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TOP OF THE WORLD



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un

KOREAS
N Korea returns to inter-Korean liaison office

Seoul: North Korea has returned its staff to an inter-Korean liaison office, Seoul said Monday, just days after unilaterally withdrawing from the joint facility. The office in the Northern city of Kaesong was opened in September as the two Koreas knitted closer ties, but the North pulled its staff out last week amid a deadlock in talks between the US and Pyongyang. The unification ministry said some of the North Korean staff were back at work Monday. "Thus, the South and the North held consultations at the liaison office this morning and will continue to operate the office as usual," the ministry said in a statement.

PAKISTAN
Former cop charged in killing of model

Karachi: A former police officer, who allegedly staged a fake encounter of a 27-year-old aspiring male model after declaring him a member of the Pakistani Taliban, was charged on Monday with murder. An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Karachi indicted former Malir Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rao Anwar for the murder of Waziristan native Nageebullah Mehsud in a fake encounter in Karachi. Anwar, who was in court when charges were framed against him, pleaded not guilty.

SYRIA TENSIONS
France bans Iran's Mahan Air

Paris: France has banned flights in and out of the country by Iran's Mahan Air, accusing it of transporting military equipment and personnel to Syria and other Middle East war zones, diplomats said on Monday, after heavy US pressure on Paris to act. The decision to revoke Mahan's licence to operate in France was made after Germany banned the airline in January. Paris had considered revoking its licence more than two years ago, but had backed down because it feared it could harm relations just after a nuclear deal was signed.

US ATTORNEY GENERAL PRESENTS PRINCIPLE CONCLUSIONS TO CONGRESS

Mueller finds no Trump-Russia collusion, but questions remain

Special Counsel's report makes no conclusion on whether President's actions obstructed justice

ERIC TUCKER, MICHAEL BALSAMO, CHAD DAY & JULIE PACE
WASHINGTON, MARCH 25

SPECIAL COUNSEL Robert Mueller found no evidence US President Donald Trump's campaign "conspired or coordinated" with Russia to influence the 2016 presidential election but reached no conclusion on whether Trump obstructed justice. That brought a hearty claim of vindication from Trump but set the stage for new rounds of political and legal fighting.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said Trump will let Attorney General William Barr decide whether the Special Counsel's Russia report should be publicly released, though she adds that "he's more than happy for any of this stuff to come out". Trump cheered the Sunday outcome but also laid bare his resentment after two years of investigations that have shadowed his administration. "It's a shame that our country has had to go through this. To be honest, it's a shame that your President has had to go through this," he said.

Mueller's conclusions, summarised by Barr in a four-page letter to Congress, represented a victory for Trump on a key question that has hung over his presidency from the start — whether his campaign worked with Russia to defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton. That was further good news for the President on top of the Justice Department's earlier announcement that Mueller had wrapped his investigation without new indictments. That could deflate the hopes of Democrats in Congress and on the 2020 campaign trail that incriminating findings from Mueller would hobble the President's agenda and re-election bid.

But while Mueller was categorical in ruling out criminal collusion, he was more circumspect on presidential obstruction of justice. Despite Trump's claim of total exoneration, Mueller did not draw a conclusion one way or the other on whether he



Trump claimed vindication soon after Attorney General William Barr concluded that the evidence presented in the Mueller report does not implicate him in any crime. Reuters, AP



EXPLAINED
Report's ambiguity on obstruction sets stage for new battle

ATTORNEY GENERAL William Barr wrote to Congress saying Special Counsel Mueller's investigation found no evidence of collusion between Trump and Russia. But on the question of whether Trump's actions during Mueller's probe constituted obstruction of justice, Barr quotes the report as stating, "...while this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him." In his letter, Barr says he evaluated the evidence in the Mueller report and concluded that Trump did not commit any crime. But Democrats are not satisfied with the conclusion of the Attorney General, who was recently appointed by Trump. They are leading Congressional investigations into Trump's conduct, and have demand to see all the available evidence. However, Barr is not required to hand over the full report, and a constitutional battle is on the cards with Democrats already threatening to issue subpoenas.

Barr, who was nominated by Trump in December, and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who appointed Mueller in May 2017 and oversaw much of his work, went further in Trump's favour.

The Attorney General said he and Rosenstein had determined that Mueller's evidence was insufficient to prove in court that Trump had committed obstruction of justice to hamper the probe. Barr has previously voiced a broad view of presidential powers, and in an unsolicited memo last June he cast doubt on whether the President could have obstructed justice through acts — like firing his FBI director — that he was legally empowered to take. AP

It's a shame that our country has had to go through this. To be honest, it's a shame that your President has had to go through this.

DONALD TRUMP

sought to stifle the Russia investigation through his actions including the firing of former FBI director James Comey.

According to Barr's summary, Mueller set out "evidence on both sides of the question" and stated that "while this report does not conclude the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him".

Israel carries out air strikes in Gaza after rocket attack near Tel Aviv

NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI
GAZA, JERUSALEM, MARCH 25

ISRAEL LAUNCHED airstrikes in the Gaza Strip on Monday after a rocket attack near Tel Aviv wounded seven people, prompting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to cut short a visit to the United States.

Netanyahu had threatened strong retaliation for the long-range rocket salvo amid accusations from opponents in a closely contested election, two weeks away, that he has been showing weakness in the face of security challenges from Gaza militants. "The Israel Defence Forces have begun striking Hamas terror



The southern Gaza strip after an Israeli airstrike. Reuters

targets throughout the Gaza Strip," a military statement said.

Netanyahu, who arrived in Washington Sunday for a four-day visit, said he would fly home right after meeting President Donald Trump on Monday.

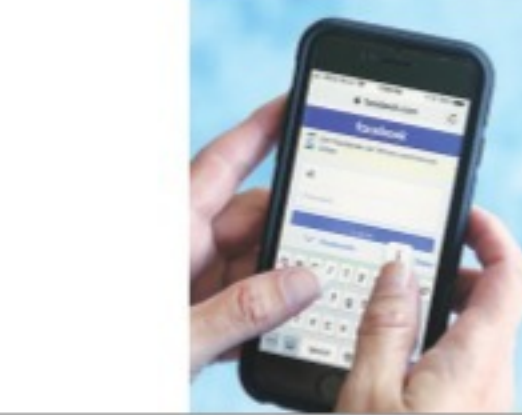
The Israeli military said

Hamas, which rules Gaza, launched the rocket that destroyed a house in Mishmeret, a village north of Tel Aviv.

There was no claim of responsibility for the early morning attack. The military said Hamas fired the rocket from about 120 km away, making it the longest-range attack from Gaza causing casualties since a 2014 war.

Palestinian security officials said Israeli warplanes attacked targets across the coastal enclave. Palestinian radio stations and Hamas TV played patriotic songs calling for "resistance".

There were no immediate reports of casualties in the Gaza Strip. Many targets were likely to have been evacuated. REUTERS



FRANCE
FACEBOOK, YOUTUBE SUED OVER NZ VIDEO

The French Council of the Muslim Faith said Monday it was suing internet giants Facebook and YouTube for allowing the public broadcast of a live video by the man who carried out the New Zealand mosque massacre this month. The council said it was suing the French branches of the two tech giants for "broadcasting a message with violent content abetting terrorism, or of a nature likely to seriously violate human dignity and liable to be seen by a minor", the complaint said.

7 held over alleged forced conversion, underage marriage of Hindu girls in Pak

M ZULQERNAIN
LAHORE, MARCH 25

AT LEAST seven people, including a man who assisted in solemnising the wedding of two teenage Hindu girls after their alleged abduction and forced conversions, have been detained in Pakistan, amid reports that the victims approached a court seeking protection.

The two girls, Raveena (13) and Reena (15), were allegedly kidnapped by a group of "influential" men from their home in Ghotki district in Sindh on the eve of Holi. Soon after the kidnapping, a video went viral in which a cleric was purportedly shown solemnising the *nikah* (marriage) of the two girls, triggering a nationwide outrage.

On March 20, the girls' family lodged a First Information Report against their alleged forced conversion to Islam.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has ordered a probe into the incident after the two separate videos started doing

rounds on social media.

Citing police, Dawn reported that several raids were conducted on Sunday night in Punjab's Rahim Yar Khan district — where it was believed the girls were taken from Ghotki — and arrested the *Nikah Khwan* who solemnised their marriages, a leader of the Pakistan Sunni Tehreek, and some relatives of the two men who had married the two girls.

The detained suspects were handed over to Sindh police.

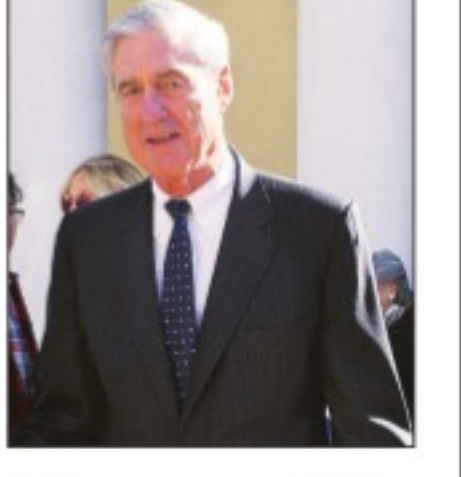
Superintendent of Police Farrukh Lanjhar, who paid a visit to the girls' father Sunday night, said that action was being taken on all available information to recover the girls.

According to Geo TV, the girls have approached a court in Bahawalpur in Punjab province seeking protection.

The Hindu community in Pakistan has carried out massive demonstrations calling for strict action to be taken against those responsible, while reminding Prime Minister Khan of his promises to the minorities of the country. PTI

Mueller probe: A timeline

2017
MAY 17 - US Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein appoints Mueller as a Special Counsel to investigate Russian meddling in the 2016 election and to look into any links or coordination between Russia and Trump's campaign.



US Special Counsel Robert Mueller

OCT 30 - Former Trump campaign adviser George Papadopoulos pleads guilty to a charge of lying to the FBI about his contacts with Russian officials.

DEC. 1 - Michael Flynn, Trump's national security adviser for less than a month who also had a prominent campaign role, pleads guilty to the charge of lying to the FBI about his discussions in 2016 with the Russian ambassador to Washington.

2018
FEB 16 - Federal grand jury indicts 13 Russians and three firms, including a Russian government propaganda arm, accusing them of tampering with the electoral process to support Trump and disparage Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton.

JULY 13 - A jury indicts 12 Russian intelligence officers on charges of hacking Democratic Party computer networks in 2016 and staged releases of documents.

AUG 21 - A trial jury in Virginia finds Former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort guilty of five counts of tax fraud, two counts of bank fraud and one count of failure to disclose a foreign bank account.

2019
JAN 25 - Longtime Trump associate Roger Stone arrested. Stone is accused of lying to Congress about statements suggesting he may have had advance knowledge of plans by Wikileaks to release Democratic Party campaign emails that US officials say were stolen by Russia.

MARCH 25 - Mueller submits his confidential report on the findings of his investigation to US Attorney General William Barr.

Thai election: Charges of cheating amid confusion over results

PANU WONGCHA-UM & KAY JOHNSON
BANGKOK, MARCH 25

THAILAND'S FIRST general election since a military coup five years ago was thrown into disarray on Monday as two opposition parties alleged cheating and the election commission said it could be weeks until the make-up of Parliament becomes clear.

Confusion over the outcome of Sunday's election raised the spectre of a protracted power struggle, spoiling hopes of a clear cut result that could have ended 15 years of political turmoil in the country.

Both the pro-Army party seeking to keep coup leader



The opposition's PM candidate Sudarat Keyuraphan. Reuters

Prayuth Chan-ocha on as prime minister and the opposition party linked to self-exiled former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, claimed they would command enough parliamentary seats to form a coalition government.

The pro-Thaksin Pheu Thai party said it was considering a legal challenge over what it said were poll irregularities after partial results showed Prayuth's Palang Pracharath party with an unexpected lead in the popular vote.

The strong early showing for Palang Pracharath increased the likelihood that Prayuth, who was Army Chief when he overthrew a Pheu Thai government in 2014, would stay in power, although that outcome was not certain.

"There are irregularities in this election that we're not comfortable with. These affect the nation's credibility and people's trust," said Sudarat Keyuraphan, candidate for prime minister of the Pheu Thai Party. REUTERS

US airstrikes kill 13 Afghan civilians, including kids

REUTERS
KUNDUZ/LASHKAR GAH, MARCH 25

US AIRSTRIKES in the northern Afghan province of Kunduz killed about a dozen civilians on Saturday, local officials said, as battle intensified there and in southern Helmand province.

The airstrikes killed 13 civilians, said Safiullah Amiri, a member of Kunduz provincial council. The casualties included children, said fellow council member Amrullah, who pegged the civilian death toll at 12.

The bodies were brought into Kunduz city in the back of a truck as part of protests by dozens of civilians against the deaths.

The civilian deaths occurred as Afghan and Taliban forces claimed to inflict heavy losses on each other in Kunduz and Helmand, two Taliban strongholds.

Sgt. Debra Richardson, spokeswoman for the NATO-led Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, said it is aware of the civilian casualty reports, adding that the mission reviews all credible allegations.

"We take every measure to prevent civilian casualties, in contrast to the Taliban who intentionally hide behind women and children," she said in a statement.

Resolute Support, comprising troops from 39 countries, trains, advises and assists Afghan security forces.

Richardson said combined Afghan and US forces fought the Taliban for approximately 30 hours from Friday to Saturday near Kunduz city, during which Taliban manoeuvred in and out of civilian homes.

DANISH CAPITAL PLANS TO UTILISE WIND, RECYCLING AND AN INNOVATIVE SKI HILL TO BE CARBON NEUTRAL IN 6 YEARS

Copenhagen wants to show how cities can fight climate change

SOMINI SENGUPTA & CHARLOTTE DE LA FUENTE
COPENHAGEN, MARCH 25

CAN A city cancel out its greenhouse gas emissions?

Copenhagen intends to, and fast. By 2025, this once-grimy industrial city aims to be net carbon neutral, meaning it plans to generate more renewable energy than the dirty energy it consumes.

Here's why it matters to the rest of the world: Half of humanity now lives in cities, and the vast share of planet-warming gases comes from cities. The big fixes for climate change need to come from cities, too. They are both a problem and a potential source of solutions. The experience of

Copenhagen can show what's possible, and what's tough, for other urban governments on a warming planet.

The mayor, Frank Jensen, said cities "can change the way we behave, the way we are living, and go more green." His city has some advantages. It is small, it is rich and its people care a lot about climate change, Jensen said mayors, more than national politicians, felt the pressure to take action. "We are directly responsible for our cities and our citizens, and they expect us to act," he said.

In the case of Copenhagen, that means changing how people get around, how they heat their homes, and what they do with their trash. The city has already cut its emissions by 42 per



Copenhagen intends to change how people get around, how they heat their homes, and what they do with their trash. NYT

cent from 2005 levels, mainly by moving away from fossil fuels to generate heat and electricity. Politics, though, is making it

Jensen, 57, a left-of-centre Social Democrat, has failed to persuade the national government, led by a centre-right party, to impose restrictions on diesel-guzzling vehicles in the capital. Transportation accounts for a third of the city's carbon footprint; it is the largest single sector, and it is growing. By contrast, the national government, in a move that its critics say encouraged private car use, has lowered car-registration taxes. The transportation minister, Ole Birk Olesen, said the government wanted to reduce what he called "the over-taxation of cars," though he added that, ideally, Danes would buy only zero-emissions cars in the future.

And so, Copenhagen's goal to be carbon neutral faces a hurdle that is common around the world: a divide between the interests of people who live in cities and those who live outside. A new Metro line, scheduled to open this year, will put the majority of the city's residents within 650 metres of a station. Bicycle paths are already three lanes wide on busy routes for the whopping 43 per cent of Copenhageners who commute to work and school by bike. All the wind the city gets helps generate its electricity. Buildings are heated, in part, by burning garbage in a new incinerator — what garbage there is to burn, that is, considering that every apartment building now has eight separate recycling bins. For every unit of fossil fuels it consumes, Copenhagen intends to sell units

of renewable energy. The city has invested heavily in wind turbines.

Then, there's garbage. The city recently opened a \$660 million incinerator, 85 metres tall, resembling a shiny half-built pyramid, with an even taller stack. It's just a short walk from one of the city's most popular restaurants, Noma. It comes with a year-round ski slope to attract visitors (and recoup some of the expenses). Every day, 300 trucks bring garbage to be fed into its enormous furnace, including trash imported from Britain. The chief engineer, Peter Blinksbjerg, pointed out that instead of going into a landfill, the rubbish of modern life is transformed into something useful: heat for the city's long, cold winters. NYT

hard to go further. A municipal government can only do so much when it does not have the full support of those who run the country.