

#### **Maldives court annuls** former VP's prison term

A Maldives court on Monday set aside the conviction and 15-year prison term given to former Vice-President Ahmed Adeeb on allegations that he conspired to assassinate former President Abdulla Yameen. The High Court annulled the Criminal Court's conviction and

### Sri Lanka Parliament official held for NTJ links

A Sri Lankan Parliament official was among six people arrested for alleged links to the banned extremist group. National Thawheed Jammath (NTJ), which carried out the deadly suicide attacks on Easter Sunday, a senior police official said on Monday. The man, employed at the country's Parliament over the last 12 years, was found to be a preacher of the NTJ. PTI

# Trump warns Iran of its 'official end'

'Never threaten the U.S. again,' President tweets after a rocket was fired into Baghdad's Green Zone

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

President Trump on Sunday warned he would destroy Iran if it threatens the U.S. "If Iran wants to fight, that will be the official end of Iran. Never threaten the United States again," Mr Trump tweeted.

Tensions between the long-time foes resumed a little over a year ago when the U.S. withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an international deal aimed at containing Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for stopping crippling sanctions against the country.

presidential Sunday's tweet was presumably partly motivated by the Iraqi government reporting that a rocket had been fired into Baghdad's Green Zone – an area that includes government buildings as well as the U.S. Embassy.

The U.S. had already ordered non-essential staff out of Iraq and the White House had announced in early May that it was sending an air-



Hostilities persist: A rally held in Tehran in February marking the 40th anniversary of Iran's Islamic revolution. • AP

craft carrier and bombers to West Asia. An Iraqi military spokesperson was quoted by the Associated Press as saying the rocket was fired from east Baghdad, an area controlled by Shia militias, which are backed by Iran.

Softer approach

However, Mr. Trump appeared to adopt a softer approach during a Fox News interview which was aired Sunday evening (it is unclear when the interview was filmed).

"I just don't want them to have nuclear weapons, and they can't be threatening us. And with all of everything that's going on, and I'm not one that believes - you know, I'm not somebody that wants to go into war, because war hurts economies, war kills people most importantly - by far most importantly," he said.

Mr. Trump has sent mixed

signals on his positions on the tensions with Iran in the past, often appearing at odds with his hawkish National Security Adviser John Bolton, who has led a hard-line approach against Iran and has, previously, called for an attack on Iran.

Last week, Mr. Trump denied a New York Times report that his administration was planning to send 1,20,000 troops to West Asia if conditions deteriorated but at the same time he said he would send "a hell of a lot" more than 1,20,000 troops if need be.

"And don't kid yourself, you do have a military-industrial complex. They do like war," Mr. Trump said during the Fox interview.

Saudi Arabia called on Sunday for emergency regional talks to discuss the Gulf tensions. King Salman invited Gulf leaders and Arab League member states to two emergency summits in Mecca on May 30 to discuss recent "aggressions and their consequences".

(With AFP inputs)

## JVP to move trust vote against Sirisena, Ranil

'We hold them responsible for attacks'

MEERA SRINIVASAN COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) will move a 'no-confidence against President Maithripala Sirisena, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the Cabinet, according to the party's legislators

The move, they said, was sparked by government's "neglect" of prior warnings on the Easter attacks, and the "security lapse" that resulted in the loss of over 250 lives on April 21. The party's parliamentary group will submit the motion to the Speaker on Tuesday.

"As per our parliamentary standing orders, we cannot move a no-confidence motion against the President. However, our trust vote will name him as the Minister of Defence, who is chiefly responsible for the country's security. We are also holding the PM and the entire Cabinet responsible," JVP's Bimal Rathnayake told *The Hindu*.

The JVP has six MPs in the

225-member Though in Opposition, the party – along with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) played a crucial role during the political crisis in late 2018, backing Mr. Wickremesinghe in Parliament, after Mr. Sirisena ousted him in a widely criticised move.

Alerts on Easter blasts

The JVP's decision to chalthe government comes exactly a month after the Easter terror attacks. Both Mr. Sirisena and Mr. Wickremesinghe have said that they were not aware of the prior intelligence that the security establishment had received from sources, including India.

Political commentators have cited fissures within the government, especially between Mr. Sirisena and Mr. Wickremesinghe, as reason for the country's failure to swiftly respond to prior warnings. The motion might be taken up for a vote in the House in about two weeks' time, legislators said.

# Sweden requests detention of Assange

Country reopened a rape probe against the WikiLeaks founder last week

REUTERS STOCKHOLM

The Swedish prosecutor heading an investigation into a rape allegation against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange filed a request with a local court on Monday for him to be detained in absentia. If granted, the court order would be the first step in a process to have Mr. Assange extradited from Britain, where he is serving a 50-week sentence for skip-

Sweden reopened the rape investigation last week.



the Ecuadorean Embassy in London. ■AP

It was begun in 2010 but dropped in 2017 after Mr. Assange took refuge in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London. "I request the District Court to detain Assange in his absence, on probable cause suspected for rape," Deputy Chief Prosecutor Eva-Marie Persson said in a statement on Monday. She said she would issue a European arrest warrant for Mr. Assange to be surrendered to Sweden if the court decided to detain him.

**U.S.** extradition request Sweden's decision to reopen

the rape investigation casts doubt on where Mr. Assange may eventually end up, with U.S. authorities already seeking his extradition over conspiracy charges. A lawyer representing Mr. Assange in Sweden said he would tell the District Court it could not investigate the prosecutor's request until he had conferred with his client and learned whether or not he wished to oppose a detention order. Meanwhile, protesters ral-

lied outside Ecuador's Embassy in London as documents and electronic equipment belonging to Mr. Assange were expected to be seized for handover to U.S. authorities.

## Far-right Austrian Ministers ready to quit

Chancellor has called for fresh elections after sting forced his deputy to resign

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE VIENNA

Austrian far-right Ministers on Monday were ready to quit their posts, the party chief said, after the country's coalition government collapsed over a corruption scandal days before European elections. Conservative Chancellor

Sebastian Kurz has called for fresh elections after a hidden-camera sting forced his far-right deputy to resign, bringing an end to their coalition many on the European right had held up as a model.



Genocidal

taunts won't

end Iran: Zarif

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Iranian Foreign Minister

Mohammad Javad Zarif

said on Monday the "geno-

cidal taunts" of U.S. Presi-

dent Donald Trump will

for millennia while aggres-

sors all gone. Economic

terrorism and genocidal

taunts won't 'end Iran',"

Mr. Zarif wrote on Twitter.

nian. Try respect - it

works!" he added.

"Never threaten an Ira-

Mr. Zarif's tweet said Mr.

Trump is being "goaded by

B Team," a term he coined

to refer to National Securi-

tv Adviser John Bolton as

well as Israel's Prime Minis-

ter and the Crown Princes

of Saudi Arabia and the Un-

ited Arab Emirates, who

are all pushing a hard line

on Tehran.

"Iranians have stood tall

not "end Iran".

Austrian Interior Minister Herbert Kickl. ■ REUTERS

Saying he could no longer tolerate the Freedom Party (FPÖ) scandals, Mr. Kurz scrambled to regain control with local media speculating he may oust Interior Minis-

far-right party's top figures, as a way to impose his auth-

ter Herbert Kickl, one of the

FPÖ's warning

The FPÖ closed ranks behind Mr. Kickl, warning they may quit their Cabinet posts, which besides the Interior Ministry include the Foreign, Defence, Transport and Social Affairs Ministries.

"We will give up our government offices if Interior Minister Herbert Kickl is forced out," Norbert Hofer, who is Infrastructure Minis-

leadership on Sunday, told a press conference. President Van der Bellen on Sunday suggested elections be held in early September with a date to be fixed after further talks with other parties. Heinz-Christian Strache

ter and took over the FPÖ

stepped down as Vice-Chancellor and FPÖ leader after recordings published by German media on Friday showed him offering government contracts in return for campaign help to a fake Russian backer in a villa on the resort island of Ibiza

## + Pak. Science Minister invites clerics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

In an unusual move, Pakistan's Science and Technology Minister on Monday invited the country's two leading clerics to see how "easy" science has made it to predict the lunar calendar to calculate the start of the holy fasting month of Ramzan.

In a statement, federal Minister for Science and Technology Fawad Chaudhry invited Mufti Muneebur Rehman and Shahabuddin Popalzai to see how the moon cycle works.

Since assuming office, Mr. Chaudhry has been pushing for using science for the Islamic calendar and doing away with the traditional moon sighting method used by the Ruete-Hilal Committee.

tary polls after shooting to

power in a country wracked

by a separatist conflict and

severe economic problems. The 41-year-old comedian

youngest post-Soviet Presi-

dent a month after scoring a

landslide victory over Petro

Poroshenko with a cam-

paign capitalising on wides-

pread public discontent

Mr. Zelensky announced

his first priority was ending

the five-year conflict with

Moscow-backed separatists

in the industrial east that

has claimed over 13,000

lives. He announced he

political

the

establishment.

## U.S.'s China envoy visits Tibet

Beijing urges Branstad to carry out trip 'without prejudice'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE The U.S. Ambassador to Chi-

na is making the first trip to Tibet by an American envoy in four years after obtaining rare access to the restricted region, his Embassy said Monday. The visit by Ambassador Terry Branstad comes two months after the U.S. State Department said Beijing had "systematically" impeded access to Tibetan areas for U.S. diplomats, journalists and tourists.

Mr. Branstad was scheduled to visit Qinghai province and the neighbouring Tibet Autonomous Region from Sunday until this Saturday, an Embassy spokesperson said in an email.

"This visit is a chance for the Ambassador to engage with local leaders to raise long-standing about restrictions on reli-



U.S. Ambassador to China Terry Branstad. ■ REUTERS

gious freedom and the preservation of Tibetan culture and language," the spokesperson said.

Mr. Branstad will have official meetings, visit schools and tour religious and cultural heritage sites. His visit comes amid rising trade war tensions between Beijing and Washington. Mr. Branstad's predecessor, Max Baucus, visited Tibet in May

2015. According to the State Department's March report, five out of nine U.S. requests to visit Tibet were rejected last year, including one b Mr. Branstad.

'Earth-shaking changes' Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said Beijing welcomes Mr. Branstad's visit so that he can witness "the earth-shaking changes in the economy, society and people's production and life over the past 60 years after its peaceful liberation".

"I hope Ambassador Branstad's visit to Tibet this time can be carried out without any prejudice and can be based on an objective attitude, and based on the spirit of respecting the facts to make his own conclusions," Mr. Lu said at a regular press

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## Zelensky sworn-in after landslide win AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE Ukraine's new President Volodymyr Zelensky used his inaugural speech on Monday to call snap parliamen-

Ukraine's new President

calls snap elections

was sworn in as Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky taking oath as Ukraine President in

> would dissolve Parliament in order to call early elections, originally scheduled

Mr. Zelensky also called Parliament.



Kiev on Monday. • AFP



for October.

for the sacking of the head of the state security service, Prosecutor General and Defence Minister loyal to his predecessor, although this has to be approved by



## 32 killed in Tajik prison riot; IS held responsible

Many have joined the terror group

REUTERS

Three prison guards and 29 inmates were killed in a prison riot in Tajikistan that the government blamed on Islamic State (IS) militants.

Tajikistan's Justice Ministry said the riot broke out late on Sunday in the prison in the city of Vakhdat, 10 km east of the capital Dushanbe, as militants armed with knives killed three guards and five fellow prisoners.

The militants then torched the prison hospital, took several inmates hostage and tried to fight their way out. Security forces killed 24 militants in the battle to restore order in the prison, the Ministry said.

The prison houses 1,500 inmates, some of whom rights activists describe as

prisoners who were killed by militants were two senior members of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, which was outlawed by the government of President Imomali Rakhmon in 2015, the Ministry said.

political prisoners. Among

The authorities said one of the instigators of the riot was Bekhruz Gulmurod, a son of Gulmurod Khalimov, a Tajik special forces colonel who defected to the IS in 2015 and, according to the government, has since been killed in Syria.

Hundreds of people from the country are believed to have joined the IS. The group claimed responsibility for another Tajik prison riot last November, which followed a deadly attack by its followers on Western tourists in July 2018.