said they could see a route towards striking a possible Brexit divorce deal, following a crunch meeting yesterday.

"Both continue to believe a deal is in everybody's interest. They agreed that they could see a pathway to a possible deal," the pair said in a joint statement.

There are just days left to strike a deal. The agreement must be signed off at an October 17-18 EU summit and European officials want the negotiations to conclude in advance.

Britain is scheduled to leave the European Union on October 31, more than three years after triggering Brexit in a national referendum.

The key sticking point in the tortuous negotiations is the future arrangements on the currently invisible land border between the UK province of Northern Ireland and EU member the Republic of Ireland.

Johnson and Varadkar said they had "detailed and constructive" talks at a venue in Birkenhead, outside Liverpool in northwest England.

"Their discussions concentrated on the challenges of customs and consent," their statement said.

"They also discussed the potential to strengthen bilateral relations, including on Northern Ireland."

"They agreed to reflect further on their discussions and that officials would continue to engage intensively on them."

Yemen risks becoming the poorest country: UN

War-ravaged Yemen is on course to become the world's poorest country if the conflict persists, the United Nations said in a report. "If fighting continues through 2022, Yemen will rank the poorest country in the world, with 79 percent of the population living under the poverty line and 65 percent classified as extremely poor," according to the United Nations Development Programme report, published Wednesday. Because of the war, poverty in Yemen has jumped from 47 percent of the population in 2014 to a projected 75 percent by the end of 2019. Yemen plunged into war after Huthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa in late 2014. A Saudi-led military coalition launched a blistering offensive months later to support the government there against the Iran-aligned insurgents. The fighting has since killed tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, and pushed Yemen to the brink of famine.

Number of China's ultra-wealthy dwindles in 2019

The number of ultra-wealthy individuals dipped in China this year, a report said yesterday, as the government seeks to rebalance the economy and tackle high levels of toxic debt. Those listed as the wealthiest -- with holdings worth at least 2 billion yuan (\$281 million) -- fell to 1,819 this year, down from 1,893 last year, according to data compiled by the Hurun Report. Jack Ma, the founder of e-commerce behemoth Alibaba who stepped aside in September, retained the top spot for a second year with \$39 billion in personal wealth. He was closely followed by Pony Ma, chairman and chief executive of Tencent, who has personal wealth of \$37 billion. China now has 62 billionaires measured in US dollars, and 32 of those have more than \$10 billion.

In a first, Singapore to ban ads for very sugary drinks



Singapore will become the first country in the world to ban ads for the most unhealthy sugary drinks in its latest move to combat rising diabetes rates, the health ministry said yesterday. Products deemed "less healthy" must now display labels grading their nutritional and sugar content, with those considered to be most unhealthy banned from appearing in ads across all media platforms, including broadcast, print and online channels. It added that the measures were only a start and it will continue to explore the possibility of a sugar tax or ban.

SOURCE: AFP