

## Florida gov signs gun-safety bill into law after shooting

FORT LAUDERDALE: Florida Governor Rick Scott, a staunch ally of the National Rifle Association (NRA), signed into law on Friday a bill imposing a 21-year-old legal age requirement and three-day waiting period on all gun purchases and allowing the arming of some school employees. Within hours, the NRA filed a court challenge to provisions raising the legal age for buying a rifle or shotgun, asserting that the higher requirement - consistent with the minimum age nationally for handgun purchases - violates the US Constitution.

Final passage of the bill by state lawmakers came three weeks to the day after a gunman opened fire with a semiautomatic assault-style rifle at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public in Parkland, Florida, killing 14 students and three faculty members. Swift action in the Republican-controlled statehouse, where the powerful NRA gun lobbying organization has long held sway, was propelled in large part by an extraordinary counter-lobbying campaign waged by young survivors from the massacre and parents of the victims.

The Parkland massacre and response to it by Florida lawmakers signaled a possible turning point in the national debate between advocates for tougher firearms restrictions and proponents of the right to bear arms as enshrined in the Second Amendment of the US Constitution. Gun control supporters said the tragedy - the deadliest US high school shooting ever - has given new momentum to firearms-safety measures pending in at least two dozen states, many in solidly conservative parts of the nation.

"Today should serve as an example to the entire country that government can and must move fast," Scott said in remarks before the signing, surrounded by survivors of the shooting and their families. One of them, Andrew Pollack, whose daughter Meadow was among those killed, hailed the bill as "a start". "We're going to work on moving forward and hitting every other state to make sure they follow the lead of

Florida," he told reporters.

Scott, a Republican who received the NRA's endorsement as governor and its highest rating for supporting the rights of gun owners, said the bill represented a compromise balancing concerns on both sides of the gun debate. The NRA's lawsuit, filed in US District Court in Tallahassee, said that barring adults under the age of 21 from buying rifles was unconstitutional, violating both the Second Amendment and Americans' 14th Amendment rights to equal protection under the law. A statement issued earlier by the NRA had derided the higher minimum age and new waiting period for rifle sales as a prescription that "punishes law-abiding gun owners for the criminal acts of a deranged individual."

Still, other states appeared ready to follow Florida's lead on at least some new gun-safety measures. Five states - Alabama, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Utah - have seen so-called "red flag" bills introduced since the Florida massacre to make it easier for police to confiscate weapons from someone found to pose a threat of violent behavior, according to Kristin Brown, co-president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. Such a provision was included in the Florida package enacted on Friday.

The legislation, while containing a number of other provisions student activists and their parents from Parkland had embraced, left out one of their chief demands - a ban on assault-style weapons like the one used in the Feb 14 rampage.

The bill also was controversial for including provisions allowing school staff to be specially trained and deputized to carry guns on the job as campus "guardians", though local sheriffs and individual school districts may opt out of the program if they wish. Most classroom teachers are excluded from volunteering for the program, a compromise aimed at earning the support of the governor, and many lawmakers, who opposed the idea.

"My daughter is a teacher, and I believe teachers should teach," governor said. The bill left only non-teacher staff eligible to participate, such as administrators, guidance counselors, librarians and coaches. Florida now joins at least six other states - Georgia, Kansas, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and Wyoming - with laws allowing public school employees to carry firearms to work, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. — Reuters

## Madagascar's hidden battle...

Continued from Page 1

Leprosy was initially recorded in the first century and had almost disappeared from Europe by the 18th century, with only a handful of areas still affected thereafter, mostly in Africa, Southeast Asia and South America. More than 200,000 new cases are identified every year, according to the latest World Health Organization figures. The condition, which spreads via nasal fluids but is not highly contagious, can be treated with a months-long cocktail of drugs.

Ilena is now home to over 400 people, including more than 100 children, all mingling and living together as a community but totally isolated from the rest of society. The residents survive by growing food and rearing livestock as well as producing their own charcoal. Nobody ever leaves, except by dying, they say.

"This village has become a ghetto. Nobody comes or goes from here," Sister Damien Koenig said calmly. She is one of the nuns who have run Ilena for decades. "When we arrived, we tried to explain that leprosy is not a shameful condition, that those infected should not be embarrassed, that they could go out," she added. "But none of the young men or women can find partners on the outside."

Madagascans tend to be extremely proud of their tradition of community support, solidarity and loyalty, described by the catch-all local term "fihavanana". But those living with leprosy are excluded, and face fierce discrimination. In Marana, another village for those afflicted by leprosy in the same region as Ilena, the residents' treatment from outside typifies the prejudice faced by sufferers.

The community has had to be relocated three times due to hostility from people living in Fianarantsoa. Marana's 80 residents are now hidden by a ring of trees that shield them from outside view. "When we leave a leper colony, it's difficult to reintegrate into society," said one of them, 61-year-old Robert Razafimahatratra, sighing as he spoke.

"Even my family keep their distance from me. That's what upsets me most - not the illness, but the fact that my family rejected me. It's a mixture of shame, confusion and fear," said Harisoa Marline, another infected resident. "That's my own family, my own blood, who did that." A combination of poverty and limited access to healthcare is to blame for the continued presence of leprosy on Madagascar, an Indian Ocean island nation, which tends to rank among the three worst countries in Africa for new infections.

"Madagascar sees 1,500 new leprosy cases every year," said the head of the health ministry's anti-leprosy programme Andriamirana Andrianatoandro, adding he regretted the "ostracism and exclusion" faced by those living with leprosy. Early diagnosis is crucial to limiting the spread of the infection as there is not yet a vaccine, but identification of leprosy often comes too late - if at all.

"We never give a leprosy diagnosis in the village," said Sister Sabine Ramasinoro, one of the nuns responsible for running Marana. "To prevent people running away, we just say that we're there to care for them. A farmer in the bush has no incentive to get a leprosy diagnosis of their irritable skin lesions," said Bertrand Cauchoix, a doctor at the Raoul Follereau Foundation, one of the leading contributors to the fight against the condition. "They won't get a diagnosis because then they'll have a disability and will have probably infected someone else."

To help detect undiagnosed cases, Cauchoix has put in place programs to address skin conditions although has struggled to break through the widespread apathy. — AFP

## Kim an enigma for Washington...

Continued from Page 1

questioned whether Kim is getting "sound advice" from those around him. Scott Snyder, a Korea specialist at the Council on Foreign Relations, said that the past few weeks, in which North Korea joined the Winter Olympics in South Korea, invited Seoul officials to Pyongyang, and then offered to freeze nuclear and missile tests for talks with Trump, was possible evidence that Kim may have wised up. "He's definitely getting some good advice from somewhere now," he told AFP. He noted that Kim's offer came before he had fully demonstrated he could bomb the United States. That could have been a red line for Washington. "He stopped short of a full capability, a good move," said Snyder.

Former CIA official and Korea negotiator Joseph DeTrani said two changes have become clear with Kim. First is the country's success in its military advances. "He's got to feel good about his nuclear missile program," DeTrani said. But at the same time, he said, Kim now knows how much the international sanctions imposed because of those advances are hurting his country and people. "I think we know that sanctions are biting and mili-

tary exercises are intimidating," he said. One thing Kim is not, DeTrani added, is irrational. "He seems to be an extremely rational actor, a bit unpredictable, also very ruthless."

Michael Madden, whose group North Korea Leadership Watch does deep dives into all things Kim, said the North Korean leader appears to be moving into a new phase. Since inheriting his father Kim Jong Il's mantle in 2011, he spent his first six years consolidating power, reportedly liquidating dozens of opponents, trimming some of the military's independent power, and building his internal surveillance capabilities. Today, Madden said, Kim's regime "is more flexible than we think they are".

That was on display at the dinner with the South Koreans Monday where he showed himself to be "a fairly graceful person", with his rarely-seen wife at his side, readily joking and making fun of himself, Madden said. The North Koreans released photographs and video from the lavish banquet almost immediately. "It confirms he's confident in having consolidated his power," said Snyder.

Former US diplomat Bill Richardson, who met Kim Jong Il several times, said Kim is on the cusp of achieving what his father and grandfather always wanted: To be treated as equals by Washington. At just 34, Kim "is unpredictable, sometimes irrational. But he's been underestimated," Richardson said. "I've long thought he had an agenda, an endgame, and it's obvious that he does. He's evolved from a bomb-throwing leader to a man with a strategic vision," Richardson said. — AFP

## Syria army cuts off main towns in rebel...

Continued from Page 1

Eastern Ghouta is the last remaining opposition-controlled zone on the outskirts of the capital, and government troops have zeroed in on it in order to secure Damascus. Rebels in recent days tried to slow the advance with an attempted counter-offensive, but President Bashar Al-Assad's forces steamrolled their efforts. Syrian state television yesterday reported the army had "intensified its operations... and was advancing in three main zones".

It broadcast live footage from a neighborhood in Misraba recently recaptured from the army. Dozens of civilians including women and toddlers could be seen in a dark basement, surrounded by troops. One elderly man broke down into tears as he told state television that his family had fled to Douma under fierce bombardment. The offensive has killed more than 975 civilians, including more than 200 children, and wounded several thousand people, according to the Observatory, which relies on a network of sources on the ground.

Syria's conflict erupted with protests against Assad but has since developed into a full-blown war that has drawn in global powers. Russia has intervened on Assad's behalf while Turkey has backed rebels against his regime, rival militants and Kurdish forces. Yesterday, Ankara-backed rebels advanced against Kurdish militia in northwest Syria, coming to within two kilometres of the flashpoint town of Afrin, according to the Observatory. The move came as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened again to "purge" Kurdish militia from the town. — AFP

entered Ghouta with Monday's convoy, said the area was "on the verge of a major disaster". "I've never seen such scared faces in my life," Sajjad Malik said. He described seeing a five-storey building that had been reduced to rubble, with a powerful stench emanating from several bodies trapped underneath. In addition to clashes around Douma, fighting yesterday raged to the west near the town of Medeira and further south near Hammuriyeh, Saqba, and Eferis.

Two Islamist groups are the most prominent rebel factions in Ghouta, but militants from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) - once linked to Al-Qaeda's Syria branch - also have a presence. On Friday, 13 HTS members and their family members were bussed out of the enclave. Rebels said they would be taken to the HTS-controlled northern province of Idlib, in an arrangement struck following consultations with the UN and international players.

Such evacuation deals have been repeatedly agreed in Syria's seven-year war, most notably in the second city of Aleppo in late 2016. After a ferocious month-long government assault, thousands of rebel fighters and civilians were bussed out of the city's east. That paved the way for Syria's government to announce the full recapture of Aleppo - the largest defeat to date for the fractured opposition movement.

Syria's conflict erupted with protests against Assad but has since developed into a full-blown war that has drawn in global powers. Russia has intervened on Assad's behalf while Turkey has backed rebels against his regime, rival militants and Kurdish forces. Yesterday, Ankara-backed rebels advanced against Kurdish militia in northwest Syria, coming to within two kilometres of the flashpoint town of Afrin, according to the Observatory. The move came as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened again to "purge" Kurdish militia from the town. — AFP

## Putin: Maybe Jews meddled...

Continued from Page 1

checked; maybe they have dual citizenship or a green card; maybe the US paid them for this. How can you know that? I do not know either."

Despite Mueller's 37-page indictment, Putin said he has seen no evidence thus far that the alleged meddling broke any laws. "We in Russia cannot prosecute anyone as long as they have not violated Russian law... At least send us a piece of paper... Give us a document. Give us an official request. And we'll take a look at it." Trump has repeatedly denied any collusion with Moscow, and Putin laughed at the mere suggestion. "Could anyone really believe that Russia, thousands of miles away... influenced the outcome of the election? Doesn't that sound ridiculous even to you?" Putin asked.

On announcing the indictment on the Russians, US Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein said the document made no judgment on whether the alleged Russian

propaganda campaign altered the election outcome. "It's not our goal to interfere. We do not see what goal we would accomplish by interfering. There's no goal," Putin said. US intelligence chiefs last month said Russia still seeks to meddle in US politics, posing a threat to mid-term congressional elections in November, and the 2020 presidential election.

Trump has acknowledged that Russia and "other countries" meddled in the 2016 election, but insisted it had "no impact on our votes whatsoever" and vowed to make sure it wouldn't happen again. "We'll counteract whatever they do. We'll counteract it very strongly. You don't want your system of votes to be compromised in any way," Trump said Tuesday. "And we won't allow that to happen."

Russian efforts however are said to go far beyond US elections: US General Curtis Scaparrotti, the commander of NATO forces in Europe, told US lawmakers on Thursday that Russia is working to break up the NATO alliance partly through its online operations spreading false information. "Russia is carrying out a campaign of destabilization to change the international order, fracture NATO and undermine US leadership around the world," Scaparrotti told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday. — AFP



Kuwait Times

# Premier Brands

To see your ad here, call:  
**+965 248 35 616 / 617**  
E MAIL: info@kuwaittimes.net  
ads@kuwaittimes.net  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net



It's Shopping Time!

iPhone 8 Plus

256GB 5.5"



الآن 289 دك  
قبل 324 دك

iPhone 5 (S)

Forward thinking.

16GB 4.0" LTE



الآن 64 دك  
قبل 89 دك

iPhone 6s

128GB 4.7" LTE



الآن 169 دك  
قبل 189 دك

Available Colors



See all offers

BestAIYouSifi @BestAIYouSifi alyousifIBEST BestAIYouSifi

Credit: Start from SKD • Up to 48 month • Instant approval

Shop Online [www.best.com.kw](http://www.best.com.kw) Free Delivery

**1809 809**

• Kuwait 1 (the New str.) • Kuwait 2 (Panasonic Tower) • Hawalli 1 (Tunis str.) • Hawalli 2 ( Bin Khalid str.) • Shuwaikh (4th Ring road) • Al-Rai (4th Ring road)

• Salmiya (Salem Al-Mubarak str.) • Farwaniya ( Behind police Station) • Fahaaheel (Opp. General Parking) • Jahra ( Opp. Main Co-op.) • Airport (Departure Hall)