

TOP OF THE WORLD



Tulsi Gabbard

USA

Tulsi sorry for anti-gay past

Washington: Democrat Tulsi Gabbard apologised Thursday for her past remarks that were critical of the LGBTQ community, saying now she has a strong commitment to fight for their rights. Gabbard, 37, the first Hindu elected to US Congress, last week announced she will run for President in 2020. In the past, she "forcefully defended" her father who was fighting against gay rights and marriage equality in Hawaii.

UK

Oxford to forgo Huawei money

Beijing: Oxford University has decided to forgo further funding from Chinese tech giant Huawei as scrutiny grows in Europe over the company's relationship with the Chinese government. Huawei has been under fire with the arrests of a top executive in Canada and an employee in Poland, along with a worldwide campaign by the US to blacklist its equipment.

MEXICO

Airline offers 'DNA discount'

New York: Aeromexico, the largest Mexican carrier, is taking a poke at the US-Mexico border stand-off with a "DNA discount" for people in the US with Mexican ancestry. An ad launched this week encouraged Americans to visit Mexico, saying it would provide discounts based on the percentage of Mexican heritage determined from customers who take a blood test.

INDONESIA

Radical cleric to be freed

Jakarta: The ailing 80-year-old radical cleric who inspired the Bali bombers and other violent extremists in Indonesia will be released from prison, Indonesia's president said Friday, slashing a 15-year sentence. The announcement of Abu Bakar Bashir's imminent release came during campaigning for a presidential election due in April in which opponents of President Joko Widodo have tried to discredit him as insufficiently Islamic.

CHINA

Defending party first duty of police: China

Beijing: A top Chinese security official has asked the police to crackdown on "colour revolutions" or popular uprisings, and directed them to defend China's political system headed by the ruling Communist Party. China's police must stress on the "prevention and resistance of 'colour revolutions' and firmly fight to protect China's political security," said Public Security Minister Zhao Kezhi.

North Korea envoy meets Pompeo, Trump as diplomats hold secret meet

DAVID BRUNNSTROM & MATT SPETALNICK WASHINGTON, JANUARY 18

A TOP North Korean nuclear envoy met President Donald Trump at the White House after holding talks with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday in a diplomatic flurry aimed at laying the groundwork for a second US-North Korea summit. The visit of Kim Yong Chol, Pyongyang's lead negotiator with the US and a hardline former spy chief, marked a rare sign of potential movement in a denuclearisation effort that has stalled since a landmark meeting between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore last year. Kim Yong Chol and Pompeo, with tight smiles, posed together for photographs at a Washington hotel before holding about 45 minutes of talks that could determine whether the two sides can make headway. After those talks, the White House said Trump met Kim Yong



Mike Pompeo (right) with Kim Yong Chol at a hotel in Washington on Friday. Reuters

Chol in the Oval Office to "discuss relations between the two countries and continued progress on North Korea's final, fully verified denuclearisation." Meanwhile, North Korean vice-foreign minister Choe Son

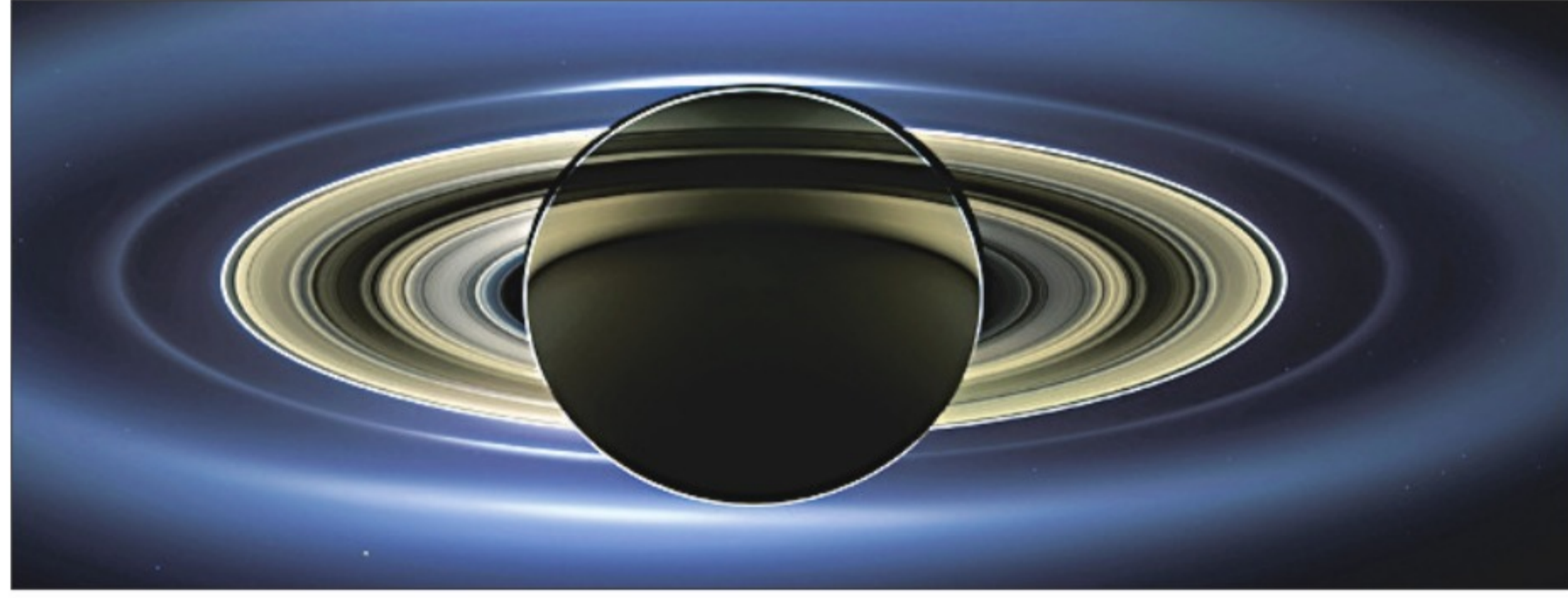
Hui has arrived in Sweden to take part in roundtable talks. Sweden's foreign ministry said on Friday, amid stepped up international efforts to end the stand-off between the United States and North Korea.

EXPLAINED America's new approach to missile defence

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump's review on Thursday, in a Pentagon report laying down America's plans for missile defence, singled out North Korea as an ongoing and "extraordinary threat". The report focused on the strategies and number of anti-missile interceptors needed to deter North Korea, and where to base them, and Trump's speech placed emphasis on attacking enemy missiles "prior to launch." The new policy also stated that the Trump administration was seeking to stop enemy missiles before they got far off the ground — a step known as boost-phase interception, since the attack would happen while a missile's engines were still firing. The approach has gained support since North Korea started testing long-range missiles.

The meeting, which is due to last over the weekend, has been planned in secret for months. A diplomatic source said the purpose of the meeting was to take steps forward in the rela-

tions between US and North Korea after things "ground to a halt" following a landmark meeting between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore last year. REUTERS



SATURN'S RINGS MUCH YOUNGER THAN PLANET

A natural-colour image of Saturn from space, the first in which Saturn, its moons and rings, and Earth, Venus and Mars, all are visible. NASA

■ Saturn's spectacular rings are very young — no more than 100 million years old, when dinosaurs still walked the Earth, scientists using data from the Cassini spacecraft have found. The finding has been published in *Science*.

■ The study shows that the rings are relatively recent, having originated less than 100 million years ago and perhaps as recently as 10 million years ago. Until now, some scientists had thought that the rings formed along with the planet 4.5 billion years ago.

■ Precise measurements of Cassini's final trajectory allowed scientists led by Sapienza University of Rome in Italy to make the first accurate estimate of the amount of material in the rings, weighing them based on the strength of their gravitational pull.

Won't accede to hunger strikes from anyone: Oli

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE KATHMANDU, JANUARY 18

NEPALESE PRIME Minister KP Oli indicated he would not negotiate with those who resort to hunger strikes to press their demands. Oli was responding to questions in Parliament pertaining to Dr Govinda KC, a senior orthopaedic surgeon and professor at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, who has been on a fast for the past six days. KC wants the government to stop the growth of private medical colleges in Nepal. Oli said while a "deal" with an individual on hunger strike could be driven by the necessity of the situation, it would not have an "overriding" effect on the right of

parliament to make laws without outside interference. "I can make appeals to the Parliament, but I cannot dictate it," he said. The government had promised KC last July that no new private medical colleges would be opened or granted affiliation. But a recent legislation said "any college that has got a letter of intent and created necessary infrastructure will be granted licence to run medical colleges". KC has undergone hunger strikes 16 times in the past five years, ending each one after an agreement with the government. KC, who was airlifted from Ilam to Kathmandu Friday and admitted to the ICU of a hospital, said he wouldn't end his fast until the government fulfills its promise.

Trump denies Pelosi plane for Afghan trip, leaks plans

JULIE HIRSCHFELD DAVIS WASHINGTON, JANUARY 18

HOUSE OF Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi postponed an official trip to Europe and Afghanistan due to security concerns Friday after President Donald Trump grounded her military flight and divulged the itinerary, and her aides said the administration leaked plans for her and the lawmakers accompanying her to fly commercially. "In light of the grave threats caused by the president's action, the delegation has decided to postpone the trip," said a statement by Pelosi's aide, adding that the State Department had raised its threat assessment for the trip

after Trump announced in a letter to Pelosi Thursday that he was revoking her use of a military aircraft to make the journey, which she was to have begun that afternoon. It was the latest turn in a bitter tit-for-tat between Pelosi, who requested Wednesday that Trump postpone his State of the Union address scheduled for January 29 in light of the continuing partial government shutdown, which she said raised security concerns given that federal employees charged with protecting the attendees were not being paid. The president struck back the next day, saying that with government workers not receiving their paychecks, he was asking her to delay what he branded a "public relations event." NYT

Islamabad to host next round of talks between US, Afghan Taliban

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 18

PAKISTAN WILL host the next round of talks between the US and Afghan Taliban in Islamabad, it was decided on Friday during a meeting between Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and US special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, according to a media report. It is expected that Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar would also be part of the peace talks, it said. Khalilzad arrived in Islamabad Thursday and also met Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa.

'GIVE MORE RIGHTS IN GILGIT-BALTISTAN'

Islamabad: Pakistan's Supreme Court has ordered the government to promulgate a new law within a fortnight to grant more rights, including fundamental human rights, to the

people of Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. A seven-judge bench wrote that the jurisdiction and power of the SC extend to Gilgit-Baltistan. PTI

"The FM assured Ambassador Khalilzad of Pakistan's support for the peace process," said Foreign Office spokesman Mohammad Faisal. Meanwhile, a Congressional report has stated that Pakistan

may view a weak and destabilise Afghanistan as preferable to a strong and unified one. The report "Afghanistan: Background and US Policy in Brief" was prepared by the Congressional Research Service.

JAMAL KHASHOGGI'S LAST WORDS

'Do not cover my mouth. I have asthma... you will strangle me'

CARLOTTA GALL ISTANBUL, JANUARY 18

A NEW book written by three Turkish reporters and drawing on audio recordings of the killing of Saudi expatriate Jamal Khashoggi offers new details about the encounter. Turkish officials have cited the recordings, saying they captured the death of Khashoggi, a journalist, on an October 2 visit to the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. A Turkish security official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the details described in the book were accurate. The book, *Diplomatic*

Atrocities: The Dark Secrets of the Jamal Khashoggi Murder, is written in Turkish and went on sale in December. The reporters identify one of the officials on the tapes as Maher Abdulaziz Mutreb, a security official and frequent companion of the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. Mutreb is heard giving orders and directing the conversation with Khashoggi, the book says. Turkish officials identified Mutreb and others through sound analysis. They say it was Mutreb who laid out the plan to Dr Salah Muhammad al-Tubaigi, a top forensic official of the Saudi government, telling him they

would try to take Khashoggi back to Saudi Arabia. If Khashoggi resisted, "We will kill him here and get rid of the body," Mutreb told al-Tubaigi, according to the book. "Jamal is tall, around 1.80 metres," al-Tubaigi is quoted as saying. "The joints of a sacrificial animal are easily split, but dismembering still will take time." "I always worked on cadavers," he said. "I know how to cut well. I have never worked on a warm body until now, but I can handle that easily. Normally while working on a cadaver, I put on my headphones and listen to music. And I drink my coffee and smoke my cigarette." "After I dismember, you will



Jamal Khashoggi

wrap them in plastic bags and put in the luggage and take" the body parts out, al-Tubaigi added. Within minutes of entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Khashoggi was taken to the consul's office. "Let go of my arm —

what do you think you are doing?" he is heard saying. As soon as Khashoggi entered the room, the reporters write, Mutreb told him: "Come, sit down. We came to take you to Riyadh." Khashoggi's answer was short and clear: "I won't go to Riyadh." The Saudi team wanted Khashoggi to send the following message to his son Salah: "My son, I am in Istanbul. Do not worry if you don't hear from me for a while." Khashoggi refused, and Mutreb ordered his men to set out the tools they had brought to dismember his body — the audio captures the sound of the instruments being placed on a table.

"Are you going to kill me? Are you going to strangle me?" Khashoggi is heard asking, Mutreb told him he would be "forgiven" if he cooperated. Mutreb then orders five Saudi agents to jump on Khashoggi. One of the agents tried to cover Khashoggi's mouth, but the audio suggests that Khashoggi fended him off. The killers finally managed to put a plastic bag over Khashoggi's head, the book says. It took five minutes until he drew his last breath, and his last words were recorded as: "Do not cover my mouth. I have asthma. Don't, you will strangle me." Khashoggi died at 1.24 pm,

the book reports, just 10 minutes after entering the building. After Khashoggi was dead, a Saudi who was sent to be a double of Khashoggi removed his clothes. Two Saudi royal guards helped Tubaigi as he dismembered the body. As the scene unfolded, consulate personnel felt sick, the book says. "According to the audio," the reporters write, "the chop-chop that was heard now and then established the use of a tool similar to a chopping knife during the dismembering of the bones of the body, while a high-pitched sound of an electric autopsy saw, working frequently, was also recorded." NYT



The Palace of Princes restaurant in Manbij, Syria, after the blast on Wednesday; (below, right) US Senator Lindsey Graham dines there in July. AP & NYT

How grilled chicken, shawarma led IS to Americans in Syria

BEN HUBBARD & ERIC SCHMITT BEIRUT, JANUARY 18

FOR US troops posted in the dusty flatlands of northern Syria, the Palace of the Princes restaurant in Manbij offered a pleasant place to stop for grilled chicken, french fries or its locally renowned shawarma sandwich. The Americans liked the food so much that they dropped in frequently, often many times a week, residents said. Visiting officials were welcomed to red booths and water pipes — two US senators dined there in July. "They stop here for chicken and shawarma whenever they have a patrol in the city," said Jassim al-Khalaf, 37, who sells vegetables nearby. "People here are used to it, so it's not a new thing to see them." The jihadis of the Islamic State noticed, too, dispatching a suicide bomber who blew himself up at the restaurant Wednesday, killing at least 15 people, including four Americans: two service members, a Defence Department civilian and a military contractor. On a July visit, a delegation of US military leaders and senators wore no body armour as they walked through a crowded marketplace there, surveying stalls hawking spices, gold jewelry, olive soap and fresh chicken. "Pretty cool," said Lt Gen Paul Funk II, then commander of coalition forces fighting in Iraq and Syria. "This is what stability looks like. This is what winning looks like." From there, the group, including Senators Lindsey Graham and Jeanne Shaheen



stroled to the Palace of Princes for lunch with local leaders. "We had a very good tour and a terrific lunch," Graham said afterward. Manbij, he said, was "a place of hope in a region that needs more hope." A two-story restaurant on a crowded downtown street, the Palace of Princes served meat grilled over charcoal, rotisserie chicken, shawarma and other dishes that made it a favourite stop for US soldiers on patrol. If the Americans gave any thought to the cardinal importance of varying one's routines in a war zone to make it harder for enemies to plan attacks, it was not reflected in their eating habits. "I know that whenever they went to the city because there was a patrol or a mission, they would pass by that restaurant," said Sherwan Darwish, spokesman for the Manbij Military Council, which works closely with the US. On Wednesday, one such patrol dropped in for a late lunch. Cars were double-parked in front of the restaurant and the sidewalks were full of people visiting the nearby vegetable market. A suicide bomber mixed into the crowd and detonated his explosive vest near the restaurant entrance. NYT