



Sri Lanka Police Special Task Force (STF) soldiers stand during a passing out parade in Katukurunda yesterday, some 40 km south of Colombo. — AFP

Qatar's beIN targets piracy with 'reveal all' website

DOHA: Qatar's beIN media group yesterday stepped up its campaign against alleged Saudi-backed piracy, launching a website exposing what it says is wide-scale theft of its programs. The "reveal all" beoutq.tv website went live with the aim of holding the pirate operation to account, a statement said. "What started out as a concerted and targeted campaign against beIN has now morphed into the largest commercial theft that's ever been seen in the world of sport and entertainment," Tom Keaveny, beIN's managing director in the Middle East region, said in the statement. "This Saudi-supported plague of piracy represents an existential threat to the economic model of the industry."

The website details programs being illegally broad-

cast in more than 20 countries, a timeline of events and points the finger at several prominent Saudi figures under the headline: "The Saudi State-Supported Piracy of World Sport and Entertainment". beIN has previously alleged that since Aug 2017 a vast and sophisticated Saudi bootlegging network known as "beoutQ" had been transmitting its stolen programs via Riyadh-based satellite provider Arabsat.

In October, beIN launched a compensation claim worth \$1 billion against the Saudi piracy channel while Qatar filed an action at the World Trade Organization. But no progress has been reported so far. FIFA and the English Premier League said they were preparing to take legal action in Saudi Arabia against the pirates.

Saudi Arabia has denied the claims and even said the piracy was operating out of Cuba.

beIN's website launch was backed by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) and another service provider, Eleven Sports. The CAF said in a statement that only it holds the rights to matches played in its competitions and "strongly condemned" beoutQ's "major piracy operation". It added it would "take all necessary" steps if any of its matches were pirated. London-based Eleven, which has rights in the UK to football matches from major European leagues including Spain's La Liga and Italy's Serie A, tweeted that it stood "shoulder-to-shoulder" with the Qataris. "Piracy is one of the greatest threats to the future of

the sports and entertainment industry and we stand against it in all forms," said Eleven Sports.

The latest beIN move comes amid a 19-month economic and diplomatic boycott of Qatar by Saudi Arabia and its allies which accuse Doha of backing terrorism and seeking closer ties with rival Iran. Qatar has refuted the claims. The website was launched on the day the Italian Supercoppa is played in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea city of Jeddah, which beIN has called on to be moved elsewhere because of the piracy issue. And on Thursday Qatar and Saudi Arabia meet in a politically charged Asian Cup football match in the United Arab Emirates, which backs Riyadh in the diplomatic dispute. — AFP

IS attack kills US forces in...

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A US official had earlier told Reuters four US troops had been killed and three wounded in the blast. Others said only two had been killed. "The information I have is news pointing toward that there are five US soldiers and 20 died in total," Erdogan said in a news conference with the Croatian president in Ankara. Erdogan said he did not believe the attack would impact Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria - "because I saw honorable Trump's determination on this point," he said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said two American soldiers, nine Syrian civilians, and five US-backed fighters were killed in the attack on a restaurant in Manbij. Rubble littered the outside of the eatery in the city center and its facade was blackened by the blast, footage from a Kurdish news agency showed. According to Pentagon statistics, yesterday's blast was the deadliest attack for US coalition forces in Syria since they deployed in 2014. The US Department of Defense only reported two previous US nationals being killed in combat in Syria, in two separate incidents. The Britain-based Observatory, which relies on a network of sources in Syria, said it was the first such suicide attack in the city in 10 months.

Speaking at a gathering in Washington of US ambassadors, Vice President Mike Pence did not comment on the attack and just said that the United States would ensure the defeat of IS, also known as ISIS. "We'll stay in the region and we'll stay in the fight to ensure that ISIS does not rear its ugly head again," he said. The bombing comes as Syrian Kurds present in areas around Manbij reject any Turkish presence in a planned "safe zone" to include Kurdish-held areas along the frontier.

Turkey has repeatedly threatened to attack Washington's Syrian Kurdish allies who Ankara views as "terrorists" on its southern flank. Washington, which has relied heavily on the Kurds in its campaign against IS in Syria, has sought guarantees for their safety after Trump's pullout announcement. On Tuesday, Erdogan said Ankara would set up a "security zone" in northern Syria following a suggestion by Trump.

But senior Kurdish political leader Aldar Khalil said any Turkish deployment in Kurdish-held areas was

"unacceptable". He said the Kurds would accept the deployment of UN forces along a separation line between Kurdish fighters and Turkish troops. But "other choices are unacceptable as they infringe on the sovereignty of Syria and the sovereignty of our autonomous region," Khalil told AFP. The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) have been a key US ally in the fight against IS.

They have taken heavy losses in a campaign now nearing its conclusion, with the militants confined to an ever-shrinking enclave of just 15 sq km. But the militants have continued to claim attacks nationwide and abroad. Ankara has welcomed Washington's planned withdrawal of some 2,000 US troops from Syria, but the future of Kurdish fighters has poisoned relations between the NATO allies. On Monday, Erdogan and Trump had a telephone conversation to ease tensions after the US leader threatened to "devastate" Turkey's economy if Ankara attacked Kurdish forces in Syria, and called for a "safe zone".

Erdogan said he and Trump had a "quite positive" conversation in which they spoke of "a 20-mile (30-km) security zone along the Syrian border... set up by us". The YPG-led forces fighting IS in a statement said they would provide "necessary support to set up the safe zone" - if it came with international guarantees to "prevent any outside interference", in an apparent reference to Turkey.

The Turkish army has launched two major operations in Syria in recent years, with the latest seeing Turkish troops and their Syrian rebel allies seizing the northwestern enclave of Afrin from the Kurds last year. Critics have accused Turkish troops and their proxies of military occupation of Syrian sovereign territory. But while Ankara has spoken of a YPG-free "security zone" under its control, analyst Mutlu Civiroglu said it was not immediately clear what the US president meant by a "safe zone", or who he thought would patrol it.

Analysts were "waiting for a clarification from Washington to see what the president really meant", he told AFP. The US planned withdrawal has sent the Kurds scrambling to seek a new ally in Damascus, which has long rejected Kurdish self-rule. With military backing from Russia since 2015, Syria's regime has advanced against the militants and rebels, and now controls almost two-thirds of the country. A northwestern enclave held by militants and pockets held by Turkish troops and their allies remain beyond its reach, along with the much larger Kurdish region. Yesterday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the Syrian government must take control of the north. — AFP

MP Ali Al-Deqbasi yesterday said that the new early retirement law which is being worked out in the Assembly will make available 15,000 jobs for Kuwaitis. The law allows Kuwaiti male and female civil servants to seek retirement ahead of time but without losing most of their pension benefits. The law is the subject of controversy between MPs and the government over its cost to the pension fund. The statements came as new official statistics revealed that the number of unemployed Kuwaitis has reached 15,000. The report said 101,000 foreigners are employed in the government against close to 300,000 Kuwaitis. MPs are pressing the government to replace a majority of expatriate employees in the government with Kuwaitis.

Constitutional court to review...

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pace of legislation. Ghanem chaired a meeting on Monday of 26 MPs representing heads and rapporteurs of Assembly panels and decided to form a new committee to coordinate to accelerate approving legislation. Ghanem said yesterday the priorities committee will continue to carry out its job and the new panel is not a replacement.

Nike unveils self-lacing next-gen shoes

NEW YORK: In the 1980s, the "Back to the Future" film franchise suggested we would all eventually wear self-lacing sneakers. Then a few years ago, Nike made the movie magic a reality, introducing its first shoe to the public with so-called "power lacing". And on Tuesday, the global sportswear giant took it a step farther - now your shoes will automatically loosen or tighten when you step into them, and then adapt based on your activity.

Wait for it - the Nike Adapt BB shoes, which go

on sale on Feb 17 for \$350 in the United States, are controlled by the touch of a button or a smartphone app. "We picked basketball as the first sport for Nike Adapt intentionally because of the demands that athletes put on their shoes," Eric Avar, Nike VP creative director of innovation, said in a statement. Using a custom motor and gear train, "Adapt" technology enables the shoe to be automatically adjusted to the foot.

The app allows the player to load in different fit preferences - for example, game play versus a timeout. Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum is the first pitchman for the new shoe. "That the app allows the ability to put the shoe on and touch the button, change the colors, see the percentage on the battery...it's just cool," Tatum said in a statement. Nike says it plans to bring the system to shoes for other sports. — AFP

Kenya says all five gunmen...

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"I can confirm that... the security operation at Dusit complex is over and all the terrorists eliminated," Kenyatta said in a televised address to the nation early yesterday. "As of this moment, we have confirmation that 14 innocent lives were lost to the... terrorists, with others injured." The Kenyan Red Cross said "at least 30" wounded had been admitted to hospital.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable of condolences to Kenyatta over the attack. Praying for Allah Almighty to bestow mercy upon the dead and wishing a speedy recovery for the wounded, HH the Amir expressed Kuwait's utmost condemnation for the ever unjustified terrorism in all its forms. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Kenyatta.

George Kinoti, the director of criminal investigations, told AFP that "two principal suspects" had been arrested. One was arrested in the suburb of Eastleigh and the other in Ruaka, northwest of Nairobi, where officers raided a house where one of the attackers lived, he said. "One of the men was identified by locals, who called police, and they have confirmed that he lived there with his wife," a police source said on condition of anonymity.

CCTV footage broadcast on local media showed four black-clad, heavily armed men entering the complex on Tuesday afternoon. A suicide bomb blast signalled the start of the attack. A police source said two attackers were shot dead yesterday morning after a prolonged shootout. "The two have red bandanas tied around their forehead and bullets strapped around their chest with several magazines each," the senior police officer said. "Each had an AK47 which has been secured."

The attack began at about 3 pm (1200 GMT) on Tuesday, with a loud blast followed by gunfire and rapid calls for help spreading on Twitter. Boinnet earlier said the attack began with an explosion targeting three cars in the parking lot and a suicide bombing in the hotel foyer.

Police sources and a mortuary official had previously reported 15 dead. Among the dead was an American citizen, identified by his family as Jason Spindler, whose brother said on Facebook that he had been a survivor of the Sept 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.

The British Foreign Office confirmed the death of a British-South African dual national and said another British person was injured. A mortuary official said there were also 11 Kenyan victims, one with no papers. The morgue was also holding an unidentified torso of a male adult, he said. It was a tormented night for families of those trapped as they waited outside the hotel while sporadic gunfire rang out. After dawn, explosions and shooting intensified until the complex was secured mid-morning.

In downtown Nairobi, dozens of people lined up to give blood at a memorial for the US Embassy destroyed in an Al-Qaeda attack in 1998 in which 213 people died. As the first explosion and gunfire rang out in the leafy Westlands suburb, hundreds of terrified office workers barricaded themselves in the complex while others fled. Distraught family members arrived at a nearby mortuary yesterday, where they said they had not been permitted to view the bodies.

"My sister is not in any of the hospitals and the last time we spoke she was a bit calm but suddenly she started crying and shouting and I could hear gunshots and her phone remained on but she wasn't speaking," said a woman who gave her name as Njoki. "We have no doubt her body is here. Let them allow us in", she said, weeping. Francis Magutu, 35, said he had been at the morgue since 6 am. "I am almost certain that my in-law is dead, but I want us to see his body, because we want to be certain."

The attack sparked a wave of outrage abroad, from UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and African Union chief Moussa Faki to the European Union. At home, an editorial in the Daily Nation newspaper said the attack was a stark reminder that Kenya's security challenges were far from over. The last major attack in the country took place in 2015, when Shabaab killed 148 people at the university in Garissa, eastern Kenya. Since then sporadic attacks have targeted security forces mostly in the remote northeastern parts of the country. "Just when we thought that things were calm, the gangs unleashed mayhem. For Kenyans the chilling reality is that the attacks are not ceasing," read the editorial. — Agencies