

TOP OF THE WORLD



The site of the bomb blast in Mogadishu Thursday. Reuters

SOMALIA
Bomb blast near restaurant at lunchtime kills 15

Mogadishu: At least 15 people died when a bomb exploded on a busy street and ripped into a nearby restaurant in Somalia's capital on Thursday, medics said. Security officials and witnesses reported bodies strewn on the ground as plumes of smoke rose high into the air after the bomb detonated on Mogadishu's Maka Al-Mukarama road, one of the seaside capital's main thoroughfares, an area busy with businesses and travellers. It struck as people were eating lunch. Abdulkadir Abdirahman Adan, director of the Aamin Ambulance service, said that 15 people had been killed. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the bombing. However, Mogadishu is a target of the Al Shabaab insurgents.

MALDIVES
Court orders police to release Yameen

Male: A court in the Maldives on Thursday ordered the release of former president Abdulla Yameen, saying there was not enough reason to hold him beyond a month under the law. Yameen was arrested on February 18 to face charges of money laundering stemming from the lease of islands for hotel development during his tenure. The High Court said the prosecution had not provided any reason to extend his remand in custody. Yameen, who cultivated close ties with China, lost an election in a surprise result last year.

GUATEMALA
Truck slams into crowd, 18 killed

Guatemala City: A large truck slammed into a crowd gathered on a dark highway in western Guatemala, killing 18 people and leaving bodies scattered on the roadway, firefighters said. Health Minister Carlos Soto said that 18 others, including children, were injured and taken to hospitals around the municipality of Nahula, in Solola province. Local fire department spokesman Cecilio Chacaj said people were apparently gathered on the highway after a person was killed in a separate accident, when the semi-trailer plowed into them.

SOUTH KOREA
'Racist' German ad causes furore

Seoul: A German advertisement showing an Asian woman getting aroused after smelling dirty laundry worn by white men has fueled anger in Seoul, with many women calling it racist and demanding an apology. The commercial, produced by German DIY-store chain Hornbach, shows white men working outside in a garden before removing their sweaty clothing and dumping it in a box. The ad then cuts to a city that resembles Tokyo, where an Asian woman buys a bag of dirty clothes — previously worn by the men — opens it and moans with pleasure, as the commercial ends with a slogan saying: "That's how the spring smells."

Thai pro-Army party won popular vote, says Election Commission

Unclear if junta-backed party or opposition alliance have enough support in Parliament to form govt

PATPICHA TANAKASEMPIPAT & PANU WONGCHA-UM
BANGKOK, MARCH 28

THAILAND'S CHAOTIC election took another turn on Thursday when the Election Commission announced that the pro-Army party, which is seeking to keep the current junta leader in power, had won the popular vote, with 100 per cent of ballots counted. The announcement does not make clear the overall winner of Sunday's general election, the first since a 2014 military coup. Both the pro-Army Palang Pracharat and an anti-junta "democratic front" have claimed a mandate to form the next government, but it is unclear if either side will be able to gather enough votes in Parliament to form a workable government.



Uttama Savanayana, Palang Pracharat Party leader, at a news conference in Bangkok on Wednesday. Reuters

Palang Pracharat won the popular vote with 8.4 million ballots, the Election Commission said. The main opposition Pheu Thai Party, whose elected government was toppled in the coup, got 7.9 million votes. "These numbers are fully-

counted results officially reported by each constituency," said Krit Urwongse, deputy secretary-general of the Election Commission. The results represented 100 per cent of the ballots counted but would remain unofficial until final

Pak minister brands US envoy to Kabul 'little pygmy' in Twitter row

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 28

A PAKISTANI minister has branded the US ambassador to Kabul a "little pygmy" in a high-level diplomatic Twitter row that erupted over ongoing peace talks between Washington and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The furore began after Pakistani PM Imran Khan reportedly suggested an interim government in Afghanistan to help smooth the talks process, making the comment during a briefing with local reporters Monday. Khan's comments caused uproar in Afghanistan. Kabul recalled its ambassador on Tuesday, and the Pakistani foreign office tried to downplay Khan's comments Wednesday, saying they had been reported "out of context...leading to an unwarranted reaction".

But shortly after US Ambassador to Afghanistan John Bass issued a tweet rebuking Khan while alluding to his past as captain of Pakistan's World Cup-winning cricket team and numerous cheating scandals in the sport involving Pakistani players. "Some aspects of #cricket apply well in diplomacy, some do not. @ImranKhanPTI, important to resist temptation to ball-tamper with the #Afghanistan peace process and its internal affairs. #AfghPeace," the tweet read. Pakistanis outraged at the snub to their leader from a foreign envoy in another country took to Twitter in response — including Khan's minister for human rights, Shireen Mazari. "Clearly you little pygmy your knowledge of ball tampering is as void as your understanding of Afghanistan and the region! Clearly in your case ignorance is certainly not bliss! Another sign of Trumpian mischief a la Khalilzad style!" she wrote, referring to the US envoy leading the peace talks, Zalmay Khalilzad.



19 KILLED IN DHAKA FIRE TRAGEDY

Firefighters attempt to extinguish a fire at a multi-storey commercial building in Dhaka on Thursday. At least 19 people were killed and over 50 injured when a massive fire engulfed the building in the Bangladeshi capital's Banani area, in the latest blaze to hit the city. The incident, which happened on Thursday afternoon in a building that houses several garment shops and internet service providers, left several people trapped inside as the blaze spread to two adjacent buildings. At least six of the killed, including a Sri Lankan national, died after they jumped off from various floors of the high-rise building. Reuters

Tanker hijacked by rescued migrants back in captain's control, arrives in Malta

STEPHEN CALLEJA & COLLEEN BARRY
VALLETTA, MARCH 28

A MALTESE special operations team on Thursday boarded a tanker that had been hijacked by migrants rescued at sea, and returned control to the captain before escorting it to a Maltese port. Armed military personnel stood guard on the ship's deck, and a dozen or so migrants were also visible, as the Turkish oil tanker *El Hiblu 1* docked at Boiler Wharf in the city of Senglea.



A child is disembarked from Turkish oil tanker *El Hiblu 1* in Valletta, Malta. AP

Several police vans were lined up on shore to take custody of the migrants for investigation, and four migrants were led off the ship in handcuffs. Authorities in Italy and Malta on Wednesday said that the group had hijacked the vessel after it rescued them in the Mediterranean Sea, and forced the crew to put the Libya-bound vessel on a course north toward Europe. Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini said the ship had rescued about 120 people and described what happened as "the first act of piracy on the

high seas with migrants" as the alleged hijackers. Malta has put the number of migrants rescued at 108. Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said on Twitter that the nation's armed forces had conducted a "sensitive operation on high seas". "We do not shirk responsibility despite our size," he said, pledging to follow international rules. The ship had been heading toward Italy's southernmost island of Lampedusa and the island nation of Malta when Maltese forces intercepted it. AP

DETAINÉES SAY THEY WERE GROPED, SUBJECTED TO ELECTRIC SHOCKS AND FLOGGED

In Saudi trial, detained women activists speak of torture, abuse

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
RIYADH, MARCH 28

SAUDI WOMEN activists detained for almost a year offered their defence at an emotionally charged hearing on Wednesday, alleging torture and sexual harassment during interrogation, courtroom sources said. Eleven women responded to charges that rights groups say include contact with international media and human rights groups, in the second hearing of a high-profile trial that foreign reporters and diplomats are barred from attending. Some of them wept and consoled each other and their family

members gathered before a three-judge panel in Riyadh's criminal court as they accused interrogators of subjecting them to electric shocks and flogging and groping them in detention, two people with access to the trial said. At least one of the detained women tried to commit suicide following her mistreatment, a close relative said. The government, facing intense international scrutiny of its human rights record, denies the women were tortured or harassed. The women, including prominent activist Loujain al-Hathloul, blogger Eman al-Nafjan and university professor Hatoun al-Fassi, were detained last summer in a sweeping crackdown on



Loujain al-Hathloul, one of the detained activists, drives towards the UAE-Saudi border in 2014. AP

campaigners just before the historic lifting of a decades-long ban on female motorists. The women had long campaigned for the right to drive and to abolish the restrictive

guardianship system that gives male relatives arbitrary authority over women. Their trial has intensified criticism of the kingdom over human rights following global outrage over journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder by Saudi agents last October. Loujain's brother and sister, based overseas, have alleged that Saud al-Qahtani, a top adviser to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who was fired over Khashoggi's killing, oversaw the torture. "The top adviser of the prince was threatening to rape my sister, kill her, cut her body into pieces," Walid al-Hathloul, Loujain's brother, told CNN. "He's the one who should be in

court today, not my sister." Qahtani has not appeared in public since his sacking was announced. Some of the detained women have appealed for bail, with the judges expected to make a decision on Thursday, family members said. The trial is set to resume on April 3, they added. There was no comment from the criminal court. At the time of their arrest, officials accused the women of links to foreign intelligence agencies, while state-backed media branded them traitors and "agents of embassies". The charge sheets, however, make no mention of contact with foreign spies, campaigners who have reviewed the documents say.

Some of the charges against the women fell under a section of the kingdom's sweeping cyber crime law, which carries prison sentences of up to five years. Loujain asked the court for one month to respond to the charges saying she was not given enough time to prepare, Walid said. He added that his family had been stopped from taking written legal documents inside her prison cell. It was not clear how the court responded to the request. The detained women were initially expected to appear in a court set up to handle terrorism-related cases. But trial was shifted to the criminal court at the last minute, without any explanation, after months of Western criticism.



MEANWHILE OCEAN HEAT HITS RECORD HIGH: UN

Ocean heat hit a record high in 2018, the United Nations said Thursday, raising urgent new concerns about the threat global warming is posing to marine life. In its latest State of the Climate overview, the World Meteorological Organisation reaffirmed that the last four years had been the hottest on record — figures previously announced in provisional drafts of the flagship report. "2018 saw new records for ocean heat content in the upper 700 metres," a WMO statement said.



Nina Martinez is wheeled into an operating room to become the world's first kidney transplant living donor with HIV. AP

1st living HIV-positive donor provides kidney for transplant

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, MARCH 28

SURGEONS IN Baltimore have performed what's thought to be the world's first kidney transplant from a living donor with HIV, a milestone for patients with the AIDS virus who need a new organ. If other donors with HIV come forward, it could free up space on the transplant waiting list for everyone.

It's a powerful statement to show somebody like myself who's healthy enough to be a living organ donor.

NINA MARTINEZ
THE FIRST LIVING HIV-POSITIVE ORGAN DONOR

Nina Martinez of Atlanta travelled to Johns Hopkins University to donate a kidney to an HIV-positive stranger, saying she "wanted to make a difference in somebody else's life" and counter the stigma that too often still surrounds HIV infection. Many people think "somebody with HIV is supposed to look sick", Martinez, 35, told *The Associated Press* before Monday's operation. "It's a powerful statement to show somebody like myself who's healthy enough to be a living organ donor." Hopkins, which is making the transplant public on Thursday, said both Martinez and the recipient of her kidney, who chose to remain anonymous, are recovering well. "Here's a disease that in the past was a death sentence and now has been so well controlled that it offers people with that disease an opportunity to save

somebody else," said Dr Dorry Segev, a Hopkins surgeon who pushed for the HIV Organ Policy Equity, or HOPE, Act that lifted a 25-year US ban on transplants between people with HIV. Segev said Monday's kidney transplant was a world first. There's no count of how many HIV-positive patients are among the 113,000 people on the nation's waiting list for an organ transplant. HIV-positive patients can receive transplants from HIV-negative donors just like anyone else. Only in the last few years, spurred by some pioneering operations in South Africa, have doctors begun transplanting organs from deceased donors with HIV into patients who also have the virus, organs that once would have been thrown away. Doctors had hesitated to allow people still living with HIV to donate because of concern that their remaining kidney would be at risk of damage from the virus or older medications used to treat it.

Facebook charged with racial discrimination in targeted housing ads

AKANKSHA RANA
MARCH 28

THE US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) charged Facebook on Thursday with violating the Fair Housing Act, alleging that the company's targeted advertising discriminated on the basis of race and colour. Seeking damages and unspecified appropriate relief for the harm caused, HUD said in its civil charge that Facebook also restricted who could see housing-related ads based on national origin, religion, familial status, sex and disability. Facebook said it had been working with HUD on the issue and was surprised by the department's decision to issue the charge. The HUD charge said Facebook enabled advertisers to exclude people whom the social network's data classified as parents, non-American-born, non-Christian, or a variety of other interests that closely align with the Fair Housing Act's protected classes. "Facebook is discriminating



The US Department of Housing and Urban Development has brought a civil charge against Facebook

against people based upon who they are and where they live," HUD Secretary Ben Carson said. "Using a computer to limit a person's housing choices can be just as discriminatory as slamming a door in someone's face." Advertising practices at Facebook have been under the microscope for about two years. News organisation ProPublica reported in 2016 that advertisers could target ads through Facebook based on people's self-reported jobs, even if the job was "Jew hater".