

TOP OF THE WORLD



US envoy calls for Beijing 'dialogue' with Dalai Lama

Beijing: The US ambassador to China has called on Beijing to open "substantive dialogue" with Dalai Lama in remarks made this week during a rare visit to Tibet, his embassy said Saturday. Terry Branstad visited northwest China's Qinghai province as well as Tibet Autonomous Region. "He encouraged Chinese government to engage in substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives, without preconditions, to seek a settlement that resolves differences," an embassy spokesman told AFP via email.

PAKISTAN Six arrested for collecting funds for JeM, LeJ

Lahore: Six militants were arrested for allegedly collecting funds for terror outfits Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) in Punjab province, as Pakistani security forces have launched a crackdown on terror financing after mounting pressure from the global community. Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab government arrested the six members of the organisations for collecting funds for financing terrorism, CTD spokesman said in a statement.

SYRIA Turkey sends weapons to Syrian rebels

Amman: Turkey has equipped an array of mainstream Syrian rebels it backs with fresh supplies of weaponry to help them try to repel a major Russian-backed assault, senior opposition officials and rebel sources said on Saturday. Russia is backing the Syrian army's large aerial and ground assault as it seeks to gain control of the last big stretch of rebel-held territory. Overnight, a Turkish military convoy arrived in a base in northern Hama near rebel-held Jabal al Zawiya, where Russian and Syrian jets have been pounding for weeks, a rebel and a witness said.

With five declaring candidacy, UK PM contest heats up

MICHAEL HOLDEN LONDON, MAY 25

THE CONTEST to replace Theresa May as British prime minister hotted up on Saturday with five candidates now vying for a job whose central task will be to find a way to take a divided Britain out of the European Union.

May announced on Friday she was quitting over her failure to deliver Brexit, raising the prospect of a new leader who could seek a more divisive split with the EU which could lead to confrontation with the bloc or a possible parliamentary election.

British health minister Matt Hancock became the latest figure to join the contest to replace May, following former foreign minister Boris Johnson, current foreign minister Jeremy Hunt, International Development Secretary Rory Stewart and former work and pensions minister Esther McVey.

About a dozen contenders in total are thought to be considering a tilt at the leadership, with trade minister Liam Fox and former junior Brexit minister Steve Baker not ruling out a challenge when asked on Saturday.

The party's divisions over the EU has led to the demise of its last four prime ministers — May, David Cameron, John Major and Margaret Thatcher — and there is little indication these schisms will be healed soon. REUTERS

WHAT'S THEIR PLAN FOR BREXIT?

EXPLAINED E.

BORIS JOHNSON

ON BREXIT: Johnson advocated "a managed no deal" that would buy time to negotiate a Free Trade Arrangement. He also said UK should be prepared to exit without a deal if no acceptable agreement is reached



JEREMY HUNT

ON BREXIT: Hunt voted to remain during the 2016 referendum. Later, he said he would prefer to leave the EU with a deal, but added that he would choose "no deal" over "no Brexit"



ESTHER McVEY

ON BREXIT: McVey resigned as a minister in protest against May's deal. She said her party needs a leader who "believes in Brexit" and that the October 31 date to exit the EU was set in stone



RORY STEWART

ON BREXIT: Stewart is against a no-deal exit and was in support of May's deal with Brussels. He voted Remain in 2016, and despite accepting Brexit, wants to reach out to Remainers to "bring the country together"



MATT HANCOCK

ON BREXIT: Hancock was in favour of Remain in 2016 but is now seen as an ally by Brexiteers. He urged MPs to back Withdrawal Agreement. To get a deal through, he believes MPs to be "brutally honest" about the trade-offs

Pope equates abortion to hiring a hitman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA VATICAN CITY, MAY 25

POPE FRANCIS said Saturday that abortion can never be condoned, even when the fetus is gravely sick or likely to die, and urged doctors and priests to support families to carry such pregnancies to term.

Speaking to a Vatican-spon-



Pope Francis

sored anti-abortion conference, Francis said the opposition to abortion isn't a religious issue but a human one. "Is it licit to throw away a life to resolve a problem?"

he asked. "Is it licit to hire a hitman to resolve a problem?"

Francis denounced decisions to abort based on prenatal testing, saying a human being is "never incompatible with life."

Even those babies destined to die at birth or soon thereafter deserve to receive medical care in the womb, Francis said, adding that their parents need to

be supported so they don't feel isolated and afraid.

While one can argue about using medical resources this way, there is value to it for the parents, he said.

"Taking care of these children helps parents to grieve and not only think of it as a loss, but as a step on a path taken together," Francis said.



RAMAPHOSA TAKES OATH

Cyril Ramaphosa after taking the oath of office, at the Loftus Versveld Stadium in Pretoria, South Africa, Saturday. AP

US moving troops to Middle East is very dangerous for peace: Iran

REUTERS DUBAI, MAY 25

IRANIAN FOREIGN Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Saturday that the US decision to deploy more troops to the Middle East in response to the perceived threat from Iran was "extremely dangerous" for peace.

The United States said it was sending 1,500 troops to region in what it called an effort to bolster defences against Tehran, and it accused Iran's Revolutionary Guards of direct responsibility for attacks on tankers this month.

"The Americans have made such allegations to justify their hostile policies and to raise tensions in the Persian Gulf," Zarif told state news agency IRNA.

"Increased US presence in our region is extremely dangerous and it threatens international peace and security, and this should be addressed," he said.

The move follows decisions to speed up the deployment of an aircraft carrier strike group as well as to send bombers and additional Patriot missiles to the Middle East. Following US media reports that Zarif had met Senator Dianne Feinstein during a US visit last month, Iran's Foreign Ministry said informative talks were common and did not involve negotiations.

Iran has threatened to disrupt oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz if the United States tries to strangle Tehran's economy by halting its oil exports.

Western experts say Iran often exaggerates its weapons capabilities, although there are concerns about its missile programme and particularly its long-range ballistic missiles.



Donald Trump at Haneda International Airport in Tokyo on Saturday. Reuters

Trump clears \$8 bn in weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE

PATRICIA ZENGERLE WASHINGTON, MAY 25

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump, declaring a national emergency because of tensions with Iran, swept aside objections from Congress on Friday to complete the sale of over \$8 billion worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan.

The Trump administration informed congressional committees that it will go ahead with 22 military sales to the Saudis, United Arab Emirates and Jordan, infuriating lawmakers by circumventing a long-standing precedent for congressional re-

view of major weapons sales.

Members of Congress had been blocking sales of offensive military equipment to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for months, angry about the huge civilian toll from their air campaign in Yemen, as well as human rights abuses such as the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at a Saudi consulate in Turkey.

"President Trump is only using this loophole because he knows Congress would disapprove... There is no new 'emergency' reason to sell bombs to the Saudis to drop in Yemen, and doing so only perpetuates the humanitarian crisis there," said Senator Chris Murphy. REUTERS

Can sink US warships with two new secret weapons: Iran official

Dubai: Iran can sink US warships using missiles and "secret weapons", a senior military official was quoted as saying by the semi-official news agency Mizan Saturday. "America... is sending two warships... if they commit the slightest stupidity, we will send these ships to the bottom of the sea... using two missiles or two new secret weapons," General Morteza Qorbani told Mizan. REUTERS

TN outfit inspired Sri Lankan suicide bombers, claims Buddhist monk

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA COLOMBO, MAY 25

A SRI Lankan Buddhist monk, who was controversially released from jail, has claimed that a Tamil Nadu-based Islamic organisation had inspired the local Islamist extremist group NTJ for carrying out the country's worst terror attack on Easter Sunday.

Earlier this month, the Sri Lankan Army chief said that some of the suicide bombers visited Kashmir and Kerala for "some sorts of training" or to "make some more links" with other foreign outfits.

Nine suicide bombers carried out a series of devastating blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels on April 21, killing nearly 260 people and injuring 500 others.

Hardline Buddhist monk Galagodaatthe Gnanasara, speaking to reporters on Friday, said that two Tamil Nadu Thowtheeth Jamaath (TNTJ) men — Ayub and Abdeen — visited Sri Lanka.

"They met one Abdul Razik here. The idea was to provoke Buddhists to attack Muslims. They spread stories derogatory of the Buddha," Gnanasara said.

The headline monk was addressing the media for the first time since President Maithripala Sirisena ordered his release using

GOVT FREEZES ACCOUNTS OF 41 TERROR SUSPECTS

Colombo: Bank accounts of 41 terror suspects in Sri Lanka having links with the outlawed Islamist group National Thawheed Jammath (NTJ) that was behind the Easter Sunday bombings have been frozen, said a media report. The accounts have a total amount of \$759,335 which was in addition to \$79,333 seized from the suspects at the time of their arrest, a police spokesperson was quoted as saying by the Times Online. PTI

a presidential pardon.

He was sentenced to six year imprisonment for contempt of court in August last year. Due to Sirisena's pardon, he was released from the jail after spending nine months behind bars.

"The TNTJ created Sri Lanka Thowheed Jamath (SLTJ) and later All Ceylon Thowtheeth Jama'ath. The SLTJ was later split under nine separate leaders," Gnanasara said. The TNTJ, in a statement issued last month, denied any links with the NTJ.

Lyon blast: French police hunt suspect

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA LYON, MAY 25

FRENCH POLICE were on Saturday pulling out all the stops to locate a suspect following a blast in the heart of Lyon that wounded 13 people.

"All means have been activated to identify and detain the person who committed this act," Paris prosecutor Remy Heitz told media in Lyon, the third-biggest French city. The blast occurred just two days ahead of hotly contested European Parliament elections and with France on watch for any repeat of recent deadly terrorist attacks which have rocked the country.

Heitz has taken charge of the investigation into "attempted murder in relation with a terrorist enterprise and association with terrorist criminals."

US hate crime convict ordered to learn about Sikh faith as part of jail sentence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW YORK, MAY 25

A UNITED States judge has ordered a white youth, who admitted to attacking a Sikh store owner because of his religion, to learn more about the faith and submit a report in court as part of his sentence for committing the hate crime.

Marion County Judge Lindsay Partridge also sentenced 25-year-old Andrew Ramsey to three years of imprisonment, according to a press release issued by the Sikh Coalition, the largest Sikh body in America.

On January 14, Ramsey brutally assaulted Harwinder Singh Dodd, who was working at a convenience store in the US State of Oregon, because of his perception of his religion.

Sentencing Ramsey to 36 months in jail on Friday, the judge ordered him to attend the local temple's annual parade to learn more about the Sikh religion, saying bigotry is the result of ignorance and "all of us are able to learn and benefit from cultures in our community".

‘WE ASK EACH OTHER WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO WOMEN IF THE TALIBAN COME BACK’

In Kabul’s liberating cafes, ‘women make the culture, not men’

DAVID ZUCCHINO & FATIMA FAIZI KABUL, MAY 25

ON SOME days, life as a young woman in Kabul can feel suffocating for Hadis Lessani Delijam, a 17-year-old high school senior.

Once, a man on the street harangued her for her makeup and Western clothes; they are shameful, he bellowed. A middle-aged woman cursed her for strolling and chatting with a young man.

"She called me things that are so terrible I can't repeat them," Delijam said. For solace, Delijam retreats to an unlikely venue — the humble coffee shop.

"This is the only place where



Outside a cafe in Kabul. NYT

I can relax and feel free, even if it's only for a few hours," Delijam said recently as she sat at a coffee shop, her hair uncovered, and chatted with two young men.

Trendy new cafes have sprung up across Kabul in the past three years, evolving into emblems of women's progress. The cafes are sanctuaries for

women in an Islamic culture that still dictates how they should dress, behave in public and interact with men.

These days, conversations at the cafes often turn to the Afghan peace talks in Doha, Qatar, between the United States and the Taliban. Many women worry their rights will be bargained away under pressure from the fundamentalist, all-male Taliban delegation.

"We are so frightened," said Maryam Ghulam Ali, 28, an artist who was sharing chocolate cake with a friend at a coffee shop called Simple. "We ask each other what will happen to women if the Taliban come back."

Many young women in

Kabul's emerging cafe society were infants under Taliban rule. Delijam had not yet been born. They have come of age during the post-Taliban struggle by many Afghans to break free of the harsh contours of a patriarchal society.

The women have grown up with cellphones, social media and the right to express themselves freely. They cannot imagine returning to the puritanical dictates of the Taliban, who sometimes stoned women to death on suspicion of adultery — and still do in areas they control.

Farahnaz Forotan, 26, a journalist and coffee shop regular, has created a social media campaign, #myredline, that implores women to stand up for their

rights. Her Facebook page is studded with photos of herself inside coffee shops, symbols of her own red line.

"Even today, we can't walk on the streets without being harassed," Forotan said. "People call us prostitutes, Westernised, from the 'democracy generation.'"

In 2014, the Taliban launched a series of attacks against cafes and restaurants in Kabul, including a suicide bombing and gunfire that killed 21 customers at the popular Taverna du Liban cafe, where alcohol was served, and Afghan men and women mingled among Westerners.

Afterward, the government forced a host of cafes and guesthouses to shut down for fear

they would draw more violence. But in 2016, new coffee shops began to open, catering to young women and men eager to mingle in public again.

Mina Rezaee, 30, who opened the Simple coffee shop in Kabul a year ago, makes sure no one harasses her female customers for wearing trendy clothes or sitting with men.

"Women make the culture here, not men," she said.

She gestured to a table where several women, their head scarves removed, sat laughing and talking with young men.

"Look at them — I love it," Rezaee said. "It's the Taliban who needs to change their ideology, not us. That's my red line." NYT