

TOP OF THE WORLD



Kevin Mallory

USA
Ex-CIA officer
jailed for 20 yrs for
spying for China

Washington: A former spy for US Central Intelligence Agency was sentenced on Friday to 20 years in prison after being convicted on charges of conspiring to transmit U.S. defense secrets to China, the Justice Department said. Kevin Patrick Mallory, of Leesburg, Virginia, was found guilty by a federal jury in June 2018 of several counts of conspiring to provide national defense information to aid a foreign government and making false statements. "This case is one in an alarming trend of former US intelligence officers being targeted by China and betraying their country and colleagues," Assistant Attorney General John Demers said in a statement.

THAILAND
'Hero' dog saves
infant buried
by mother

Bangkok: An attentive dog in Thailand is being hailed as a hero after finding and saving an infant allegedly buried in a field by his teenage mother, police said Saturday. The newborn was lying under a layer of dirt near a farm in Chumpuang but was found the same day by a curious canine named Ping Pong, who then alerted his owner, a cattle herder. "I don't think it was long after his mother buried him before the dog found him," case officer Panuvat Udkam told AFP. He added that the boy was recovering in hospital.

LIBYA
Militants kill 3
troops at LNA
checkpoint

Benghazi: Libyan officials say Islamic State militants have killed at least three troops in an attack on a checkpoint in a desert town. A statement by the self-styled Libyan National Army said militants captured four soldiers at the town of Zallah Saturday, but troops were able to free three of them. The Islamic State group claimed the attack. The group expanded its reach in Libya after the country was plunged into chaos following the 2011 uprising that ousted and killed Muammar Gaddafi.

India offers Lanka full support to fight 'common threat of Jihadi terrorism'

US, Sri Lanka issue joint statement agreeing to work for peace, security

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, MAY 18

INDIA HAS offered full support to Sri Lanka in dealing with the common threat of "Jihadi terrorism" following the deadly Easter Sunday suicide bombings that killed nearly 260 people.

Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Friday also discussed the prevailing security situation during his recent meeting with two top-ranking Buddhist monks at Sri Dalada Maligawa or the temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy, Indian Embassy here said in a statement.

The High Commissioner also paid respects at Sri Dalada Maligawa and received the blessings of the Most Venerable Thibbotuwawe Sri Sumangala Mahanayake Thera of Malwatu Chapter and the Most Venerable Warakagoda Sri Gnanarathana Mahanayake Thera of the Asgiriya Chapter in Kandy, it said.

Both the Mahanayake Theros deeply appreciated India's unconditional and strong support for Sri Lanka, including in the security sphere, the statement said.

To ensure a safe maritime domain

The US and Sri Lanka have resolved to work together to ensure

High Commissioner... discussed the prevailing security situation with the Most Venerable Mahanayake theros and offered India's full support to Sri Lanka in dealing with the common threat of Jihadi terrorism"

— A STATEMENT

a safe maritime domain in the Indian and Pacific oceans through a rules-based order that ensures respect for international laws and norms, amid the increasing Chinese influence over the strategically important region.

The US and Sri Lanka's joint statement came a day after US Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale and visiting Sri Lankan Foreign Affairs Minister Tilak Marapana held third US-Sri Lanka Partnership Dialogue in the American capital.

"The United States and Sri Lanka resolved to work together to foster peace and security and ensure a safe maritime domain in the Indian and Pacific Oceans through a rules-based order that ensures respect for international laws and norms," the statement said.



An unarmed Sri Lankan soldier secures a Buddhist temple on Saturday. AP

Amid tight security, a sombre Vesak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, MAY 18

SRI LANKAN President Maithripala Sirisena on Saturday granted an amnesty to 762 convicts to mark Vesak, also known as 'Buddha Jayanti', being celebrated by the Buddhist majority nation amid tight security arrangements in the wake of Easter Sunday bombings.

The Sri Lankan government has restricted the five-day na-

tional Vesak festival celebrations to just two days citing the prevailing security situation in the country following the massive Easter Sunday bombings on April 21 which claimed nearly 260 lives and injured 500 others.

President Sirisena released the 762 prisoners, including 26 women, under a Presidential pardon to mark Vesak. Those freed had been convicted for minor offenses other than rape, murder and drug offenses.

WHAT IS VESAK?

VESAK, THE Day of the Full Moon in the month of May, is the most sacred day to millions of Buddhists around the world. It was on the day of Vesak two and a half millennia ago when Buddha was born, attained enlightenment and in his eightieth year passed away.

Surprise victory for Australia's PM in polls

DAMIEN CAVE
SYDNEY, MAY 18

SCOTT MORRISON, Australia's conservative prime minister, scored a surprise victory in federal elections on Saturday, propelled by a populist wave — the "quiet Australians," he termed it — resembling the force that has upended politics in the United States, Britain and beyond.

The win stunned Australian election analysts — polls had pointed to a loss for Morrison's coalition for months. But in the end, the prime minister confounded expectations suggesting



PM Scott Morrison, after casting his ballot. AP

that the country was ready for a change in course after six years of tumultuous leadership under the

conservative political coalition. "I have always believed in miracles," Morrison said at his victory party in Sydney, adding, "Tonight is about every single Australian who depends on their government to put them first. And that is exactly what we are going to do."

The election had presented Australia, a vital American ally in the Asia-Pacific, with a crucial question: Would it remain on a rightward path and stick with a political coalition that promised economic stability, jobs and cuts to immigration or choose greater action on climate change and income inequality?

By granting Morrison his first full term, Australians signaled their reluctance to bet on a new leader, choosing to stay the course with a hardworking rugby lover at a time when the economy has not suffered a recession in nearly 28 years.

The triumph by Morrison, an evangelical Christian who has expressed admiration for President Trump, comes at a time of rising tension in the Asia-Pacific region. A trade war between the United States and China has forced long-time American allies like Australia to weigh security ties with Washington against trade ties with Beijing. **NYT**

N Korea asks UN chief to address ship seizure by 'gangster' US

REUTERS
SEOUL, MAY 18

NORTH KOREA has asked United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to deal with the "illegal" seizure of one of its cargo ships by the United States, state media said on Saturday.

"This act of dispossession has clearly indicated the United States is indeed a gangster country that does not care at all about international laws," the North Korean ambassador to the United Nations said in a letter sent to Guterres dated Friday, according to North Korea's KCNA news agency.

Pyongyang's protest to the United Nations over the seizure comes amid mounting tensions since a second summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump, aimed at bringing about denuclearisation of the North, broke down in Hanoi in February.

The letter also called for "urgent measures" by Guterres and claimed that Washington infringed the North's sovereignty and violated UN charters.

The US Justice Department said the North Korean cargo ship, known as the "Wise Honest", was seized and impounded to American Samoa. The vessel was accused of illicit coal shipments in violation of sanctions and was first detained by Indonesia in April 2018.

Aircraft risk being targeted by Iran amid tensions: US

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI, MAY 18

COMMERCIAL AIRLINERS flying over the Persian Gulf risk being targeted by "miscalculation or misidentification" from the Iranian military amid heightened tensions between the Islamic Republic and the US, American diplomats warned Saturday, even as both Washington and Tehran say they don't seek war.

However, US officials have yet to publicly explain the threats they perceive coming from Iran, some two weeks after the White House ordered an aircraft carrier and B-52s bombers into the region.

The US also has ordered nonessential staff out of its diplomatic posts in Iraq.

President Donald Trump since has sought to soften his tone on Iran. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also stressed Saturday that Iran is "not seeking war", comments seemingly contradicted by the head of Revolutionary Guard, who declared an ongoing "intelligence war" between the nations.

"Although Iran likely has no intention to target civil aircraft, the presence of multiple long-range, advanced anti-aircraft-capable weapons in a tense environment poses a possible risk of miscalculation or misidentification..." the warning said.

Austria's vice chancellor resigns over video sting, far-right coalition teeters

KATRIN BENNHOLD & CHRISTOPHER F SCHUETZE
BERLIN, MAY 18

AUSTRIA'S FAR-RIGHT vice chancellor, Heinz-Christian Strache, resigned on Saturday after a secretly filmed video showed him promising government contracts to a woman claiming to be the niece of a Russian oligarch and plotting to do away with press freedom in Austria.

The resignation was the culmination of a series of scandals that have plunged Austria's governing coalition into the biggest crisis in its 17-month history.

For weeks, opposition parties have called on Chancellor Sebastian Kurz to end his controversial coalition with Strache's

EXPLAINED

Key region for air travel

THE WARNING by the FAA is a sign of the uncertainty facing the Persian Gulf airspace, which is critical to East-West aviation as well as trade. Major international airlines such as Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways operate in the region. While these airlines have indicated that their operations have not been affected yet, there are likely to be consequences if the situation persists.

'No war will occur'

Speaking in China, Zarif told IRNA news agency that war is not what Iran wants. "No war will occur as neither are we seeking a war nor anyone else has the illusion of being able to fight with Iran in the region," Zarif said.

Meanwhile, the head of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard reportedly said the US and Iran already were in a "full-fledged intelligence war".

Freedom Party, whose well-documented links to far-right extremists and to Russia have increasingly worried allies at home and abroad.

The video, filmed in a villa in Ibiza three months before the 2017 election and was obtained and published on Friday night by the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* and the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, two respected news outlets, appeared to have been filmed without Strache's knowledge and left him severely ethically compromised.

Strache has admitted that the meeting took place but denies any wrongdoing, telling *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that "a lot of alcohol was consumed as the evening progressed" and that there was a "high language barrier" during the conversation. **NYT**

ROAD CONTRACT, PROPAGANDA MACHINE

250 MILLION EUROS
The woman seen with Strache in the video offers to invest 250 mn euros in Austria and he offers her road-building contracts

ATTACKING JOURNALISTS
At one point in the video, Strache is heard comparing journalists to prostitutes. He also said he would like the news media landscape to resemble that



of neighboring Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orban has turned the country's public media into a pro-government propaganda machine.

A DEMANDING TRACK

A runner competes in the Great Wall Marathon at the Huangyaguan Great Wall outside Beijing, China. Reuters

'WE SHOULD NOT HAVE A ROMANTIC VIEW OF SPORTS... IT CAN ALSO DIVIDE PEOPLE'

Basketball is 'war, minus shooting' in Lebanon, where partisanship lurks

team, that a brawl broke out. Riot police swarmed the court. The TV announcers tut-tutted. Two basketball officials who tried to silence the chanting landed in the hospital.

"And it was a hopeless case," moaned Akram Halabi, president of Lebanon's national basketball federation. "They were losing by 33 points!"

These days, with the hosting rights to soccer's World Cup a matter of geopolitical intrigue and President Donald Trump regularly laying into the NFL, few expect sports to be just about sports anymore.

But sports have a particularly political cast in Lebanon, whose 18 officially recognized religious

sects and affiliated political parties live, work and socialize with each other, but never stop angling for advantage. It is a country where partisanship lurks behind, roughly speaking, everything. (See also: schools, hospitals, banks, chess clubs, Ping-Pong and Girl Scouts.)

Then there is Lebanese basketball, a popular sport with a passionate fan base, whose professional season resembles nothing so much as an election with a lot of very tall, very muscular campaign surrogates.

Each basketball club gets the bulk of its financing from a politically connected sponsor who, in return, reaps fan - and voter - loyalty for his political party.



People play basketball in Beirut, Lebanon. NYT

Party colors adorn the players' jerseys. Stadiums are hung not only with championship banners, but also with large posters of political patrons, like the enormous photo of the assassinated former prime minister, Rafic Hariri, that presides over one team's home games.

Sunni Muslims root for a Sunni Muslim-financed team, Maronite Christians for a Maronite Christian team and Armenians for an Armenian team.

Lebanese basketball is "war, minus the shooting," said Danyel Reiche, a professor at the American University of Beirut who researches politics and sports in Lebanon.

"I think we should not have a

romantic view of sports, that it's always good and always brings people together," Reiche said. "It can also divide them."

Considering its size (about the same as Connecticut), population (about 6 million) and record in other sports (undistinguished), Lebanon is pretty good at basketball. Its youth teams are on the rise. Its national team beat China last year, though it failed to qualify for this year's basketball World Cup.

Fans are happy to tell you all about the last Lebanese player who made it big: Rony Seikaly, a Beirut-born college star at Syracuse who played for the NBA for more than a decade.

Lebanese officials dream of

catapulting another Lebanese into the NBA, and Halabi, the national federation's president, is trying to depoliticize and professionalize the game by drumming up broadcast deals and apolitical business sponsors for the teams.

Daniel Faris, an American of Lebanese descent from New Mexico who plays for Champville and got dual citizenship to play on the national team, has witnessed enough fights - including one where his teammates started brawling with rival spectators - that he has learned to be cautious about trash-talking certain teams' fans.

"I just support whoever's paying me," he said. "I stay out of it." **NYT**