

ELSEWHERE

**Bezos's messages bought from girlfriend's brother**

WASHINGTON
The *National Enquirer* bought revealing messages between Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and his then-secret girlfriend for \$2,00,000 from her brother, *The Wall Street Journal* reported on Monday. The *Enquirer* in January reported that Mr. Bezos had an affair with former news anchor and entertainment reporter Lauren Sanchez — a leak that led to his divorce. **AFF**

Supreme Court endorses detention of immigrants

WASHINGTON
The Supreme Court on Tuesday endorsed the U.S. government's authority to detain immigrants awaiting deportation anytime — potentially even years — after they have completed prison terms for criminal convictions, handing President Donald Trump a victory. **REUTERS**

'Gunman will face the full force of the law'

CHRISTCHURCH
Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern vowed on Tuesday never to utter the name of the twin-mosque gunman as she opened a sombre session of Parliament with *as-salaam alaikum*. "He will face the full force of the law in New Zealand," she pledged to grieving Kiwis. **AFF**

Kazakh President resigns after 30 years in power

ALMATY
Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev resigned on Tuesday after three decades in power, in what appeared to be the first step in a choreographed political transition. Mr. Nazarbayev has governed the Central Asian country since 1989, when it was still part of the Soviet Union. **REUTERS**

U.K. to seek Brexit extension till June 30

Government to go ahead with a vote on Prime Minister May's deal despite Speaker Bercow's warning

VIDYA RAM
LONDON

The British government has indicated that it could press ahead with plans for a vote on Prime Minister Theresa May's controversial withdrawal agreement next week, despite a warning from the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, that only a significantly different agreement could be put to the House again.

The statement by Mr. Bercow on Monday afternoon caught MPs and Downing Street off guard, and threw a spanner in the government's plans to hold two votes — one before a European Union (EU) Council meeting this week, and one after to try getting its deal through Parliament before Britain is set to leave the EU on March 29. Unless an extension is agreed to (or Article 50 is

revoked by both sides) Britain is set to leave the EU with or without a deal on that date.

Mr. Bercow's warning that parliamentary votes carried "weight" and that the House could not be asked the same question infinitely means that the government won't bring the withdrawal deal to MPs ahead of the Thursday meeting of the European Union Council. Even though the government looked set to lose the vote, there were hopes that with some MPs wavering, it could lose by a smaller margin and that this could help the government in extracting further concessions from the EU. However, without that recourse, the government will have to find a new strategy.

Vote next week

Downing Street has said that it is writing to EU Council



A protest against Brexit in London on Monday. **•AP**

president Donald Tusk to ask for an extension — initially till June 30 (just before July 2 when the new EU parliamentary session will open after May elections) but with the possibility of extending it further if the need arose, the BBC reported. It would then hold a vote next week, potentially by asking MPs to

vote to set aside the Bercow ruling, Brexit Secretary Stephen Barclay indicated on the BBC this morning.

In an astonishing display of the division at the heart of the British government, Mr. Barclay last week voted against the government motion extending the Brexit deadline.

However, whether the EU will agree to give the U.K. more time is another matter altogether. It would take a veto from just one EU country to block an extension being given, and there are increasing signs of frustration from the continent.

"The clock is ticking and time is running out," warned Germany's Europe Minister Michael Roth, speaking to reporters in Brussels. Ahead of Thursday's meeting Mr. Tusk reiterated "full EU unity", on Brexit, as well as the group's preparedness for a no-deal exit.

Even if the EU were to agree to an extension along the lines sought by Downing Street, it is far from given that the deal would pass next week. Many Brexiters have continued to hold out — hopeful the U.K. could crash out of the EU on WTO terms.

Next Dalai Lama could be from India: monk

China rejects the Tibetan's suggestion

ATUL ANEJA
BEIJING

China on Tuesday rejected the assertion by the Dalai Lama that his successor could be found in India — a move that could undermine the legitimacy of the next-in-line chosen by Beijing.

The 14th Dalai Lama has been living in India in exile since 1959.

Speaking to Reuters, the Dalai Lama had said that Beijing is worried about the legitimacy of his successor. "In future, in case you see two Dalai Lamas come, one from here, in a free country, one is chosen by Chinese, and then nobody will trust, nobody will respect (the one chosen by China).

"So that's an additional problem for the Chinese. It's possible, it can happen," the

83-year-old Tibetan monk said.

In its response, the Chinese Foreign Ministry was unequivocal in rejecting the Dalai Lama's assertion. It said the reincarnation of Dalai Lama should pursue Chinese laws, regulations as well as established religious principles.

"I knew you were going to ask this question. Well, here is the answer: Reincarnation is the unique way of Tibetan Buddhism. It has fixed rituals and systems. The Chinese government has a policy of freedom of religious beliefs. We have... regulations of freedom of the reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhism. We respect and protect such ways of Tibetan Buddhism," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said.

Dutch prosecutors probe terrorist motive in shooting

REUTERS
AMSTERDAM

Dutch prosecutors on Tuesday said they were investigating a possible terrorist motive behind the shooting on a tram in the city of Utrecht in which three people were killed and five wounded. A Turkish-born man, Gokmen Tanis, 37, was arrested after a seven-hour manhunt on Monday by security forces and remained in custody.

Prosecutors said he is suspected of three fatal shootings, possibly with terrorist intent. "Two other suspects were also in custody, police said, but their role was unclear. "Up to this point, a terrorist motive is seriously being considered", prosecutors said in a state-



A woman mourning at the site of Monday's shooting in Utrecht. **•REUTERS**

ment, citing "the nature of the shooting and a letter found in the getaway car".

But it remained unclear whether Tanis was acting on political beliefs or a personal vendetta. "Other motives are not being ruled out," the statement said.

Bilawal's tweet seeks removal of 3 Pak. Ministers

His speech last week, which called for strong action against all terror outfits, resulted in a war of words

MEHMAL SARFRAZ
LAHORE

"The government has responded to my demand to sack Ministers associated with banned outfits by declaring me anti-state, issuing death threats & NAB notices. None of this deters us from our principle[d] stand; form joint NSC parliamentary committee & act against banned outfits," tweeted Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Tuesday.

Last week, Mr. Bhutto-Zardari had demanded the removal of three federal Ministers for their links with proscribed organisations. He had not named the three Ministers but everyone had guessed their names — Fi-

nance Minister Asad Umar, Minister of State for Interior Shehryar Afridi and Railways Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad. In a series of tweets on Monday, Mr. Bhutto-Zardari confirmed these names by tweeting out news stories of these three Ministers hobnobbing with leaders of banned outfits.

A united front

There has been a war of words ever since the PPP chairman delivered a hard-hitting speech in the National Assembly on March 6. He appreciated the Opposition for showing a united front to the world after the Indian aggression post-Pulwama. He said: "There was no petty politicking... none of the Op-



Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party. **•AFP**

position members dared to declare Imran Khan a security risk for trying to make peace overtures to India."

Mr. Bhutto-Zardari also poked fun at the resolution to nominate Mr. Khan for the Nobel Peace Prize.

After that, he spoke resolutely about terrorism. "We don't need to fight terrorism, extremism, banned organisations because the world wants us to, because we are under international pressure, because we are under India's pressure. As the Pakistan Peoples Party has been saying from the outset when most members of this House were in denial about the threats of extremism and terrorism, we have to combat this mindset for the future of our coming generations."

He questioned the state about the implementation of

the National Action Plan (NAP). "What happened to 'no more good or bad Taliban'? What happened to action against Punjab's Taliban? What happened to action against banned organisations? What happened to judicial reform? What happened to combating terrorist financing and terror related money laundering? And what the hell is mainstreaming? How is it possible that this House takes a unanimous decision and the state implements a diametrically contradictory policy of capitulation, appeasement and so-called mainstreaming? This is not the policy of the Parliament of Pakistan and this should not be the policy of Pakistan!"

China remains mum as Qureshi raises Kashmir during visit

ATUL ANEJA
BEIJING

Pakistan on Tuesday pressed China to focus on alleged human rights violations in Kashmir as Beijing prepares to play an active diplomatic role in defusing India-Pakistan tensions following last month's Pulwama attack.

At a joint press conference on Tuesday after concluding the first Pakistan-China foreign ministerial dialogue, visiting Pakistani Foreign Mi-

nister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said that the world should make a "new assessment" of the situation in Kashmir, especially after the Pulwama attack.

Mr. Qureshi asserted that he had briefed his Chinese counterpart and State Councilor Wang Yi about "the rapidly deteriorating situation on the Indian side of the Kashmir," especially the "human rights violations" following the Pulwama suicide



Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. **•AFP**

bombing. "I think there is a need for a new assessment of how the situation on the In-

dian side of Kashmir should be handled by the Indians. There are voices within India that are questioning the efficacy of the policy that they (Indians) have followed for the last many years now," Mr. Qureshi said.

But during the press conference, Mr. Wang made no direct or indirect references to the Kashmir issue, though he praised Pakistan for exercising restraint to de-escalate the post-Pulwama situation.

Instead, the Chinese side reinforced its stated position that Beijing firmly upheld the maintenance of status quo along the borders — a stance it had adopted on February 27, after sections of the establishment in Islamabad raised the alarm apprehending Indian missile strikes on Pakistani targets. "No matter how things change in the world and the region, China will firmly support Pakistan in upholding

its independence and territorial integrity and dignity," Mr. Wang said.

The Chinese Foreign Minister stressed that "a peaceful and stable South Asia is in the common interest of... countries and meets the expectations of the world. China commends the constructive efforts taken by Pakistan to ease the situation. We call Pakistan and India to exercise restraint and peacefully resolve their differences."

Sri Lanka oil refinery attracts record investment

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka announced on Tuesday that an overseas joint venture had committed \$3.85 billion to a new oil refinery — the single largest foreign investment in the country's history.

The Board of Investment of Sri Lanka said construction would begin this week on the refinery and storage facility jointly fi-

nanced by Oman's Ministry of Oil and Gas and a Singapore-registered company.

Deputy International Trade Minister Nalin Bandara said he expected the refinery to be fully operational within four years. Oman will fund 30% of the new oil project while Singapore-based Silver Park International, which is majority owned by a business interest in India, will finance the rest.

Signing FTA with India not an immediate priority: U.K.

It isn't in the post-Brexit first tier, says Minister

VIDYA RAM
LONDON

Britain has acknowledged that securing a Free Trade Agreement with India will not be its immediate priority as it prepares to leave the EU and focusses on "first-tier" countries. Instead, Britain would initially focus on tackling existing barriers to trade, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Minister for Asia Mark Field and the head of the South Asia Department Fergus Auld told MP during an evidence session on Tuesday afternoon as part of an inquiry by the committee into the government's efforts to build a "global Britain" in the wake of Brexit.

Referring to the Department of International Trade (DIT)'s approach to securing post-Brexit trade deals, Mr. Auld said that the Department would first focus on securing FTAs that were "relatively simple" and "where there was clear mutual advantage."

"I think with India the DIT are looking first at how to deal with other barriers to trade," and that this would build towards a future trading relationship, rather than going straight for an FTA, said Mr. Auld.

However, when asked about what the barriers were, Mr. Field noted that businesses have not always found it easy to operate in India. "There have been a number of high trade disputes that required international arbitration," he told MPs. "We are prioritising in terms of free trade agreements are concerned. It's not that India is not im-



Mark Field, Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific. **•THE HINDU**

portant but it isn't in that first tier."

While it was a positive step that India had risen by 53 ranks in the 'Ease of Doing Business Index' between 2016 and 2018, the fact that it remained at position 77 suggested that "there are difficulties that are there", Mr. Field told MPs.

Visa issue

Asked by one MP if the government recognised the significance of the issue of visas for India, Mr. Field acknowledged that this was an issue between the two countries.

He also rejected a suggestion by one MP that Britain was more generous to an "autocracy than a democracy", by offering a two-year visitor visa to Chinese nationals that was not available to Indians.

The Chinese visa, he said, was simply a pilot, whose efficacy was still being examined, and if this were to be found suitable, could potentially be replicated for India in the future.

H-1B changes due to kick in from April 1

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

The U.S. administration will start accepting H-1B FY 2020 applications on April 1, 2020, United States Citizenship and Information Services (USCIS) announced via a statement on Tuesday.

The announcement also confirmed several other changes to the programme — a new data hub, a change in how the lottery is conducted for the general category and advanced degree holders and changes to the mechanism of premium processing.

Data hub

USCIS is launching a new tool — the H-1B Employer Data Hub — which will allow the public to search for H-1B petitioners by company name, fiscal year, an industry code, city, state or zip code. This, according to the USCIS, will provide greater transparency to the programme by providing information on H-1B approval and denial rates and which companies are using the visa.

Over 70% of H-1B visas went to Indians in fiscal year 2018 but it is unclear whether the overall impact on Indians will be positive or negative because of the aforementioned changes.