

# THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



A resettled farmer harvests maize near Chinhoyi town. Reuters

ZIMBABWE  
White farmers to start getting compensation

Harare: Zimbabwe will start paying compensation this year to thousands of white farmers who lost land under former president Robert Mugabe's land reform nearly two decades ago, the government said, as it seeks to bring closure to a highly divisive issue. Around 20 years ago, Mugabe's government carried out at times violent evictions of 4,500 white farmers and redistributed the land to 300,000 black families, arguing it was redressing imbalances from the colonial era. But land reform still divides public opinion as opponents see it as a partisan process that left the country struggling to feed itself. The present government sees the paying of compensation to white farmers as key to mend ties with the West.

PAKISTAN  
Prime Minister's office evacuated due to fire

Islamabad: A fire broke out at Pakistan Prime Minister's Office here on Monday, according to a media report. The fire broke out on the sixth floor of the building and Prime Minister Imran Khan was reportedly one floor below in a meeting, the Express Tribune reported. The PMO was evacuated after the fire broke out. The fire was contained and a police official said an electrical short circuit may have caused the incident, the daily reported.

GERMANY  
Merkel to host May for Brexit talks today

Berlin: German Chancellor Angela Merkel will host Theresa May for talks on Tuesday, on the eve of a crucial EU summit when the British premier is hoping to convince the bloc to grant her a new Brexit extension to June 30. "The Chancellor and the British Prime Minister will have an exchange of views on Britain's exit from the European Union as well as on Wednesday's special summit of the European Council," said Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert.

INDONESIA  
Woman jailed for blasphemy loses appeal

Jakarta: Indonesia's Supreme Court rejected the appeal of a woman whose complaint about the volume of mosque loudspeakers led to an 18-month prison sentence for blasphemy. The ethnic Chinese woman, Meliana, was sentenced in August, more than two years after her comments sparked riots in the Sumatran Tanjung Balai. A notice on the court's website said the appeal was rejected on March 27. No reason was given. The case highlighted how the blasphemy law has become a tool for hard-liners to persecute minorities.

KHALIFA HAFTAR'S EASTERN ARMY ADVANCES ON LIBYAN CAPITAL

## Battle for Tripoli rages, airport bombed

Casualties mounting as fighting intensifies; UN says 2,800 displaced and many more fleeing

AHMED ELUMAMI & AYMAN AL-WARFALLI  
TRIPOLI, BENGHAZI, APRIL 8

A WARPLANE attacked Tripoli's only functioning airport on Monday as eastern forces advancing on the Libyan capital disregarded international appeals for a truce in the latest of a cycle of warfare since Muammar Gaddafi's fall in 2011.

Casualties were mounting in fighting that also threatens to disrupt oil supplies, increase migration to Europe and wreck UN plans for an election to end rivalries between parallel administrations in the country's east and west.

The eastern Libyan National Army (LNA) forces of Khalifa Haftar — a former general in Gaddafi's army — said 19 of its soldiers died in recent days as they closed in on the internationally recognised government in Tripoli.

A spokesman for the Tripoli-based Health Ministry said fighting in the south of the capital had killed at least 25 people, including fighters and civilians.

Matiga airport, in an eastern suburb, was bombed and closed, authorities said. That left Misrata airport, 200 km to the east down



A member of Misrata forces, under the protection of Tripoli authorities, prepares himself to go to the front line in the Libyan capital on Monday. Reuters

the coast, as the closest option for Tripoli residents.

Haftar's LNA, which backs the eastern administration based in Tobruk, took the oil-rich south of Libya earlier this year before advancing fast through largely unpopulated desert regions toward Tripoli.

Seizing the capital, however, is a much bigger challenge. The LNA has conducted airstrikes on



EXPLAINED  
E Fears of another civil war in fractured Libya

AFTER THE Arab Spring turned into a civil war in Libya, Khalifa Haftar returned to the country to take on dictator Muammar Gaddafi, whose army the former served in before falling out with him and being exiled to the US. Following Gaddafi's killing in 2011, Libya became fractured and came to be governed by multiple militias. Now, most of the militias are aligned either with the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), based in Tripoli, or Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), which props up another government in eastern Libya. Haftar positions himself as a strong leader who can unite the country and fight the extremist militias, but critics see him as another Gaddafi. The LNA's push to capture Tripoli pits the militias in both factions against each other and raises fears of another extended period of deadly unrest.

the south of the city as it seeks to advance along a road from a disused former international airport.

On Sunday evening, LNA forces had moved up from the airport coming as close as 11 km to the city centre before retreating, residents said.

The government of Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj is seeking to block the LNA with the help of allied armed groups who have

rushed to Tripoli from Misrata in pickup trucks fitted with machine guns. Serraj has run Tripoli since 2016 as part of a UN-brokered deal boycotted by Haftar. His Tripoli government has reported 11 deaths in the last few days, without saying on which side.

The UN said 2,800 people had been displaced by the clashes and many more could flee, though some were trapped. REUTERS



Members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Tehran this year. President Trump said the designation "underscores the fact that Iran's actions are fundamentally different from those of other governments". AP

## US designates Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist group

EDWARD WONG & ERIC SCHMITT  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 8

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said Monday that he was designating a powerful arm of the Iranian military as a foreign terrorist organisation, the first time that the United States had named a part of another nation's government as such a threat and raising the risk of retaliation against US troops and intelligence officers.

The move, which has been debated at the highest levels within the administration, was imposed on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The military unit has carried out operations across the Middle East, trained Arab Shia militias and taken part in a wide range of businesses in Iran.

The designation "underscores the fact that Iran's actions are fundamentally different from those of other governments," Trump said in a statement.

"This action will significantly expand the scope and scale of our maximum pressure on the Iranian regime. It makes crystal clear the risks of conducting business with, or providing support to, the IRGC."

This is the first time that the US has named a part of a nation's government as a terrorist organisation

The action imposes wide-ranging economic and travel sanctions on the military unit as well as the organisations, companies or individuals that have ties to it — including officials in Iraq, a US ally. Officials in the US said the broad terrorist designation covers 11 million members of the Iranian group and units in its hierarchy.

Top Pentagon and CIA officials oppose the designation, which they argue would allow hard-line Iranian officials to justify deadly operations against Americans overseas, especially Special Operations units and paramilitary units working under the CIA.

After Trump's announcement, Iran's Supreme National Security Council said it was designating the US Central Command, the part of the military that oversees operations in the Middle East and Africa, as a terrorist organisation. NYT

## Israel holds general election today, future of West Bank on the ballot

DAVID M HALBFINGER  
JERUSALEM, APRIL 8

AS ISRAELIS get ready to go to the polls Tuesday, a stark, fateful and long-deferred choice has suddenly reappeared to confront them after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's unexpected promise to begin extending sovereignty over the West Bank if he is re-elected.

Do voters want to make permanent their country's control over the West Bank and its 2.6 million Palestinian inhabitants? Or do they want to keep alive the possibility that a Palestinian state could be carved out there one day?

That question has been made newly urgent by Netanyahu, who is facing a career-threatening challenge from a unified centrist party headed by a team of former army chiefs. His shocking announcement about Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank appeared to be a last-ditch effort to rally his right-wing base and stay in power.

For supporters of annexation, it is not only this week's vote that is on their minds but the US election in 2020: They call President Donald Trump's staunch support for Israel a "historic opportunity" to proceed with annexation of some, much or even all of the West Bank — but one that comes with a ticking countdown to a possible new government in Washington.

### ISRAEL ELECTIONS AT A GLANCE

Israelis vote in a national election Tuesday. Polls show Benjamin Netanyahu, seeking a fifth term, is best positioned in the tight race to become the next PM.

#### WHAT THE POLLS SAY

Final opinion polls on Friday showed that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had fallen behind his main challenger, centrist Benny Gantz, but still has an easier path to form a government that would keep him in power for a record fifth term.

#### POSSIBLE ALLIANCES

No single party has ever won an outright majority in the Knesset, making coalition governments the norm. Netanyahu will likely seek a coalition, similar to his current government, with ultranationalist and Jewish Orthodox parties. Gantz, who heads the centrist Blue and White Party, will likely win the support of centre-left and left-wing parties, but polls predict he will fall short of a governing

majority in Parliament.



Campaign billboards featuring rival PM candidates. Reuters

#### RIVALS TO ALLIES?

It also is possible that Netanyahu's Likud Party and the Blue and White Party would join forces and create a national unity government. In theory, the President could offer both Gantz and Netanyahu this opportunity and they could take turns as PM.

Two-state proponents, while conceding there is no way to know for sure how Palestinians would react, say a sovereignty push would almost certainly lead to a nightmare of one kind or another for Israel,

like a rise in violence and international condemnation. The incremental entrenchment of Jewish settlements on Palestinian land is often called "creeping annexation". And until now it has occurred slowly

#### THE ARAB VOTE

Arab citizens represent nearly a fifth of the country's 5.8 million voters, which could give the four Israeli Arab parties a potential kingmaker role. But these parties have never joined a governing coalition in Israel. Some Arab voters have vowed to boycott the election.

enough to let supporters of a two-state solution reassure themselves that such steps could still be undone or accounted for in future negotiations. Applying sovereignty, by contrast, would be all but irreversible. NYT

'STUDY THE GREAT NATION' APP IS A PART OF XI'S EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN IDEOLOGICAL CONTROL IN THE DIGITAL AGE

## In China, an app about Xi is impossible to ignore, even if you try

JAVIER CHERNÁNDEZ  
CHANGSHA, APRIL 8

INSIDE A fishing gear store on a busy city street, the owner sits behind a counter, furiously tapping a smartphone to improve his score on an app that has nothing to do with rods, reels and bait.

Jiang Shuiqiu, a 35-year-old army veteran, has a different obsession: earning points on Study the Great Nation, a new app devoted to promoting President Xi Jinping and the ruling Communist Party — a kind of high-tech equivalent of Mao's Little Red Book. Jiang spends several hours daily on the app, checking news about Xi and brushing up on socialist theories.

Tens of millions of Chinese workers, students and civil servants are using Study the Great Nation, often under pressure from the government. It is part of a sweeping effort by Xi to strengthen ideological control



Communist Party members using the Study the Great Nation app during a weekly meeting in Beijing in February. Tens of millions of Chinese are now using the app, often under pressure from the government. Reuters

in the digital age and reassert the party's primacy, as Mao once did, as the centre of Chinese life.

"We must love our country,"

said Jiang, one of the top scorers on the app in Changsha, the capital of the southern province of Hunan. "We are getting stronger and stronger."

While many people have embraced the app as a form of patriotism, others see it as a burden imposed by overzealous officials and another sign of

a growing personality cult around Xi, perhaps China's most powerful leader since Mao's time.

"He is using new media to fortify loyalty toward him," said Wu Qiang, a political analyst in Beijing. He likened Study the Great Nation to the little booklet of Mao quotations that was widely circulated during the chaotic and violent Cultural Revolution.

Since its debut this year, Study the Great Nation has become the most downloaded app on Apple's digital storefront in China, with the state news media saying it has more than 100 million registered users — a reach that would be the envy of any new app's creators.

But those numbers are driven largely by the party, which ordered thousands of officials across China to ensure that the app penetrates the daily routines of as many citizens as possible, whether they like it or not. NYT

## China to use AI to stop 'uncivilised visitors' from entering public parks

KJM VARMA  
BEIJING, APRIL 8

CHINA IS planning to introduce artificial intelligence systems in parks in Beijing to ban "uncivilised visitors" from entering public areas in the city.

Beijing park management authorities are considering compiling a list of unruly visitors identified through artificial intelligence and facial recognition technology.

The list will allow the authorities to curb what they deem to be bad behaviour during events such as the three-day holidays around Tomb Sweeping Day, also known as the Qingming Festival.

On the second day of the three-day holidays around Tomb Sweeping Day, which ended on

Sunday, parks in Beijing witnessed an upsurge in visitors, which led to uncivilised tourist behaviour, officials at the Beijing Municipal Administration Centre of Parks told the Beijing Youth Daily.

The centre is considering establishing a "blacklist" to restrict loutish travellers — for example, those who destroy cultural relics and refuse to stop — from entering the park, the report said.

The report said that some tourists have been spotted climbing peach trees, picking flowers and damaging plants. There were also people who fished near the lake and sold things privately in the park.

Mi Shanpo, an official at the centre, said facial recognition and other technologies will be used to detect uncivilised behaviour. PTI