

'WORLD'S HEAVIEST WOMAN' TO FLY TO INDIA FOR SURGERY

MUMBAI: An Egyptian believed to be the world's heaviest woman will fly to India for weight reduction surgery today after intervention from the country's foreign minister ensured her a visa. Eman Ahmed Abd El Aty, aged 36 and weighing around 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds), is slated to arrive in India's financial capital Mumbai in the early hours of today, Muffazal Lakdawala, her doctor, said in a statement. She will be flown on a specially modified Airbus and will be taken to Mumbai's Saifee Hospital upon arrival, the statement said. "To prepare her (Eman) for the flight, a team of doctors has been in Egypt for the last ten

days to optimise the conditions for her travel," the statement said.

Abd El Aty's sister had approached Lakdawala in October saying her sibling needed urgent medical attention. Her family told the doctor that as a child she was diagnosed with elephantiasis, a condition that causes the limbs and other body parts to swell, leaving her almost immobile. She later suffered a stroke and was rendered bedridden, triggering a series of ailments including diabetes, high blood pressure, hypertension and sleep apnoea.

After hearing about her case Lakdawala had offered to carry out the

procedure free of charge. Her request for a visa was initially rejected, prompting Lakdawala in December to tweet a request for help to India's foreign minister Sushma Swaraj. At the time Swaraj was in hospital awaiting a kidney transplant but was quick to respond with an offer of help. Abd El Aty has had a long wait as no airliners were previously willing to fly her from Egypt to India owing to her health complications.

"...Transporting Eman to Mumbai is a challenging task keeping in mind the complexities of her case as she is a high risk patient who has not been able to move or leave the house for the

past 25 years," the surgeon said. If Abd El Aty's weight claims are proven medically, she will beat Pauline Potter (643 pounds) from the United States to become the world's heaviest woman alive. Bariatric surgery is essentially a stomach-shrinking bypass procedure carried out on those wanting to lose excessive weight.

It is increasingly common in India, which has a growing problem with obesity, particularly in urban areas. India is a key destination for medical tourists because it offers quality services at a fraction of the cost of western countries and no waiting lists. —AFP



MEXICO: View of a group of monarch butterflies in the snow at the Ocampo community, Michoacan state, Mexico on March 11, 2016. —AFP

TRUMP WALL COULD HARM BUTTERFLY'S MIGRATION: MEXICAN OFFICIAL

MEXICO CITY: The monarch butterfly population dropped by a quarter in its Mexican wintering grounds this season and US President Donald Trump's planned wall could affect its migration from Canada, Mexican authorities said Thursday. The orange and black butterfly covered 2.91 hectares (7.2 acres) of pine and fir forest in the 2016-2017 season, compared to 4.01 hectares the previous year, a 27.4 percent decline, the government said. The monarch population is estimated by the area of forest it occupies in the states of Mexico and Michoacan, where it overwinters.

Last year, cold fronts and snow slammed 100 hectares of woods in the central mountains where the butterfly spends the winter months after traveling

4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles) across Canada and the United States. "The causes for this drop are mainly the extreme climate events," Alejandro Del Mazo, Mexico's commissioner for protected areas, said at a news conference. "There were deaths of monarch butterflies in the previous season, and this, without a doubt, is one of the main causes for the reduction" this year, Del Mazo said.

The butterfly's population had rebounded last year, but some seven percent were killed in a storm in March, around the time they make their journey back across the United States. Del Mazo warned that the butterfly's survival could be threatened by the massive wall that Trump says he plans to build across the 3,000-kilometer border. The barrier could

change the natural markers that guide the insect across the border, he said. "Without a doubt, fragmenting the habitats and maybe causing changes to the tributaries and rivers that we share with the United States could have an impact," Del Mazo said.

"Along its route, this insect also needs to identify refuges, climate events and water that, if altered, could have some impact, but it's very early to say," he cautioned. The monarch has been threatened by illegal logging in its Mexican habitat and the use of herbicides in fields of milkweed—the plant that it feeds on when in caterpillar form—in the United States and Canada. Mexico's government has deployed a special police unit in the mountains to find illegal sawmills. —AFP

TRUMP REMARKS LATEST EVIDENCE OF HEALTH LAW REPEAL SLOWDOWN

WASHINGTON: A House conservative leader called Monday for votes "as soon as possible" on legislation voiding and replacing the health care law, even as President Donald Trump's latest remarks conceded that the effort could well stretch into next year.

"Maybe it will take till sometime into next year, but we are certainly going to be in the process," Trump said in an interview with Fox News' Bill O'Reilly that was broadcast Sunday. While saying he expected something "fairly soon," he added, "I would like to say by the end of the year, at least the rudiments. But we should have something within the year and the following year."

The comments come as congressional Republicans continue laboring to deliver on a promise they've been making for years: that they will repeal President Barack Obama's 2010 health care overhaul and replace it with an alternative.

They also come as constituents supporting Obama's law have made life uncomfortable back home for some Republican lawmakers. Reps. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., and Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., faced pointed questions from voters in recent days in scenes reminiscent of 2009, when tea party voters noisily confronted congressional Democrats at town hall meetings.

Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, said late Monday that there's "growing consensus" among members of the hard-line conservative group for quick votes on repealing Obama's statute and replacing it that would be held simultaneously, or at worst within days of each other.

"Repeal and replace as soon as possible gives us a lot more credibility" with voters, Meadows said in an interview after his group discussed their health care strategy in an evening meeting without approving a formal position. Meadows, whose organization claims around 40 House GOP lawmakers as members, said delays in producing a Republican replacement plan create "unnecessary anxiety on behalf of our constituents."

Tax-advantaged

Meadows said Rep. Mark Sanford, R-SC, is working on legislation similar to a bill by Sen Rand Paul, R-Ky, that's winning support among conservatives. That measure would eliminate requirements in current law that insurance policies cover specified benefits such as maternity and mental health; expand tax-advantaged health savings accounts and let insurers sell policies across state lines.

A House health subcommittee planned Tuesday votes on a pair of minor bills making it harder for people to avoid counting some forms of income - including lottery winnings - used to determine if they qualify for Medicaid, the health program for low-income people. —AP