

International

30 million diabetics can't access insulin they need

Number of people suffering from diabetes surges

NEW YORK: The number of people suffering from diabetes is surging, even as tens of millions cannot get the insulin they need, the World Health Organization said. The UN health agency stressed the need to cut prices and dramatically increase access to the life-saving medicine. More than 420 million people are currently estimated to be living with diabetes globally, marking nearly a quadrupling in the past four decades.

And that number is expected to surge past half a billion by the end of this decade, WHO said Friday. But despite an ample supply, high prices make it difficult for many diabetics to access the insulin they need to manage their condition. "There are significant gaps in access to conditioning globally, particularly in lower income countries," Kiu Siang Tay, of WHO's Access to Medicines and Health Products division, told reporters.

In a fresh report, WHO decried a betrayal of the solidarity showed by the Canadian researchers who discovered insulin 100 years ago. Frederick Banting and John Macleod sold the patent for insulin, which transformed a diagnosis of diabetes from a swift death sentence to a manageable disease, for just one Canadian dollar, insisting the discovery "belongs to the world." "Unfortunately, that gesture of solidarity has been overtaken by a multi-billion-dollar business that has created vast access gaps," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement.

'I want to start a youth movement': Facebook whistleblower

PARIS: What exactly does one do after leaking thousands of documents from the world's most powerful social media company? For Frances Haugen, the answer is obvious: start a youth movement. Facebook has faced stinging criticism over the whistleblower's document drop, not least the revelations that the company knew its Instagram photo app had the potential to harm teen mental health.

Ex-Facebook engineer Haugen believes young people have more reason than anyone else to pressure social media companies to do better. "I want to start a youth movement," she told AFP in a wide-ranging interview, adding that youngsters who have grown up online should not feel so "powerless" over the social networks enmeshed in their lives. Haugen has spent nearly two months in the spotlight over her claims that Facebook has consistently prioritized profits over people's safety, and supporters and foes alike are wondering what comes next.

The interview on Friday at a luxury Paris hotel, carefully watched by her lawyer, came at the end of a European tour that was managed by a slick public relations team, with financial backing from the philanthropic organization of eBay founder, Pierre Omidyar. Haugen, 37, has addressed lawmakers in London, Brussels and Paris, as well as a cheering crowd of thousands at a Lisbon tech conference. Both Britain and the EU are currently debating new tech regulation, and she said the tour was an opportunity "to influence where those regulations are going".

Iowa-born Haugen knew very well before she went to work for Facebook that its sites were capable of sending people down dangerous rabbit holes. A close friend who became radicalized in 2016 was convinced that billionaire George Soros secretly controlled the economy. "That was very painful," she said.—AFP



PARIS: US whistleblower and former Facebook engineer Frances Haugen during an interview in Paris.—AFP

Is the body on Mount Etna Italian reporter 'killed' by mob?

ROME: Half a century after investigative journalist Mauro De Mauro disappeared in Sicily, the discovery of a body in a cave has raised fresh hopes of cracking one of Italy's mafia mysteries. Crime laboratory analysts are expected to perform a DNA test on the corpse, which was found in September on the slopes of Mount Etna by a sniffer dog during a mountain rescue exercise. Investigators have long believed De Mauro, who had been looking into the suspicious death of powerful businessman Enrico Mattei, was kidnapped and killed by Sicily's Cosa Nostra organized crime group.

The journalist disappeared on September 16, 1970, in Palermo. His daughter Franca, one of the last people to see him alive, called a police hot-line after reading news reports about the recently-found body, which dates to the 1970s and has a distinctive nose-just like her father. The man on Etna, in his 50s, was wearing dark trousers, a light striped shirt, a wool jumper, a black tie, a dark green coat, a winter hat with a pom-pom on it, and black boots, the reports said.

'Non-competitive'
Diabetes is divided into two types. An estimated nine million people have type 1 diabetes, a chronic condition where the pancreas does not produce enough insulin - the hormone that regulates blood sugar levels. Most people living with diabetes have type 2, which is associated with obesity and other lifestyle factors and emerges in adults and increasingly



UN health agency stresses the need to cut prices

among children. All type 1 diabetics need insulin to survive, and generally their access is ensured. Some 63 million people with type 2 meanwhile also need the hormone, according to WHO estimates, but only about half of them can access it.

Diabetes is especially on the rise in lower-income countries, which now account for 80 percent of cases, but the insulin consumption in those countries is lagging due to a range of barriers, it said. A major prob-

lem is that the global insulin market remains dominated by just three companies: Eli Lilly, Novo Nordisk and Sanofi, creating a "non-competitive market environment". The report also lamented that the global market had at the start of this century shifted away from human insulin, which can be produced quite cheaply, to much pricier synthetic insulins.

This, it said, had imposed "an untenable financial burden on lower-income countries". Tay pointed out that the price for the new insulin analogs could be multiple times higher, but clinical evidence showed that "human insulin usually works equally good ... for most people living with diabetes." Another problem highlighted in the report was that research and development in the area focuses heavily on the needs in high-income countries, even though lower-income nations have the biggest burden.

"WHO is working with countries and manufacturers to close these gaps and expand access to this life-saving medicine for everyone who needs it," Tedros said. Earlier this year, the UN agency launched talks with insulin manufacturers and others about ways to meet the growing demand "at prices that countries can afford". It said Friday that the industry had made some commitments, including participating in a prequalification program it introduced in 2019 aimed at bringing more manufacturers into the market.—AFP



OGOSSAGOU: A Senegalese Blue Helmet peacekeeper stands in the village of Ogossagou, Mopti Region.—AFP

Peace is a tall order in massacre-hit Mali village

OGOSSAGOU: In Ogossagou, where ethnic Fulani suffered two massacres in two years, traces of the recent horrors abound in this village of central Mali. They are one sign of just how tough incipient internationally-sponsored peacemaking efforts are between nomadic Fulani herders and traditional Dogon hunters. Reconciliation is all the more difficult as the Dogon accuse the Fulani of supporting the jihadists—who are now present in central Mali but have been a scourge of the Malian government and its western allies since 2012.

A peace pact signed last month has produced "a lull" in the village, Senegalese army captain Andre Sebastien Ndione, who heads the nearby UN base, told AFP. "But it is relative, it can go off the rails at any time," Ndione added. In the Fulani part of the village, targeted by people dressed as traditional Dogon hunters, reminders are everywhere of the killings of 160 civilians in March 2019 and 31 more in February 2020. Local NGOs say the number of Fulani dead is even higher.

Destroyed houses lie abandoned in tall grass and a charred wooden pestle for grinding millet bears witness to the brutality of the events. Ogossagou is one of the last villages in central Mali's Bankass area where Fulani, who are also called Peul, still live. Ghost villages are all that remain in other parts of the area. A hotbed of violence plaguing the Sahel, the centre of Mali has become prey to the atrocities of jihadist organizations, self-defense groups, brigands and even regular armed forces.

Both Malian and UN security forces have been singled out for their inability to prevent the repetition of

violence that weighs heavily on people's minds in Ogossagou. Malian soldiers and peacekeepers of the UN MINUSMA operation are today based between the districts of Ogossagou-Dogon and Ogossagou-Peul, separated by a few dozen meters that might as well be thousands of meters given the gulf in feeling. The Fulani, living next to mass graves dug in haste, are constantly bullied by Dogon neighbours who accuse them of being accomplices of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadist group in the area.

Stray dog

The Fulani wanted to leave Ogossagou after the second massacre, but troops restrained them in the months that followed the slaughter on February 14, 2020. "The army prevented people from fleeing. It would have been a failure for the state if there were no more Fulani," a humanitarian source in the region told AFP on condition of anonymity. Government soldiers have also been accused by the United Nations of raping Fulani women who survived the massacres.

The year 2020 was a long one for the Fulani. Nobody could leave the village to cultivate their fields or go to the market. Residents were too afraid of being killed to take to the road, despite the peaceful appearance of the bush that surrounds Ogossagou and stretches to the horizon. "It was an open-air prison," said Jens Christensen, the Danish regional director of MINUSMA. Tensions ran so high that in March the soldiers had to intervene to separate Dogons and Fulani when a Dogon's dog strayed from one part of the village to another.

In September 2020, Christensen and his teams began a step-by-step mediation, which culminated on October 8 with the signing of a peace agreement. It bound inhabitants of Ogossagou and ten surrounding villages to lay the foundations for reconciliation, specifying that Fulani and Dogon visit each other, accept free movement and not attack each other. The bright smiles of village children lighten the ambient gloom, but they are not enough to eradicate the deep fissures in the village.—AFP

The journalist may have been held by kidnapers for years and have been given different clothes. If the body is a DNA match with De Mauro, he may have died after managing to escape. Police mountain rescuers can be seen in a video published on their Facebook page this week climbing down a steep, narrow tunnel to the cave, the entrance to which is almost hidden from the outside. The dog had been supposed to be sniffing out a fictitious missing person for training purposes—but found the real remains instead.

Trapped

Investigators believe the man, who was in his 50s and about 170 centimeters tall (five feet, six inches), entered the cave voluntarily but found it impossible to climb out again. His death is not believed to have been violent, the reports said. De Mauro had been doing research for award-winning director Francesco Rosi's film about the death of Mattei, who founded the ENI oil company, and who died in a 1962 plane crash likely caused by a bomb.

Mafia boss Salvatore "Toto" Riina was tried over De Mauro's murder, but found not guilty for lack of proof. The journalist was kidnapped a few days before Franca's wedding. After having returned home together from an outing, Franca went inside while her father parked the car. She turned to see two or three men appear, and get into the car. De Mauro then drove off quickly, never to return, according to the Giornale della Sicilia daily. The lead investigators on the case would be killed in turn by the mafia years later.—AFP



CATANIA: This image grabbed from a video handout shows a watch found by members of the Guardia di Finanza dog squad from Nicolosi, Catania, in a lava cave on the Etna volcano near Zafferana Etnea, Sicily.—AFP

News in brief

Rebels seize Hodeida area

DUBAI: Yemen's Houthi rebels have taken control of a large area south of Hodeida, a lifeline port where the warring sides agreed a ceasefire in 2018, government military sources said. The rebels advanced after forces loyal to the internationally recognized government retreated from positions south of the Red Sea port city, the sources said, without giving reasons. The Hodeida ceasefire was agreed at Yemen's last peace talks in Sweden in 2018, but clashes have since broken out between the rebels and pro-government troops around the city. Elsewhere, the Iran-backed insurgents, who are fighting a Saudi-led coalition, have been engaged in a sustained attempt to capture Marib, the government's last stronghold in the north. The United Nations said it was aware of the reported withdrawal near Hodeida and the Houthis' move into the vacated areas, and was watching the situation closely.—AFP

Missing journalist found dead

ABUJA: A Nigerian journalist who went missing last month in the nation's capital has been found dead, killed by a hit-and-run driver, police said. Tordue Salem, a parliamentary reporter with the independent Vanguard newspaper in Abuja was last seen on October 13 after leaving the national assembly building. Efforts by family, friends and colleagues to locate the reporter were unsuccessful until his body was discovered on Thursday. National police spokesman Frank Mba told reporters in Abuja that the hit-and-run driver who killed Salem had been arrested and had confessed. Mba said that after the 29-year-old suspect, Clement Ito, hit the reporter, "the victim's phone, an iPhone, fell on the car's windshield". Police investigators were able to track the phone and therefore the suspect to where he parked his car. The newspaper also confirmed the recovery of Salem's body in a hospital in Abuja.—AFP

US space tourist dies

NEW YORK: US businessman Glen de Vries, who flew into space with "Star Trek" actor William Shatner on last month's Blue Origin flight, has died in a plane crash, police said. The small aircraft came down in Hampton Township, New Jersey, about 60 miles west of New York City, shortly before 3:00 pm on Thursday, a spokesman for New Jersey state police told AFP. "There are two confirmed fatalities," the spokesman said, naming de Vries, 49, and 54-year-old Thomas Fischer. "The FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) will be the lead investigating agency," he added, without providing more details. De Vries, the founder of clinical research platform Medidata Solutions, joined Shatner on Blue Origin's second crewed mission on October 13. Also on board for the 11-minute journey that took them beyond Earth's atmosphere and back again were Blue Origin executive Audrey Powers and Planet Labs co-founder Chris Boshuizen.—AFP

Migrants drown off Morocco

SKHEIRAT: Four Moroccan migrants trying to reach the European Union have drowned in the Atlantic Ocean, officials and relatives said. Three other migrants were rescued after their vessel sank off the resort of Skheirat, south of the capital Rabat, on Thursday. "We are in shock. My cousin, who was 29, was among the dead," said a relative of one of those who drowned. "They were all Moroccan. We had no idea he was going to try to make the voyage." Officials said the migrants' vessel was believed to have had a capacity of up to 20 people, and a search was continuing for any other survivors. Fishermen in the area said the coast between Rabat and Casablanca was a regular jumping-off point for migrants trying to reach mainland Spain. Further south, along the Moroccan-controlled coast of the disputed Western Sahara, the goal is normally Spain's Atlantic Canary Islands.—AFP

Unvaccinated or cured face curbs

VIENNA: Austria's government said it wanted a nationwide lockdown for those not vaccinated against or recovered from the coronavirus, while Vienna city authorities said they would start vaccinating children as young as five - a first in the EU. Only around 65 percent of the population is fully vaccinated in Austria, a rate described by Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg as "shamefully low". Salzburg and Upper Austria states, which have seen some of the worst case rates, are already introducing a lockdown for the unvaccinated from Monday. This means they will not be able to leave the house except for reasons such as buying essential supplies, exercise or seeking medical care. "The aim is clear: we want on Sunday to give the green light for a nationwide lockdown for the unvaccinated," Schallenberg told a press conference. He said lockdowns across the country would be enforced with "random" spot checks.—AFP