

TOP OF THE WORLD



John William King

USA

In a first, Texas executes white supremacist for black man's killing

JOHN WILLIAM King, 44, convicted two decades ago for killing James Byrd Jr. in an act of unfathomable racist brutality in the small town of Jasper, was put to death by the state of Texas on Wednesday night with a dose of pentobarbital. The execution, carried out at the state's death chamber in Huntsville, came after the US Supreme Court turned down King's last petition for a stay. Less than a year after Byrd's killing, King became the first white man in modern Texas history to be sentenced to death for killing a black person. This was a troubling milestone given that at least 344 black people were lynched in the 73 years after Reconstruction, a tally that includes only documented lynchings and stops in 1950.

USA

US records 695 measles cases, most since 2000

New York: The United States recorded 695 cases of measles in 2019, the most of any year since the disease was declared eliminated in 2000, authorities said. "The high number of cases in 2019 is primarily the result of a few large outbreaks — one in Washington State and two large outbreaks in New York that started in late 2018," the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention said. The resurgence of the disease is linked to a growing anti-vaccine movement around the world.

PAKISTAN

Sharif seeks court nod to go abroad for treatment

Islamabad: Former Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif on Thursday filed a petition in the Supreme Court to allow him to go abroad for medical treatment. Sharif, 69, serving seven-year jail term in Lahore's Kot Lakhpat jail since December last year, was given six-week bail on medical grounds on March 26 by the apex court to seek treatment within the country. His counsel told the court that Sharif had multiple heart-related ailments and that he needed to consult his physicians in the UK.

EASTER SUNDAY BOMBINGS DEATH TOLL REVISED TO 'AROUND 253' FROM 359

Sri Lanka on edge with lock-downs, scares, sweeps for bomb suspects

Defence secy resigns; PM says more attacks possible; new explosion in town east of capital, no casualties, cause unclear

REUTERS & PTI
COLOMBO, APRIL 25

SRI LANKAN authorities locked down the central bank and shut the road leading to the jittery capital's airport because of a bomb scare on Thursday as more people were swept up in the search for those behind Easter Sunday bombings that killed 253.

Authorities had earlier said the attack killed 359 people, but Director General of Health Services Dr Anil Jasinghe said Thursday that the toll was "around 253", and that the larger death toll was released as a result of "a calculation error".

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said authorities were targeting the "sleepers" who could trigger another round of bombings as police released photos of six suspects, including three women, wanted for their involvement in the attacks and sought information regarding them from the public.

Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando gave his resignation letter to President Maithripala Sirisena Thursday. Sirisena had asked Fernando and police chief Pujith Jayasundara to quit after their failure to prevent the blasts despite prior intelligence.

Underlining the nervous atmosphere in the country, the entry road to Colombo's main airport was shut after a suspicious vehicle was spotted at a car park. The road was reopened when the alert was declared a false alarm.

A police spokesman said there was an explosion in a town east of the capital, but there were no casualties. The cause was not clear but it was not a controlled



Sri Lankan soldiers perform security checks at a roadside in Colombo on Thursday. AP

detonation and was being investigated, he said.

Police said they had asked people to leave offices early in Colombo's business district to avoid throngs at rush hour. City-centre restaurants were also shutting early.

More people were swept up for questioning overnight. Police said 16 people were detained for questioning overnight, taking the number held since Sunday to 76.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka has suspended its plans to grant visas on arrival to citizens of 39 countries. "Although arrangements were in place to issue visas on arrival for citizens of 39 countries, we have now decided to hold it for the time being in consideration of the current security situation," Tourism Minister John Amararatunga said in a statement.

LANKA TAKES EMERGENCY STEPS

VISA ON ARRIVAL SUSPENDED

Sri Lanka on Thursday suspended its plans to grant visas on arrival to citizens of 39 countries after foreign links emerge in Sunday bombings, the government said.

DRONES, UNMANNED AIRCRAFT BANNED

The country's Civil Aviation Authority has banned the use of drones and unmanned aircraft until further notice. The CAA said that it was taking the measure "in view of

the existing security situation in the country".

CATHOLIC CHURCHES SUSPEND PUBLIC MASS

Catholic churches in Sri Lanka suspended all public services until the security situation improves as the head of the church, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, urged politicians to set aside their differences.

EATERIES CLOSE EARLY

Colombo's restaurants will shut early and police have told office-goers to avoid rush hour throngs.

MEANWHILE

JAPAN CREATES 1ST ARTIFICIAL CRATER ON ASTEROID

Japanese scientists have succeeded in creating what they called the first-ever artificial crater on an asteroid, a step towards shedding light on how the solar system evolved, the country's space agency said Thursday. The announcement comes after the Hayabusa2 probe fired an explosive device at the Ryugu asteroid early this month to blast a crater in the surface and scoop up material, aiming to reveal more about the origins of life on Earth.



The former American vice president joined a crowded Democratic field

Joe Biden enters 2020 race for the White House

STEVE PEOPLES & THOMAS BEAUMONT
WASHINGTON, APRIL 25

FORMER US vice president Joe Biden formally joined the crowded Democratic presidential contest on Thursday, declaring the soul of the nation at stake if President Donald Trump wins re-election.

In a video posted on Twitter, Biden focused on the 2017 deadly clash between white supremacists and counter protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia. Biden noted Trump's comments that there were some "very fine people" on both sides of the violent encounter, which left one woman dead. "We are in the battle for the soul of this nation," Biden said. "If we give Donald Trump eight years in the White House, he will forever and fundamentally alter the character of this nation — who we are. And I cannot stand by and watch that happen."

The 76-year-old Biden becomes an instant front-runner alongside Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who is leading many polls and has proved to be a successful fundraiser. Among Democrats, Biden has unmatched international and legislative experience, and he is among the best-known faces in US politics. He quickly racked up endorsements on Thursday morning, becoming the first Democrat running for president with the backing of more than one US senator. AP



At the site of a mass burial in Negombo. Reuters

Hundreds of Muslims flee, Christians grieve in violence-torn town

ALASDAIR PAL & SUNIL KATARIA
NEGOMBO, APRIL 25

AS MOURNERS buried the remains of Christian worshippers killed by the Easter Sunday suicide bomb attacks in Sri Lanka, hundreds of Muslim refugees fled Negombo on the country's west coast where communal tensions have flared in recent days.

At least 250 people perished in the coordinated series of blasts targeting churches and hotels. Church leaders believe the final toll from the attack on St Sebastian's Church in Negombo could be close to 200, almost certainly making Negombo the deadliest of the six near-simultaneous attacks.

On Wednesday, hundreds of Pakistani Muslims fled the multi-ethnic port an hour north of the capital, Colombo. Crammed into buses organised by community leaders and police, they left fearing for their safety after threats of revenge from locals.

"Because of the bomb blasts and explosions that have taken place here, the local Sri Lankan people have attacked our houses," Adnan Ali, a Pakistani Muslim, told Reuters as he prepared to board a bus. "Right now we don't know where we will go."

Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attacks, yet

despite Islamic State being a Sunni jihadist group, many of the Muslims fleeing Negombo belong to the Ahmadi community, who had been hounded out of Pakistan years ago after their sect was declared non-Muslim.

The fallout from Sunday's attacks appears set to render them homeless once more.

Farah Jameel, a Pakistani Ahmadi, said she had been thrown out of her house by her landlord.

"She said 'get out of here and go wherever you want to go, but don't live here'," she told Reuters, gathered with many others at the Ahmadiyya Mosque, waiting for buses to take them to a safe location.

Sri Lanka's government is in disarray over the failure to prevent the attacks, despite repeated warnings from intelligence sources. REUTERS

FIRST SUMMIT BETWEEN THE TWO LEADERS HELD IN RUSSIA

Putin meets Kim, says North Korea ready to denuclearise if it gets guarantee of security

VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV & ERIC TALMADGE
VLADIVOSTOK, APRIL 25

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin said North Korean leader Kim Jong Un confirmed during their first summit Thursday he is willing to give up his nuclear weapons — but only if he gets an ironclad guarantee of security beforehand.

The Russian President stressed that Moscow and Washington both want North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons. But he said the security guarantees should be underwritten by multiple countries.

Putin added that Kim encouraged him to explain the nuances of Pyongyang's position to US President Donald Trump. He said he's willing to share details of the summit with Trump.

"I will talk about it tomorrow with the leadership of China," Putin said, before heading to Beijing on a two-day visit after meeting Kim. "And we will just as openly discuss this issue with the US leadership. There are no



Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un after their talks in Vladivostok Thursday. Reuters

secrets. Russia's position always has been transparent. There are no plots of any kind."

Putin's remarks came after the one-day summit just off the Pacific port city of Vladivostok.

It wasn't immediately clear what other agreements the lead-

ers might have struck.

Meeting Putin for the first time, Kim said: "The reason we visited Russia this time is to meet and share opinions with your excellency, President Putin, and also share views on the Korean Peninsula and regional political

situation, which has garnered the urgent attention of the world, and also hold deep discussions on strategic ways to pursue stability in the regional political situation and on the matters of jointly managing the situation." AP

EXPLAINED
Denuclearisation distant as N Korea sticks to its guns

NORTH KOREA'S stance on denuclearisation, which Kim reiterated to Putin at their summit, seems to have remained unchanged despite the first meeting between Trump and Kim last year raising hopes of a deal being agreed.

For North Korea, denuclearisation has always included not just the elimination of its own weapons, but also the removal of the US nuclear threat and military presence from the Korean Peninsula. The US and South Korea are unlikely to agree to such an arrangement in the near future, making the idea of a deal to destroy North Korea's nukes a distant one.

Chinese military silent over Pak ships' absence at Navy fleet review

KJM VARMA
BEIJING, APRIL 25

THE CHINESE military said on Thursday it "always attached importance" to relations with the Indian and Pakistani counterparts and was ready to make more efforts to advance the ties, but kept silent over the absence of ships from its all-weather ally at the fleet review of the 70th anniversary celebrations of China's Navy.

Two Indian battle ships, including *INS Kolkata* and *INS Shakti*, took part in the fleet review at Qingdao on April 23 which was presided over by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The Pakistan Navy reportedly could not send its ships to PLAN's most celebrated moment despite the all-weather relations due to the recent Indo-Pak hostilities after the deadly Pulwama terror attack in February. However, a delegation headed by Pakistan Navy chief Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi attended the event.

Chinese defence ministry spokesman Col Ren Guochang evaded a question at a media briefing about the absence of Pakistan's ships in the event. PTI

TO IMPROVE PHYSICAL, MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL AGE

1-yr-olds should get no screen time, those under 5 not more than 1 hr: WHO

EMILYS RUEB
APRIL 25

IN A new set of guidelines, the World Health Organisation said infants under the age of one should not be exposed to electronic screens and that children between the ages of two and four should not have more than one hour of "sedentary screen time" each day.

Limiting, and in some cases eliminating, screen time for children under the age of five will result in healthier adults, the organisation, a United Nations health agency, announced Wednesday. But taking away iPads and

other electronic devices is only part of the solution, the researchers said. Children under five should also get more exercise and sleep in order to develop better habits that will stave off obesity and diseases in adolescence and adulthood, the guidelines said.

"Achieving health for all means doing what is best for health right from the beginning of people's lives," Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the WHO, said in a statement. "Early childhood is a period of rapid development and a time when family lifestyle patterns can be adapted to boost health gains."

As previous generations worried about the effect of radios and televisions, researchers today are studying the effect of "screen time," which has become a shorthand for the amount of time spent interacting with TVs, computers, smartphones, digital tablets and video games, on brain development and overall health. But there is limited data on the short- and long-term effects.

The National Institutes of Health has funded a \$300 million project known as the ABCD Study (for Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development), which hopes to show how brain development is



'Children under 5 should get more exercise and sleep'. Reuters

affected by a range of experiences, including substance use, concussions and screen time. But the

study is tracking children aged nine to 10 into young adulthood, and the data is preliminary.

In 2016, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued guidelines that recommended children under 18 months avoided screen time other than video-chatting. And it recommended introducing only "high-quality programming" to children 18 to 24 months of age, and advised that parents and caregivers watch the programme with them. Children between the ages of two to five years should watch only one hour per day of approved programming.

The World Health Organisation's guidelines go further than those recommendations. Dr Fiona Bull, a programme

manager for surveillance and population-based prevention of noncommunicable diseases at the WHO, led a team of experts who developed the guidelines.

"Improving physical activity, reducing sedentary time and ensuring quality sleep in young children will improve their physical, mental health and well-being and help prevent childhood obesity and associated diseases later in life," Bull said in a statement.

The researchers also recommended that children under five not be restrained in strollers, high chairs or strapped to a caregiver's back for more than one hour at a time. And children be-

tween the ages of one and five should get three hours of physical activity per day, and get at least 10 hours of sleep per night.

According to the WHO, the number of obese people worldwide has nearly tripled since 1974. Instances of childhood obesity, once considered a scourge of wealthy nations, are increasing dramatically in low- and middle-income countries, especially those in Africa and Asia.

The organisation said that the failure to meet current physical activity recommendations is responsible for more than 5 million deaths globally each year across all age groups. NYT