



## 'NO SPITTING': FIGHTING MADAGASCAR'S PLAGUE

The plague hospital in Madagascar is having its busiest year – 165 people have died so far

Sally Hayden

Near the crest of one of the steep hills dotted across Madagascar's capital Antananarivo sits a plague hospital. Outside, children play and brick-makers shovel sand, but the hustle of the city's busier areas is missing. Colourful houses nearby display identical signs on their locked gates. "No standing; no spitting; don't throw your trash," they order.

It's a necessary precaution. The Central Anti-Plague Hospital Ambohimindra is one of six hospitals that treat plague in Antananarivo, and has been placed here because of its relative isolation. This hospital has been open for decades, but 2017 has been the busiest year. Madagascar's plague outbreak, which began in August, has killed 165 people so far, and infected more than 2,000.

About 400 cases of the bubonic plague, contracted from rats, occur annually on an African island better known for safaris and the eponymous 2005 children's film, but this outbreak is a rarer crisis. Unusually, another strain of plague has been identified: the deadlier pneumonic plague, which can pass from person to person through coughing, sometimes killing within 24 hours.

The plague has also spread to cities. "This is the first time it's an urban epidemic," says Dr Marielle Zaramisy, the hospital's chief of medicine, speaking in her small office from behind a cloth face mask. She's been working in the hospital for just a month and a half, since the height of the crisis. Her family are worried about her safety. "As a human I'm afraid but I'm following all the precautions. It's my job."

Visitors must wear masks covering their mouths at all times. Before entering, shoe soles are sprayed with disinfectant and your temperature is taken with a handheld thermometer. The guards on the door oversee this process, but they also have a more important job: to make sure patients don't escape. At least one inmate got away in October, making it all the way home before doctors forced him back into an ambulance. There have been many other attempts, Zaramisy says. "Some escaped because they're afraid of needles. People here are not used to the hospital."

"The problem of plague is not just a medical response. You can have hospitals but if

people don't come it isn't enough," said Jean Benoit Manhes, the deputy representative of Unicef.

Adding to public anxiety is a plague of rumours: that the outbreak is a government plot to get donations ahead of next year's election; if you catch the plague it means you're dirty; everyone who goes to hospital will die.

Zaramisy says it's even hard to convince those who are infected of what they have. "It's all about them not believing what they have despite having symptoms."

Unicef has put together a team of 12 people just to deal with rumours, while the ministry of health is supporting a 24-hour hotline which is mainly contacted by those who've seen misinformation on Facebook.

Despite this, Madagascar's ministry of health says the outbreak is now under control. When *The Irish Times* visited the hospital there were eight patients there, down from 60 three weeks ago. For safety reasons, it wasn't possible to interview them, though they were visible in the distance, milling around the tents used as wards.

Throughout the outbreak, three people died in this hospital. Zaramisy explains, in each incidence because they waited too long before coming.

### Safe burials

Malagasy people traditionally dig up the bodies of their relatives every seven years in a ritual called Famidihana – or the "turning of the bones". They clean the remains, reshroud them, and rebury them. Sometimes families dance around the remains.

It is not certain how long the plague bacteria lives on in victims of the disease, so the government has banned victims from being buried in family tombs. Instead, they're being buried in anonymous graves outside the cities. The bodies are placed in sealed body bags by hygienists employed by Unicef and the World Health Organisation, who only allow two family members to witness the process, rather than the dozens that would attend Malagasy funerals in normal circumstances.

"There's no updated circular on safe and dignified burial yet," says Manhes, "no one really dares to take responsibility." The ministry of health is carrying out consultations on how to tackle the problem, though the delay has led to some difficulties.

"There's been some resistance from the families," says Dr Lalaina Randriamanantsoa, technical assistant at the ministry of health. "Some family members have gone

into hiding."

For each confirmed case of plague, as many as 20 more contacts have to be treated as a precaution. Those admitted to hospital are given the antibiotics streptomycin and co-trimoxazole, initially injected every three hours. Patients stop being contagious after five days of treatment.

After eight days they leave hospital healthy again, though victims are afflicted with stigma.

"Some people are ashamed once they get out of here. They don't know can they go out at night, they don't want to tell their boss because he won't hug them anymore," Zaramisy says.

Madagascar's "plague season" traditionally runs from October to April, but this year it started in August. Experts suggest that could be due to a number of reasons, including climate change and slash-and-burn farming which causes rats to migrate to populated areas.

Posters warning of the "peste", as it's called, are displayed on the walls of government buildings, airports, city offices and shop stalls in rural villages. They show smiles

66

About 400 cases of the bubonic plague, contracted from rats, occur annually. Another strain has been identified: the deadlier pneumonic plague

ing children playing in piles of trash with rats, or women washing clothes surrounded by rubbish. "Clean the house every day and kill the bacteria," the writing advises.

However, Zaramisy worried some of the messaging falsely suggests plague is a disease of the poor or dirty. "It's not discerning," she says. Most prone to the disease are young men aged 20-25, followed by children aged 5-10.

At least 76 medical staff have been infected. The dead include a basketball coach from Seychelles who flew to Madagascar for a tournament.

Antananarivo is a poor city. It's filled with vintage cars – kept not for love, but be-

■ Dr Marielle Zaramisy, chief of medicine at the Central Anti-Plague Hospital Ambohimindra in Madagascar's capital Antananarivo.

cause their owners can't afford another. Children beg for money on the streets alongside minors working as shopkeepers or prostitutes. Crime is rife. All six of the city's arrondissements have had cases of the plague, including those considered rich areas.

### Poverty

The plague hits indiscriminately, but poverty has played a role in the death toll. Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 92 per cent of the population earning under \$2 a day. The average income is less than it was when the country gained independence in 1960.

The uneducated are least informed about the plague, meaning they won't present to a hospital if they experience symptoms. Though plague medication is free, the high cost of prescriptions for other ailments also means poor people aren't used to going to doctors, preferring traditional healers instead.

One of the many Malagasys who expressed scepticism about the plague was Felana (22), who works at a sweet and cigarette stall in the Ambanvouta area of the city. She wasn't certain the plague even existed. "I don't know," she responds, shrugging when asked to explain her doubt. Still, the impact on her business is tangible. "People are afraid of plague so no one's willing to go shopping."

Lahaina Rakotzafy, a taxi driver, says he is suspicious about the diagnoses by doctors. "They tell everyone they have the plague there." A small, wiry man, he says he continued working throughout the outbreak though would consider taking precautions, like wearing a face mask, if he came across someone who seemed really sick. "If they're cured I can talk to them no problem."

Despite the chaos it's caused in Madagascar, locals and health professionals also say the chance of the plague spreading to other countries is minimal, for the same reason the country remains so poor and underdeveloped: it's an island.

Manhes, the Unicef deputy representative, sums it up. "Because of its isolation and because of lack of international interest, what happens in Madagascar stays in Madagascar."

## 'We watch reports of increasing house prices with horror'



Ciara Kenny

Readers share their experiences of house hunting in today's market

A new report published by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on Tuesday predicts Irish house prices will rise by at least 20 per cent over the next three years.

This does not mean another property bubble is inflating, the think tank claims, adding that by "international comparisons, Irish prices appear to be quite affordable".

*The Irish Times* asked readers to share their experiences. Are Irish house prices "quite affordable", in their view?

**Maria McDonnell, Dublin:** 'Who are these people who find houses to be affordable?'

In a country where a couple in their mid 30s, who have both worked full time since leaving third level education, without dependents and with decent incomes, can't afford to buy a house in Dublin that is either a) not in an economically or socially depressed area, or b) over an hour's commute from their workplace in the city centre, I wonder who these people are who find houses to be affordable?

**John-Paul Foley, Maynooth, Co Kildare:** 'Eventually there will be a lack of workers in Dublin to provide essential services'

I am a secondary school teacher in my mid-30s, and my wife is a dental nurse. We have a combined salary of just under €65,000 gross. We live in Maynooth but there is no opportunity for us to be able to afford to buy a house here. Our options are to move and have a long commute to our jobs in the Dublin area, or to move jobs. This is hard to do as a teacher, as job security is hard to find.

**Seamus Dooley, Dublin:** 'We watch reports of increasing prices and lack of supply with horror'

In 2016 my partner and I applied for a mortgage. Both on €32,000 a year, we were refused as we did not earn enough, according to the bank. We waited and got salary increases to €40,000 each, which was fantastic, but we soon realised that in the few months that had passed, our hope of securing a property in the areas we had previously considered was gone, as house prices had rose considerably in that time. We now watch regular reports in the media of increasing prices and lack of supply with horror. We have accepted that we won't be buying a home in the current market.

**Caoimhe Kerins, Dublin 7:** 'We were evicted last year'

Both my partner and I work full time in professional roles. We have been renting in Dublin city for 10 years. We were evicted last year after our landlord told us she was moving back into the house (another tenant is in there now). We lost the only house our daughter had ever known as home, and faced a scary time trying to find somewhere to live that was close to our local services, family and friends.

I have worked full time my entire adult life. My partner was unemployed for most of the recession, or working zero-hour contracts, so we were not in a position to start saving until last year and that has been a challenge. We have a three-year-old daughter who has been in full-time childcare since the age of one, at a cost of €460 per month despite this being her "free year".

We would really like to buy as renting has become so precarious. We worry about being evicted again, particularly with our daughter starting school in September. The maximum we can afford in a mortgage is €320,000, which is significantly below the price of a three-bedroom house in Dublin. We don't want to move out of Dublin as we would lose our social support network and the health services we depend on.

**Anna Preis, Courtown, Co Wexford:** 'I could barely afford a one-bed in Finglas'

As a single buyer earlier this year, my budget was profoundly limited. I could barely afford a one-bed apartment in Finglas or Ballymun, or the property would have been in a terrible shape, leaving me with no reserve funds to restore it.

I'm working in Dublin, but as a daily commuter from Bray in Co Wicklow, where I was a tenant, I started to look at the time of commuting instead of distance, to identify an area to house hunt. The journey with Dublin Bus during peak hours took about an hour and a half, so I searched for properties around Drogheda, Balbriggan and Kildare, as well as Arklow and Wicklow town. Eventually, I settled in Courtown in Co Wexford. I was fortunate to land a deal for a two-bedroom semi-detached bunga-

low with enclosed garden, for less than a one-bed apartment in Ballymun (comprising a kitchen with no windows and a small bathroom). Despite the commute, which may not work for everyone, I'm pleased with my choice.

**Aisling Bruen, Dublin:** 'Not everyone gets parental handouts'

House prices may be affordable to those inheritees in line to catch a hefty leg-up from mummy and daddy on their passing. Unfortunately, life is not parental handouts for all. In my own situation, a care-leaver with estranged family ties, there is no safety net of a family home, no moving back with the relatives to get a deposit up. I cannot break from the trap that is the rental market due to circumstance of it being exactly that - a vortex. This Americanised rhetoric of "hard work will get you there" is utter nonsense, and just proof that Leo Varadkar is so far removed from reality of what is: many people are struggling.

**Andrew Slattery, Dublin:** 'The mortgage I was offered was immoral' We are well on the road to the next bubble bursting. We have a herd mentality and panic is setting in. I've been to banks looking for a new mortgage, and despite the supposed "new rules", the amount being offered to me (despite already having negative equity on my apartment and two kids in crèche) is scandalously high and immoral. I have no idea how the banks are circumventing the rules again. The media also need to stop hyping the market. I have visited several properties in good south Dublin addresses where the prices have been dropped in recent weeks. The media does not seem to be picking up on this.



Our options are to move and have a long commute to our jobs in the Dublin area, or to move jobs

**Katie Delaney, Dublin:** 'I do not see us buying in Dublin any time soon' My partner and I both have recently paid permanent jobs with promotion opportunities in the future. I do not see us buying in Dublin any time soon. When I look at what I can afford in my hometown of Newry (a one-hour commute time away), the price and quality of housing in Dublin is disgraceful. I just cannot justify those prices, even if I could afford them.

**Jamie Murphy, Swords, Co Dublin:** '€400,000 does not go far'

As a couple of very high earning engineers, the fact we have to rely on the help-to-buy scheme to even consider purchasing a house is insane. It's even more insane that this purchase will be off plans, a semi-detached house in the furthest part of Swords from the city. €400,000 does not go far. Yet, we are the lucky ones? I swore we would never buy during a boom like generations before us. But it's that or potentially swap rental houses every year. Effectively you can't live a stable life if you rent.

**John Madden, Athlone:** 'Our Taoiseach is out of touch'

Prices are increasing every day yet wages in rural Ireland could barely meet the requirements for a deposit. How is one supposed to save 10 per cent while paying exorbitant rents, car insurance, and fuel, heating and electricity costs? It cannot be done. Our Taoiseach is wholly out of touch.

**JK, Galway:** 'Investors are easily identified at viewings'

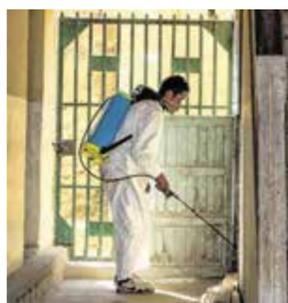
I work in science and earn just under the industrial average wage. My partner looks after our kid and works part time for herself when work comes her way. Even with a mortgage of 3.5 times the average industrial wage, you will not buy anything in Galway. Exorbitant rents are attracting a huge amount of "investors". They are easily identified at viewings, as the car they drive is worth more than the property. For the moment we rent a very small apartment, and I guess we will be there for the foreseeable future.

**Rachel King, Galway:** 'Agents were receiving larger bids over the phone'

I spent a few years looking in Galway for houses within reasonable distance of my child's school, advertised for around €300,000. I found the estate agent process completely lacking in transparency. Agents were receiving larger bids over the phone. The price would jump to €150,000 more than the asking, for damp, mouldy, ugly houses in need of €100,000 at least to make liveable. There is no regulation. I gave up. But there's no security in renting.



■ The Central Anti-Plague Hospital Ambohimindra, one of six to treat the plague in Madagascar's capital Antananarivo; workers from the ministry of health disinfect a public school; firemen and council workers begin the cleaning operation at a market in the Anosibe district. PHOTOGRAPH: HENTSOA RAFALUA/GETTY IMAGES



# Maldives crisis deepens after 'coup' put down

Government seems to be in control but it is unclear whether political crisis is over

Appeals made for India to intervene and for the US to impose financial sanctions

Maldives president Abdulla Yameen's administration said yesterday it had put down a coup after declaring a state of emergency the day before and arresting two supreme court justices and opposition figures.

"We have managed to ensure the failure of the coup attempt by some people," defence minister Adam Shareef Umar said on state television.

While the government seemed in control yesterday, it was unclear whether the political crisis in the Indian Ocean island nation, best known as a luxury holiday destination, was over.

On the same day, an exiled former president urged regional power India to send an envoy backed by its military to release Maldivian political prisoners.

The Maldives plunged into crisis last week after the supreme court quashed terrorism convictions against nine leading opposition figures including the exiled, first democratically elected president, Mohamed Nasheed.

Tensions came to a head when Mr Yameen's government rejected the ruling and on Monday imposed an emergency and then in the early hours of yesterday morning arrested the chief justice and another judge of the court. In doing so, the government ignored calls from the United States and the international community to respect the court's verdict.

By yesterday evening, Mr Yameen appeared to have gotten his way with the court when he

lifted his suspension of an Article of the constitution that establishes the supreme court as the final authority on legal matters.

Meanwhile, Mr Nasheed, who was granted asylum by Britain after the government of the Maldives allowed him to leave jail for medical treatment abroad in 2016, sought Indian intervention to resolve the nation's most serious political crisis in years.

"On behalf of Maldivian people we humbly request: India to send envoy, backed by its military, to release judges & pol. detainees... We request a physical presence," Mr Nasheed, who is currently in Colombo, Sri Lanka, said in a Twitter post.

He also urged the United



**Police also detained Mr Yameen's half-brother, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who had ruled the Maldives for 30 years until 2008 and now stands with the opposition**

States to block the financial transactions of Mr Yameen's government.

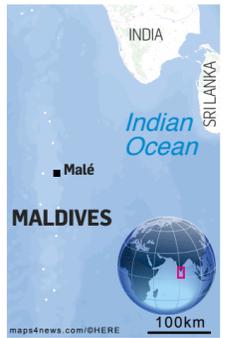
Since Mr Yameen took power in 2013, his government has faced heavy criticism over the detention of opponents, political influence over the judiciary and the lack of freedom of speech.

Addressing the nation on state television, Mr Yameen said he had acted to prevent a coup, and suggested that the judges had chosen to side with his opponents because they were being investigated for corruption. "I declared the state of emergency because there was no way to hold these justices accountable. This is a coup. I want to know how well planned this coup is," he said.

As part of the crackdown, police also detained Mr Yameen's half-brother, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who had ruled the Maldives for 30 years until 2008 and now stands with the opposition.

Mr Gayoom was detained at his residence along with his son-in-law. But Mr Gayoom's son Faris, who was one of the imprisoned opposition leaders whom the court ordered to be freed, was released yesterday.

Other opponents of Mr Yameen remained in prison. Located near key shipping lanes, the Maldives have assumed greater importance since China began building political and economic ties as part of its so-called "String of Pearls" strategy to create a net-



work of ports in the Indian Ocean. Having historically held more clout in the islands, India has sought to push back against China's growing influence there. India, the United States and Britain have urged Yameen to honour the rule of law and free the detainees. -Reuters

# FGM in Uganda 'We've seen too many girls bleed to death'



**Sally Hayden**  
in Nakapiripirit, Uganda

Female genital mutilation has been illegal in Uganda since 2010 but old habits die hard

Across northeast Uganda, reformed "cutters" apologise for their sins. "I used the same knife on seven girls," one gap-toothed woman is announcing in front of an attentive crowd. "The first had HIV/Aids, so all seven got it. Now they're all dead."

In another village, at another community meeting, a skinny elder remembers watching girls bleed to death after mutilating them herself. A third woman says she worried about how hard her victims' pregnancies would be later. A fourth was pulled away from cutting by God – but only after she quadrupled her price, to cash in on increased demand.

Female genital mutilation, or FGM, has been illegal in Uganda since 2010. With the threat of imprisonment hanging over offenders, local tribes say they're changing their ways, with some benefiting from a wave of funding from organisations such as the United Nations and Irish Aid; the UN aims to stop FGM globally by 2030.

Tuesday is the 16th International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation. Officially, FGM includes all procedures that alter or damage the female genitalia for non-medical reasons. The United Nations calls it an extreme form of discrimination against women and girls, and a violation of their human rights, including the right to be free of torture.

Different communities give different explanations for why they carry out FGM, but they usually involve inaccurate arguments about cleanliness and womanhood. FGM is also about control: it stops women experiencing sexual pleasure, which means they're less likely to cheat on a partner or be otherwise promiscuous.

And old habits die hard.



**Former "cutters" from the Pokot tribe say their job carrying out FGM on young girls made them respected in their community.** PHOTOGRAPH: SALLY HAYDEN

Traditionally, April marks the start of cutting season for the Pokot tribe. In the mountains of Karamoja, where mutilated girls have been left in caves for weeks to hide them from discovery, a "reformed cutter" named Chepureto Lebul is explaining the process.

## Wash in cold water

On a day approved by the village's male elders and the spirits they claim to consult, as many as 50 girls aged between nine and 11 would be made to remove their clothes and wash in cold water. They would then form a queue. "There were those that were cowards; they'd go to the back of the line, but they wouldn't get away," Lebul says. "When your daughter runs away it means she's a coward; you haven't raised her well."

One by one the girls sit on a stone. They're surrounded by older women, so they can't escape as their external genitalia

are cut out with a tool made from an arrowhead or a bent knife. Once the procedure is done, blood gushing from the girl's legs, she'll be carried to a resting spot. It will be two weeks before the girl can walk again – if she survives.

Lebul used to take 1,000 Kenyan shillings – €8 – or a goat for each girl mutilated, a fortune for a woman in such a deprived location. Although she claims to have quit the practice, she seems still to support it; she looks gleeful as she mimics what she used to do, pulling a young girl forward to act as the victim as she waves her cutting tool. Lebul boasts that she was strong and brave enough to operate on all 50 girls herself. Since stopping four years ago, she says, she has no income.

About 200 million women globally are living with female genital mutilation, according to the United Nations Population Fund, and three million more will be cut worldwide this year alone.

In Uganda the percentage of women put through FGM is low overall, at about 1.4 per cent, but among some tribes in the northeast of the country the rate is much higher. As many as 95 per cent of Pokot women ex-

**"Once the procedure is done, blood gushing from the girl's legs, she'll be carried to a resting spot. It will be two weeks before the girl can walk again – if she survives"**

perience it, and the local authorities and aid workers attempting to stamp it out are battling cultural traditions that are extremely powerful in an impoverished region where more than 90 per cent of people are illiterate.

Initiatives include paying former cutters two million Ugandan shillings, or €450, to give up the practice, creating alternative coming-of-age ceremonies, or enlisting spiritualists to ask the supernatural beings they worship to spare the girls. Although FGM may seem

like an act that women inflict on each other, men actually have the final say, according to many locals *The Irish Times* speaks to.

FGM – or circumcision, as its proponents they call it – is seen as desirable because it makes a wife less likely to stray when her husband is away with their cattle. In the Pokot tribe a girl's father decides when she's ready for FGM, says Aturo London.

A man in his 50s with five wives and 20 children, London says it would create problems at home for him to marry someone who hadn't been through it. "An uncut girl is not a woman," he says. And "if I marry an uncut lady she will be abused by the cut wives".

Of the 50 girls Lebul cut each year, as many as three would die, she says – their friends watching them bleed to death without proper medical help or care. Yet, Lebul says, she never felt bad about inflicting the pain. "I've never witnessed a girl crying, screaming or making noise, because they come with strength," she said.

Ugandan girls who survive the procedure do not usually return to school. Considered adults afterwards, they are quickly married off to men who

may have several other wives already.

## Problems begin

Once the child bride gets pregnant, the problems begin. Most FGM victims cannot deliver a baby naturally, says Anguzu John, a health officer in the district of Nakapiripirit, yet many have no way to get to hospital for a Caesarean section. The Pokot people fall within John's catchment area, which has only one ambulance for 200,000 people. So, instead of proper medical treatment, a new mother may face another life-threatening cut, one that allows her newborn to make it out of her alive.

FGM is most common in some African, Middle Eastern and Asian communities. It's also a growing problem in countries to which members of those communities migrate. British police have questioned people arriving at UK airports and the Eurostar rail terminals as part of Operation Limelight, an attempt to tackle families taking girls abroad for FGM.

In Ireland a couple currently face trial at Dublin Circuit Criminal Court on a charge of genitally mutilating their daughter at their home in 2016.

# Congress in rush to avert US shutdown

Trump says 'we'll do a shutdown' if immigration demands are not met

**SUZANNE LYNCH**  
Washington Correspondent

The US Congress is striving to find a deal to avoid a second government shutdown by midnight tomorrow when the short-term funding Bill agreed last month expires.

Lawmakers in both houses of Congress are trying to assemble a deal on immigration which would include protections for "Dreamers" – young people who were brought to the United States illegally as children. But Republicans are calling for funding to be included for the border wall, a contentious issue for Democrats.

The House of Representatives was due to hold a vote on a package yesterday evening, but it was not expected to gain support in the Senate.

In a measure of the difficulties ahead, President Donald Trump said he would "love to see a shutdown" if Democrats do not accede to his immigration demands. "We'll do a shutdown. And it's worth it for our country," he said yesterday, as he hosted a round table discussion on the violent MS-13 gang. "If we have to shut it down because the Democrats don't want safety – and unrelated but still related, they don't want to take care of our military – then shut it down, we'll go with another shutdown."

## 'Chain migration'

Mr Trump's comments came after he made a series of remarks about immigration on Twitter, including calling for an end to "chain migration" – the process whereby family members of immigrants are permitted to enter the country.

"Polling shows nearly 7 in 10 Americans support an immigration reform package that includes DACA, fully secures the border, ends chain migration & cancels the visa lottery," he tweeted, adding that if Democrats oppose the deal "they aren't serious about DACA – they just want open borders".

Mr Trump also reacted to the death of NFL player Edwin Jackson, who was killed in a car accident on Sunday. Police confirmed that the footballer and another man were killed by a drunk driver who entered the country illegally, having been twice deported.

"So disgraceful that a person illegally killed @Colts line-backer Edwin Jackson," Mr Trump said. "This is just one of many such preventable tragedies. We must get the Dems to get tough on the Border, and with illegal immigration, FAST!"

Pressure on Congress to agree an immigration package also increased after White House chief of staff John Kelly said that Mr Trump is unlikely to extend DACA – the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals Bill which protects so-called Dreamers – when it expires on March 5th. Mr Trump announced last September that he was abolishing the Obama-era scheme, giving Congress until March 5th to come up with a legislative solution.

**"We must get the Dems to get tough on the Border, and with illegal immigration, FAST!"**

Against the background of another turbulent day on the markets, politicians across both sides of the aisle were anxious to avoid another government shutdown, less than three weeks after the federal government closed for three days after Democratic senators refused to support a short-term funding Bill.

One possibility under discussion in the Senate was a short-term measure to fund the government until March 23rd.

Meanwhile, the White House said Mr Trump would review a Democratic memo, released by the House intelligence committee on Monday, which purports to rebut the contents of a Republican-authored memo released last week which is highly critical of the FBI.

Mr Trump has five days within which to decide to release the memo publicly.

Mr Kelly said the document was "lengthy" and that Mr Trump would review it.

It is possible that the memo could be published with redactions.

# John Mahoney, star of 'Frasier', dies aged 77

**DEIRDRE FALVEY**

John Mahoney, one of the stars of the hit TV series *Frasier*, has died aged 77. He is best known for playing Martin Crane in the series, father to Kelsey Grammer's Frasier Crane, but in Ireland he is remembered fondly for his frequent performances at the Galway International Arts Festival.

Mahoney died in a Chicago hospice on Sunday.

*Frasier*, a spinoff of *Cheers*, ran for 13 seasons from 1993 to 2004. Mahoney's portrayal of Marty earned him two Emmy nominations, two Golden Globe nominations and a Screen Actors Guild award.

Born in Blackpool, England, in 1940 to a family evacuated from wartime Manchester, he was the seventh of eight children.

His father was a baker from Cork who emigrated to the UK. Mahoney did some acting at school and was offered a placement with a Birmingham theatre at the age of 18. Instead he decided to cross the Atlantic to join his sister Vera, a GI bride who had fetched up in Illinois.

Mahoney made Chicago his adopted hometown.

A former professor of English, he was writing for a medical journal and at the age of 37 turned to acting.

He began in theatre in the 1970s, joining Steppenwolf Theatre at the suggestion of actor John Malkovich, eventually winning a Tony Award for his performance in John Guare's *The House of Blue Leaves* in 1986.

He was proud of his Irish roots, says Paul Fahy, his friend, and artistic director of the Galway International Arts

Festival but he recalls Mahoney telling him once how "when he moved to the US he made a conscious decision: this is it, he would become an American, and within six months he developed an accent!"

**"What a wonderful, sweet and gentle man he was. We loved him dearly"**

Mahoney performed at the Galway arts festival in many plays, and forged a strong relationship with the city, the arts festival, and Irish audiences. He first visited in 2000 when Chicago's Irish Rep Company brought Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* to the festival.

Mahoney later said of this: "Performing it there was one of the highlights of my career, genuinely."

Fahy said the festival today mourned a friend: "We are so sad to hear of the death of our dear friend John Mahoney. He performed so many memorable roles at the festival and often holidayed in Galway. A truly brilliant actor. What a wonderful, sweet and gentle man he was. We loved him dearly. He was a total joy to work with. We will miss him very much."

As well as his many festival performances, he came over privately many times to visit Galway and Connemara, almost always in the winter months.

Mahoney told the *Galway Advertiser* in an interview: "I remember flying in to Dublin, seeing a show in the Abbey, driving



**John Mahoney in Galway.** PHOTOGRAPH: JOE O'SHAUGHNESSY

across to Galway and then spending nearly a month driving all over Ireland and by the time that month was over I felt totally, utterly, Irish and have ever since."

Mahoney never married and did not have children. - Additional reporting: agencies

# India and Pakistan tensions rise after fatal clash in Kashmir

**RAHUL BEDI**  
in New Delhi

The fragile peace between nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan is under severe strain as their two armies continue to exchange missile, mortar and small arms fire across their disputed border in northern Kashmir state.

These exchanges, the worst between the two in more than a decade, resulted in the deaths of four Indian soldiers over last weekend along the 776km "line of control" that divides Kashmir between the neighbours.

"The Indian army will respond when the time is right, and it will be a fitting response to Pakistan," India's federal home minister Rajnath Singh said in response to the four sol-

diers' deaths. India's vice-chief of army staff Lieut Gen Sarath Chand also warned Pakistan on Monday of strong retaliatory action. "Our action will speak for itself."

The line of control is the de facto border dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan, both of whom claim the disputed principality in its entirety.

## Heavily militarised

It is one of the world's most heavily militarised frontiers, where more than 300,000 Indian and Pakistani soldiers face off against each other.

Artillery duels were a regular feature in this region until 2003, when both sides agreed to a ceasefire, but the ceasefire began unravelling in 2013 after diplomatic and political ties deteriorated.

India claims the Pakistani army violates the ceasefire along the line of control to facilitate the infiltration of armed militants into Kashmir in order to boost the insurgency in the state since 1989 from an independent Muslim homeland.

Pakistan denies this charge, saying it provided Kashmir's separatists with diplomatic and political support to accomplish "self-determination" in the face of human rights abuses by India's security forces.

The Indian army claims Pakistan violated the line of control ceasefire 868 times last year, up from 228 in 2016. India says Pakistani ceasefire violations so far this year have reached 240.

Pakistan says Indian troops violated the ceasefire more than 1,900 times in 2017.

# Escaping Boko Haram: the mother who hid her daughter in a ditch for nine months



**Sally Hayden**  
in Gwoza

Zainabeu Hamayaji faked mental illness to deter Islamist militants from searching for her eldest girl

When she heard reports that Boko Haram was approaching her home town three years ago, Zainabeu Hamayaji had to think quickly. The Islamist militant group – whose name roughly translates as “Western Education is Forbidden” – had been terrorising the northeast of Nigeria since 2009, and now it was moving on to Madagali.

The 47-year-old’s biggest concern was her eldest daughter, Hassana Isa. At 12, she was young enough to enjoy childish games with her siblings, but old enough to be chosen as a wife for one of the violent militants whose organisation was becoming synonymous with destruction and bloodshed.

In that moment, Hamayaji made a decision that would change all of her family’s lives. Speaking about it now, a range of emotions flicker across her face as she recounts what happened next. She is sitting in an old schoolroom-turned camp for the displaced in Gwoza, a rural Nigerian town that served as the headquarters of Boko Haram’s once sizeable caliphate. Through a large bullet hole in the blackboard, she can see boys playing outside.

Eight years into a war that has caused tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 2.5 million, the scale of the brutality of Boko Haram is still emerging. As more and more of the territory it seized becomes accessible, evidence of massacres, the use of child soldiers and other atrocities committed across Nigeria’s northeast are being laid bare.

So too come tales of heroism, bravery and ingenuity. Hamayaji’s story is one of these.

## Hidden in a hole

“I dug a ditch within my compound,” she says. Inside it, Hamayaji hid almost 100 jerrycans of water, sacks of nonperishable food and some leather bags to use in lieu of a toilet. Then, she told her daughter to get inside the hole. Hamayaji covered the top of the hole with corrugated iron, and erected a tent on top. She kept her daughter hidden in that hole for the next nine months.

Within days, Boko Haram arrived in her town, killing her husband and many other local men, and quickly gaining total control of the area. “I saw them killing so many people because they were trying to escape, so I couldn’t leave,” Hamayaji says.

Next, as anticipated, the militants went door to door looking for young women.



**Zainabeu Hamayaji in an old schoolroom in a camp for the displaced in Gwoza, a rural Nigerian town that served as the headquarters of Boko Haram's once sizeable caliphate**

PHOTOGRAPHS: SALLY HAYDEN

Tipped-off about Hamayaji’s eldest, they turned up at her house. “I swore and swore I didn’t have a daughter but they didn’t believe me and kept beating me,” she says.

“They came every day to beat me and they were constantly terrorising me. So I decided to strip myself of all of my clothing and just walk around naked in the village. I un-plaited my hair to look like a mad woman. I urinated and put faeces on my hair and my body. I’d go to the town centre and roll around in trash so they would think I was mentally unstable.”

Her other three children – aged seven, 10 and 11 – backed up the charade, telling the sceptical militants that their mother had been attending a psychiatric hospital before the town was captured.

Hamayaji demonstrates how, while pretending to be mentally unwell, she would pull her other daughters close to her. She’d have flies swarming around her, attracted to the excrement. This was another ploy to save her children.

“Boko Haram decided they did not want a child from a madwoman. Previously they had killed a madwoman and the curse from the madwoman prevented them from any military successes. They didn’t want to kill another, so I was spared because of their belief. They wrote something on the wall saying nobody should attack this madwoman, it will be a curse. So I was protected.”



When the army’s soldiers arrived they were also suspicious of Hamayaji, asking her whether she had been married to a member of Boko Haram, unable to understand how she had survived without collaborating. She explained to them that her daughter had been living for nine months in the ditch she had dug for her.

## Soldiers arrived

Nine months after Boko Haram arrived in Madagali, it was ousted by the Nigerian military.

last a long time. Hamayaji still has a dislocated shoulder from being repeatedly beaten – which, along with almost constant headaches, stops her from working. She has a scar on her forehead, and a missing tooth. She gesticulates wildly when telling her story, almost re-enacting the persona she had to adopt to get her through those nine horrific months.

For mother and daughter, the scars will

“

**Boko Haram decided they did not want a child from a madwoman . . . They wrote something on the wall saying nobody should attack this madwoman, it will be a curse. So I was protected**

She readily accepts that what she did was unusual. “There are not a lot of women who sacrificed like that,” she says. “Other women actually gave away their children for selfish reasons, because Boko Haram were giving money at the time – they got food in exchange and needed to eat.”

The sum being paid for children ranged from 100,000 Nigerian naira (€278) to twice that amount, she says.

Hamayaji says sometimes the militants would give mothers land in the villages they had captured as a kind of dowry for their daughters. “Women would be so elated, they’d collect the money and the properties.”

## Schoolgirls kidnapped

Boko Haram came to global attention when it kidnapped 276 schoolgirls from their dormitories in Chibok.

However, thousands of other women and girls have also been abducted or forced into marriages by the terror group. While some have few complaints about how they were treated, many have suffered physical and sexual abuse, and some forced into warfare.

Former wives have told stories of regular rape by both their “husbands” and other militants, forced labour and even the possibility of being made to carry a suicide bomb. The majority of bombings in public areas are currently carried out by women, some of whom may not know what they’re carrying, as the devices are detonated by militants from a distance.

For women and girls who escape, the threat of abuse remains. Last October, a Human Rights Watch report found that displaced women were being raped and sexually exploited by Nigerian authorities including government officials, police and camp leaders.

For now, Hamayaji says her eldest daughter is safe. Aged 14, she is at the Eid (end of Ramadan) celebrations when I meet her mother.

However, in common with some 11 million other children across northeast Nigeria, Hassana Isa is not in school and has limited opportunities. Hamayaji is reduced to begging for scraps to feed the family, she says, though it’s better than living under Boko Haram control.

“I will see what the future holds. I don’t know what will happen,” Hamayaji says, batting away flies in the dark, empty schoolroom, the sounds of hundreds of other displaced people outside. “I just know we’re safe now.”

## North Korea shrugs off sanctions to grow at fastest pace since 1999

CLIFFORD COONAN  
in Beijing

North Korea’s economy shrugged off tough international sanctions over its nuclear programme to expand by 3.9 per cent last year, the fastest pace in 17 years, data from South Korea’s central bank has shown.

As well as cranking up tensions in the region, North Korea’s military spending, including investment in nuclear weapons tests and missile launches, helped give the economy a boost, Shin Seung-cheol, an official at the Bank of Korea’s economic statistics department, told the Yonhap news agency.

The growth mainly came from industries such as mining and manufacturing, as well as utilities such as electricity, gas and water supplies.

The Bank of Korea said it was the highest growth rate since 1999 when the economy grew 6.1 per cent. Last year, the isolated economy, which is believed to be heavily reliant on fuel and investment from its ideological ally and neighbour China, shrank by 1.1 per cent because of a devastating drought.

## Travel ban US prohibits visits to North Korea

The US government will ban Americans from travelling to North Korea due to “the serious risk of arrest” after a US student was jailed while on a tour and later died, the state department said yesterday. US secretary of state Rex Tillerson authorised a “Geographical Travel Restriction” on all Americans’ use of a passport to the country, spokeswoman Heather Nauert said. “Once in effect, US

Another official speaking to Yonhap said the North Korean economic situation remained parlous. “North Korea’s economic structure is very fragile and is not really set up for high growth,” the official said.

## China links

News of strong growth is likely to bring attention back to China’s links to North Korea. While they are traditionally allies, their friendship has been strained by North Korea’s insistence on pursuing nuclear capa-

abilities despite Chinese requests for it to stop and to join dialogue on the issue.

US president Donald Trump has been putting pressure on China to do more to rein in Pyongyang’s nuclear ambitions but Beijing says it has limited scope for this.

China accounts for 93 per cent of North Korea’s foreign trade and mineral resources are a key part of their bilateral trade.

The Bank of Korea believes per capita income in the North

is about 1.46 million won (€1,120), which works out at about 4.5 per cent of that in the South.

North Korea has been struggling to bring in foreign currency since the UN Security Council passed a resolution in November that tightened sanctions, including cutting the country’s coal exports, after it conducted its fourth and fifth nuclear tests.

## Ballistic missile

Despite slowing trade, North Korea has still been able to develop what it says is an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the US.

The South Korean unification ministry has renewed its call on North Korea to accept its offer of dialogue in the demilitarised zone that divides the two countries since the Korean War (1950-53) ended without a peace treaty.

North Korea’s main newspaper, *Rodong Sinmun*, said it was “nonsense” for Seoul to hope for improved relations as long as it continued to back sanctions and hold joint naval drills with the US.

## China under pressure to allow Nobel laureate’s widow move abroad

CLIFFORD COONAN

International pressure is growing to allow Liu Xia, the wife of the late Nobel Peace Prize-winner Liu Xiaobo, to leave the country if she wants to go abroad. She has been under house arrest for years.

Diplomatic sources in Beijing say intensive discussions are under way with Chinese authorities to grant permission to allow Ms Xia, a photographer and poet, to leave the country.

Liu Xiaobo, who was jailed on subversion charges, died of liver cancer on July 27th and China has been fiercely criticised over its treatment of the Nobel laureate.

Negotiations are proving tricky. Beijing has responded by saying that Mr Liu was a criminal under Chinese law, that he received excellent care and by telling western countries to back off what it sees as a sovereignty issue.

China has held a firm line saying “she is free” even though she has effectively been under house arrest for seven years since her husband won the peace prize in 2010. She has never been charged.

## Communist Party

There are fears that if she were allowed to leave China, she would become a high-profile thorn in the Chinese government’s side, criticising the Communist Party for the way her late husband was treated.

The United Nations high commissioner for human rights Zeid Ra’ad al-Husseini said this week he will keep on pressuring China to allow Ms Xia to leave.

“We’re now focused on his wife and ensuring that she has – or trying to ensure that she

has – freedom of movement and if she wants to leave China she should be able to leave China,” Mr Zeid said.

He plans to meet Chinese officials when he returns to Geneva to repeat his call to have restrictions on Ms Xia’s movements removed.

The Chinese foreign ministry rejected calls for her to be allowed to move freely, saying it was a domestic affair and that foreigners were “in no position to make improper remarks” over the handling of Mr Liu’s case.

Ms Xia spent the last few weeks of her husband’s life with him in the hospital in Shenyang. During her time under house arrest, she was allowed to leave her apartment

to go and visit her husband in Shenyang once a month. Her friends say she has suffered great mental anguish during her time in unofficial custody.

German chancellor Angela Merkel has reportedly raised the issue with the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, and US secretary of state Rex Tillerson has also called for Ms Xia to be allowed to leave China.

Legal scholar Jerome Cohen, director of the US-Asia law institute at New York University, wrote on his blog that Ms Xia’s case highlighted “what I call NRR – ‘non-release release’, another, lesser-known but insidious form of oppression”.

For people who aspire to inspire.

## Executive Education Programmes

- **BSc Hons Management Practice**  
1 evening per week over 2 years  
Internationally recognised qualification
- **MSc in Executive Leadership**  
Part time over 2 years  
International study visit to Boston college

Delivered in Dublin by Ulster University and led by industry and academic experts.

Enrolling now for Autumn Programmes

Call us on (01) 472 7101  
Visit [irishtimestraining.com](http://irishtimestraining.com)  
Email [gencourses@irishtimes.com](mailto:gencourses@irishtimes.com)



## Thai court to deliver Shinawatra verdict

Thailand’s supreme court has set August 25th as the date for a verdict in the trial of the country’s former prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra, who is accused of wasting billions of dollars on a rice subsidy scheme.

Ms Yingluck, overthrown in a 2014 military coup, faces up to 10 years in jail if found guilty in the trial, which has been going on for 18 months. Yesterday

was the last day for witness hearings. Ms Yingluck can make a closing statement on August 1st, the court said.

Ms Yingluck and her Pua Thai Party say the trial is politically motivated, aimed at discrediting a populist movement that has helped the Shinawatra clan win every election since 2001. Ms Yingluck’s brother Thaksin Shinawatra intro-

duced the rice programme before he himself was ousted in a 2006 coup.

But Ms Yingluck took it a step further by offering to buy rice from farmers at up to 50 per cent above market prices. The measure helped her sweep to power in 2011, but government losses from the scheme – which also distorted global rice prices – fuelled protests that led

to her removal. Ms Yingluck, however, remains popular among her supporters, particularly in the northeast, Thailand’s poorest region.

Hundreds of supporters at the court cheered Ms Yingluck at the court yesterday – defying junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha’s request for her followers to stay away.

– (Reuters)