



USA
LIVID R. KELLY CRIES, CALLS ACCUSERS LIARS

R&B star R. Kelly cried, angrily stood up and ranted about being "assassinated" during his first interview since being charged with sexual abuse, calling his accusers liars and saying people are after him for his money. The 52-year-old singer was charged last month in Chicago with sexually abusing four females dating back to 1998, including three underage girls.

TOP OF THE WORLD



At the Commonwealth Games last year, Cook Islands athletes wore outfits reflecting the country's Polynesian heritage. Reuters

SOUTH PACIFIC
Cook Islands mulls changing colonial name

Wellington: The Cook Islands wants to ditch a name commemorating an 18th century English sea captain and dreamt up by Russian map makers, the head of a committee tasked with picking a new name for the South Pacific tourist hub said on Wednesday. The self-governing nation of 15 islands and home to around 17,000 people wants a name in the Cook Islands Maori language - and it has 64 possibilities so far, including Rangiaroa, or "Love from the Heavens", and Rarootua, meaning "We Stand Under God". "It is time that we stood proud in our own name, chosen by us, for us and in our own language," committee head Danny Mataroa said.

LITERATURE

One Hundred Years of Solitude coming to Netflix

New York: Netflix announced on Wednesday that it had acquired the rights to develop Gabriel Garcia Márquez's seminal novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* more than 50 years after it was originally published, in 1967. It will be the first time the novel is adapted for the screen. The Nobel Prize winning novelist's son Rodrigo García will be an executive producer on the project along with his brother Gonzalo. Márquez had in the past rejected many offers to adapt the book to film.

IRAN

Lawyer of women protesters faces prison sentence

Dubai: A prominent human rights lawyer in Iran who defended protesters against the Islamic Republic's mandatory headscarves for women has been convicted and faces years in prison, an activist group said Wednesday. The conviction of Nasrin Sotoudeh, who previously served three years in prison for her work, underlines the limits of challenging Iran's theocracy as it faces economic pressure exacerbated by the US pulling out of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

SOUTH AFRICA

2 white farmers jailed for murder of black teen

Johannesburg: Two white South African farmers were sentenced to up to 23 years in prison on Wednesday for the murder of a black youth who was thrown from a moving vehicle after being accused of stealing about 80 rand (\$5) worth of sunflowers. The death of 15-year-old Matlhomola Mosweu in April 2017 caused outrage in a country where deep racial divisions persist 25 years after the end of white-minority apartheid rule.

Talks with Taliban focus on four key issues to end Afghan war: US

'Negotiators focusing on counter-terrorism, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue and ceasefire'

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, MARCH 6

THE US has said the ongoing negotiations with the Taliban are focused on four interconnected issues, including counter-terrorism and troop withdrawal, that will be key for any future agreement to end the 17-year war in Afghanistan.

A high-powered American delegation, led by Special US Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, has been holding marathon meetings in Doha with a high-level Taliban team led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar.

The talks have been going on for several days to finalise a draft agreement on a potential foreign troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and to end the 17-year war in the country.

"These discussions are ongoing, and what they're focusing on are the four interconnected issues that are going to compose any future agreement, and those four (issues) are counter-terrorism, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan



US special envoy for peace in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad (centre), with the Afghan media at the US embassy in Kabul in January. Khalilzad is leading the ongoing talks with the Taliban in Doha. Reuters

dialogue and a ceasefire," State Department Spokesperson Robert Palladino told reporters at his biweekly news conference.

Responding to a question, Palladino said talks were going on and more work needs to be done.

"We're focused on this. We have private diplomatic conversations that are occurring, and we want to give all the parties time to work out these issues.

Special Representative Khalilzad is engaging on this on a daily basis right now, and progress is being made," he said.

Since his appointment in September, Afghanistan-born Khalilzad has met with all sides in an attempt to end America's longest war in which the US has lost over 2,400 soldiers in more than 17 years.

The Taliban control nearly half

EXPLAINED

Web of interlinked issues at heart of Afghan peace talks

THE KEY issues in the US-Taliban talks — counter-terrorism, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue and a ceasefire — are highly interlinked and the substantial differences the two parties have over some of them could prevent the sides from reaching an agreement over all of them. The US has repeatedly said the Taliban must enter into talks with the Afghan government. But the militants have long refused to do so, calling the Ghani government America's puppet. The Taliban are also reluctant to agree to a ceasefire, believing this would only help the Afghan forces. The militants' main demand is the withdrawal of US troops, but Washington wants intra-Afghan talks and a ceasefire before it pulls out. The Taliban have also said they are willing to ensure Afghan soil is not used by terrorists targeting America — another key US demand — but only if the US pulls its troops. For a peace deal to emerge, the two sides will need to be prepared to make major concessions.

of Afghanistan, and are more powerful now than they were at any time since the 2001 US-led invasion after the 9/11 terror attacks.

The US has continued to push for a ceasefire in the war-torn country and the opening of ne-

gotiations between the Taliban and the Kabul government.

The Taliban, however, have repeatedly refused to meet with officials of the Afghan government, whom they dismiss as "puppets". PTI

FIGHT FOR LAST IS ENCLAVE IN SYRIA



People being evacuated from the last territory held by IS outside Baghouz, Syria, on Wednesday. AP

Angry and defiant, IS families surrender

SARAH EL DEEB
BAGHOUZ, MARCH 6

ANGRY CIVILIANS evacuating from the last shred of territory held by Islamic State militants in Syria praised the extremist group Wednesday and chanted "Islamic State will remain," underscoring the defiance of IS fighters and their supporters even as their defeat looms.

There were no signs of combat on Wednesday to allow for evacuations from the IS-held pocket in the eastern Syrian village of Baghouz. Associated Press journalists positioned across from the IS-held pocket saw lines of pickup trucks, motorcycles and people

walking on foot, in what appeared to be a group evacuating.

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces has been applying a combination of military force to put pressure on the militants who refuse to surrender, followed by pauses to allow for the evacuation of civilians.

Thousands of people have streamed out of Baghouz in the last few days under a stepped-up assault by the SDF. The latest wave of evacuations brings the final defeat of IS a step closer — a milestone in the devastating four-year campaign to defeat the group's so-called "caliphate" that once covered a vast territory straddling both Syria and Iraq. AP

Trump pressed aides to ensure security clearances for Ivanka, Kushner: CNN report

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, MARCH 6

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump pressured his chief of staff and White House counsel to grant his daughter and White House adviser Ivanka Trump a security clearance against their recommendations, CNN reported on Tuesday.

Trump pushed for John Kelly, his chief of staff at the time, and Donald McGahn, who was then his White House counsel, to grant the security clearances to his daughter and Jared Kushner, her husband and another White House adviser, following concerns raised by the personnel office, CNN reported.

Both men refused to grant the security clearances to the couple, and ultimately Trump awarded them to the pair himself, according to CNN, which cited three sources.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The *New York Times* reported last week that Trump ordered his chief of staff to grant Kushner a top-secret security clearance. Senior administration officials were troubled by the decision, and Kelly wrote an internal memo about the order.

Ivanka Trump said in a TV interview last month that her father had "no involvement" in granting her or Kushner clearances.



Trump's school says it concealed his grades

Washington: A military academy that Donald Trump attended as a teenager concealed his academic records in 2011 in response to pressure from Trump allies, *The Washington Post* reported.

The New York Military Academy came under such pressure after Trump challenged then president Barack Obama to release his own academic records.

Then-headmaster Evan Jones told the *Post* that the superintendent of the private school "had been accosted by prominent, wealthy alumni of the school who were Mr Trump's friends" and wanted to keep his academic records secret. Trump has consistently boasted he was a superb student throughout his youth.

Last week Trump's former personal attorney, Michael Cohen, testified to Congress that one of his jobs was to threaten lawsuits against the schools that Trump attended so they would never release his grades. PTI

N Korea begins rebuilding missile site after Kim-Trump summit fails

CHOE SANG-HUN
SEOUL, MARCH 6

NORTH KOREA has started rebuilding the facilities it uses to launch satellites into orbit and test engines and other technologies for its intercontinental ballistic missile programme, according to US military analysts and South Korean intelligence officials.

The revelation comes after the breakdown of the second summit between the North's leader, Kim Jong Un, and US President Donald Trump last week in Hanoi, Vietnam. It could be a first sign that North Korea is preparing to end its moratorium on missile tests.

North Korea began dismantling the Sohae Satellite Launching Station in Tongchang-ri near its northwestern border with China last summer, after Kim held his first meeting with Trump in June in Singapore. It partially took down an engine test site, a rocket launch pad and a rail-mounted building used by engineers to assemble launch vehicles and move them to the launch pad.

The North did not completely dismantle the facilities, and when Kim met with President Moon Jae-



The Sohae Satellite Launching Station launch pad. CSIS/Beyond Parallel/DigitalGlobe via Reuters

in of South Korea in September, he offered to destroy them in the presence of US experts.

But that offer is in doubt after Kim's meeting with Trump in Hanoi ended without an agree-

ment on how to end the North's nuclear weapons programme.

In Hanoi, Kim asked for the removal of UN sanctions in return for dismantling its Yongbyon nuclear complex north of

Pyongyang, the North's capital, as well as the Tongchang-ri facilities. Trump rejected the demand, calling the lifting of sanctions too high a price to pay for partial moves toward denuclearisation. NYT

China links altitude sickness to Tibet travel restrictions

MICHAEL MARTINA & LIANGPING GAO
BEIJING, MARCH 6

FOREIGNERS CAN'T handle Tibet's high altitude so China needs to restrict access, the top Chinese official in charge of the remote and

mountainous region said, defending tough government restrictions on who can go there.

Access to Tibet has become another irritant in ties with the US after President Donald Trump signed into law an Act that seeks to press China to open the region by denying US entry to officials

deemed responsible for restricting access to Tibet.

Speaking on the sidelines of China's annual meeting of Parliament, Tibet's Communist Party boss Wu Yingjie said on Wednesday that many Americans visit Tibet, especially older ones, and some foreign tourists "meet

with mishap" at high altitude. Tibetans have been finding foreigners who have died because of the harsh conditions, he said.

"After considering the special geographical and climatic conditions, we adopted a series of regulations on foreigners entering Tibet," he added. REUTERS

NEW DOCUMENTARY DETAILS CHILD ABUSE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST SINGER

MJ songs pulled from radio stations amid Leaving Neverland uproar

CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-MCLAY
WELLINGTON, MARCH 6

AS THE release of a documentary detailing abuse accusations against singer Michael Jackson has prompted debate about his legacy, the public response to its contents is also leading radio stations across the globe to stop playing his music.

A radio network in Quebec pulled Jackson's music from its nearly two dozen stations, according to *The Canadian Press*. In Britain, *Variety* reported, the BBC was forced to deny imposing such a ban after it was reported that the singer's music had been "quietly dropped" from one of its stations.

And the backlash has led to an almost complete removal of the singer's music from the airwaves in New Zealand, after the two largest radio networks —

which own most of the country's commercial stations — said Wednesday that they would no longer play Jackson's songs.

In the New Zealand and Canadian cases, radio networks cited a change in public opinion about Jackson that was tied to the documentary *Leaving Neverland*, a two-part miniseries focusing on the accusations of two men who say Jackson abused them as children, as the reason for the ban. The programme is scheduled for broadcast in New Zealand on Sunday and Monday.

Leon Wratt, the content director of MediaWorks, one of the New Zealand radio companies, said listeners had indicated that they no longer wanted to hear Jackson's music.

"We aren't deciding whether Michael Jackson is guilty of pedophilia or not," he said in an interview on one of MediaWorks' stations, Magic. "We're just merely



Michael Jackson arrives for trial at a court in Santa Maria, California, in March 2005. A new documentary has revived focus on allegations of child abuse against the late pop superstar. AP

trying to make sure that our radio stations are going to play the music that people want to hear."

Wratt added that the accusations against Jackson had been public for years — the singer was

cleared of child molesting charges after a trial in 2005. But viewers of the documentary have reacted with shock. And its subjects, Wade Robson and James Safechuck, who detail disturbing accusations from their childhoods regarding Jackson, have received both plaudits and abuse for their part in it.

Dean Buchanan, a spokesman for NZME, the other New Zealand radio network to pull Jackson's music, said by email that the singer's work was not being played "right now" on the network's stations.

The country's national public broadcaster, Radio New Zealand — which is primarily a talk station — also said that Jackson's music currently "did not feature" in its air play, although a spokesman, John Barr, said that was not the result of a particular editorial decision.

A Canadian media company,

Cogeco, that told *The Canadian Press* it had banned Jackson's music on its 23 stations in Quebec — including three major Montreal stations — cited the public response to *Leaving Neverland* as the reason.

Neither NZME nor MediaWorks responded to questions about how long the ban would last, when it began or whether the networks planned to pull the songs of other musicians accused of wrongdoing, such as R. Kelly, who has been accused of, and denies, decades of serial misconduct.

Wratt, of MediaWorks, said Jackson's music would still be available on streaming services and in record stores for anyone who wanted to hear it.

"The difference with radio, of course, is that if we play it you don't have a choice," he said.

This is not the first time radio stations and streaming services

have wrestled with whether to remove the music of artists accused of misconduct: Spotify last May instituted a policy of ceasing to promote or recommend R. Kelly's music because of the accusations against him, although it rescinded the policy a month later after uproar from some in the music industry.

Jackson's estate in February cancelled the Chicago run of a new jukebox musical about the singer three weeks after the Sundance premiere of *Leaving Neverland*, and two weeks before its HBO broadcast. The producers of the musical, *Don't Stop Til You Get Enough*, cited scheduling difficulties caused by a labour dispute as the reason.

The estate is seeking \$100 million in damages from HBO over the *Leaving Neverland* documentary, which Howard Weitzman, the estate's lawyer, branded "a disgrace". NYT