

17The World

TOPOF THE WORLD



Assange leaves a court in London. *Reuters*

BRITAIN

I've protected many: Assange fights extradition

London: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange told a London court his work had protected “many people” and refused to agree to be extradited to the US. The US has requested the extradition of Assange, who was dragged from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London on April 11, and has charged him with conspiracy to commit computer intrusion which carries a maximum penalty of five years. Asked at a preliminary hearing whether he agreed to be extradited to the US, Assange, via a video link from a UK prison, said: “I do not wish to surrender for extradition. I’m a journalist winning many, many awards and protecting many people.”

PAKISTAN

Musharraf skips court date again in treason case

Islamabad: Pakistan’s former president Pervez Musharraf did not turn up for the treason trial against him on Thursday citing deteriorating health, and a special court accepted his plea to postpone the hearing until after Ramzan, according to a media report. The former president’s lawyer Salman Safdar stated that despite strong willingness and eagerness to return to Pakistan, the life-threatening ailments and medical complications have forced him not to appear before the special court.

USA

Former CIA man pleads guilty to spying for China

Washington: A former CIA officer could spend the rest of his life behind bars after pleading guilty to spying for China, the US Justice Department said. Jerry Chun Shing Lee, 54, was arrested in January 2018, suspected of having provided information on a CIA network of informants that was brought down by China between 2010 and 2012. Lee pleaded guilty before a US District Court judge in Virginia to conspiring to provide national defence information to China, the Justice Department said.

MASSIVE 4-DAY MEETING OF AFGHAN LEADERS ENDS

Grand council backs Taliban talks, urges terror tag removal

Latest round of US-Taliban negotiations to end the 17-yr conflict held separately

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KABUL, MAY 2

AN AFGHAN grand council on Thursday agreed on several recommendations for peace talks with the Taliban, after four days of meetings in Kabul meant to hammer out a common strategy for future negotiations. The council overwhelmingly backed talks between Kabul and the Taliban and also called for the UN to remove its global terrorist designation for the Taliban, a long-standing demand of the insurgents.

President Ashraf Ghani had convened the council of more than 3,200 participants, known as Loya Jirga, earlier in the week.

However, a number of prominent Afghans, including Ghani’s partner in the unity government, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, boycotted the council, which ends on Friday.

The US has in recent months stepped up efforts to resolve Afghanistan’s 17-year war and has been pressing for direct talks between the Taliban and Kabul.

The insurgents refuse to talk to the government, considering it a US puppet, though they have held

3,200-STRONG LOYA JIRGA ISSUES RECOMMENDATIONS

THE GRAND COUNCIL

The grand council, known as Loya Jirga, was comprised of over 3,200 participants, including political, tribal and religious leaders. President Ashraf Ghani convened the meeting of the council to hammer out a common strategy for talks with the Taliban.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The council overwhelmingly backed talks between Kabul and the Taliban and also called for the UN to remove its global terrorist designation for the Taliban. It also expressed its support



Delegates attend the grand council meeting in Kabul.

for women’s rights and said the country must not backtrack from the gains that women have made since the 2001 ouster of the Taliban regime.

LEGAL STATUS

While the recommendations of the council are not legally binding on the government, historically its verdict has been respected by politicians.

several rounds of talks with US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

After an opening speech Monday, Ghani gave the chairmanship of the council to Abdul Rasool Sayyaf, a former warlord with past links to Osama bin Laden. He is known for adhering to a strict interpretation of Islam.

Still, the council expressed its

support for women’s rights and said the country must not backtrack from gains that women have made since the US-led invasion in 2001 ousted the Taliban regime.

Meanwhile, Khalilzad embarked on another round of talks with the Taliban Wednesday in Qatar, where the insurgents maintain a political office. Those talks

are narrowly focused on US troop withdrawal and Taliban guarantees that Afghanistan will not be used to stage terrorist attacks.

Earlier in the week, Khalilzad visited Pakistan and Russia, where a trilateral meeting that also included China issued a statement supporting US efforts to find an end to the protracted Afghan war.



Nicolas Maduro with Venezuela Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez and military personnel in Caracas Thursday. *Reuters*

Maduro hangs on as protests peter out

LUC COHEN & ANGUS BERWICK
CARACAS, MAY 2

VENEZUELAN S HEADED opposition leader Juan Guaido’s call to take to the streets on Wednesday in a bid to force President Nicolas Maduro from power, but there was little concrete sign of change in a crisis that increasingly looks like a political stalemate.

Guaido had called for the “largest march” in Venezuela’s history and said on Twitter that “millions of Venezuelans” were in the streets in “this final phase” of his move to oust Maduro.

But by late afternoon, many of the protesters in the capital Caracas had drifted home. National Guards fired teargas at

EXPLAINED

With options running out, Guaido appeals to govt employees

JUAN GUAIDO, who declared himself president in January, has so far not succeeded in taking control of Venezuela’s state machinery, with Nicolas Maduro still in power. Guaido’s latest push, which he called the final phase of the operation to oust Maduro, petered out after he failed to win the backing of more than a few military personnel. Maduro retains the backing of Venezuela’s armed forces. Now, Guaido has called on government employees to join him. Public sector workers have for years been made to attend government rallies, but if a significant number turn out for Guaido, it would be a big blow for the Maduro regime.

the remaining demonstrators, and one injured demonstrator was carried by others to a first

aid truck, *Reuters* video showed. Rights organisations said a young woman died in surgery

after being shot in the head during a protest in Caracas. Guaido confirmed via Twitter that a woman died after being shot.

The standoff in the South American country increased tensions between the United States and Russia, which accused each other of interference in the OPEC-member nation’s affairs.

Despite Guaido’s calls for the military to support him, the armed forces leadership has so far remained loyal to Maduro, who has been in power since his mentor, the late President Hugo Chavez, died in 2013.

“If the regime thought we had reached maximum pressure, they cannot even imagine,” Guaido told thousands of cheering supporters. “We have to remain in the streets.” **REUTERS**

MEANWHILE

NEW THAI QUEEN MAKES PUBLIC DEBUT

Thailand’s Queen Suthida, a former royal bodyguard, made her first official public appearance Thursday at the side of Rama X, just days before his coronation and a day after her marriage to him was announced. She was seen kneeling alongside him at a royal function.



BOTCHED ATTACK: A man believed to be Abdul Latheef Mohamed Jameel (extreme left, in striped shirt and cap) in an elevator at the Taj Samudra hotel in Colombo on Easter Sunday, minutes before suicide bombings were carried out in six other locations. Police say Jameel could not carry out an attack at the Taj Samudra as his bomb failed to go off. Instead, he ended up detonating the bomb in a motel next to the city’s zoo, killing two people. *Handout via Reuters*

Sri Lankan churches cancel all Sunday mass until further notice

Assets of all suspected Easter Sunday terrorists to be frozen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, MAY 2

SRI LANKA’S Catholic church announced Thursday that it has cancelled all Sunday mass in churches across the island nation until further notice after warning of more possible attacks, days after it was announced that public mass would resume from May 5.

All public church services were cancelled after the Easter Sunday bomb blasts that ripped through three churches and high-end hotels, killing 253 people and injuring 500 others.

“His eminence the Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith has instructed that Sunday masses should not be held this week,” Reverend Edmund Thilakarathne, the spokesman for the Archbishop’s House, said. On April 30, Cardinal Ranjith

Pak foreign minister cancels visit amid security concerns

Islamabad: Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi cancelled his upcoming visit to Sri Lanka in the wake of the security situation in the island nation following the Easter Sunday suicide attacks, a media report said Thursday. Qureshi was due in Maldives on May 2 and in Colombo from

May 3 till May 5, but it was cancelled in light of the security situation in Sri Lanka, the *Express Tribune* reported.

Pakistan’s Foreign Office had said last week that Islamabad has offered “every possible” assistance to Sri Lanka in investigations into the terrorist attacks. **PTI**

said that public mass in Sri Lanka would resume since the attack in certain Catholic churches from May 5. However, he had also criticised the poor security situation in the country in the face of threats of more attacks.

Sri Lankan authorities, meanwhile, are taking steps to freeze the assets of terrorists involved in

the Easter Sunday bomb blasts, a media report said on Thursday.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is in the process of identifying and compiling the list of assets belonging to those involved in the attacks, police spokesman S P Ruwan Gunasekera was quoted as saying by the *Daily Mirror*.

Empty chair and a prop chicken: US AG Barr skips Mueller hearing

MARY CLARE JALONICK
WASHINGTON, MAY 2

ATTORNEY GENERAL William Barr skipped a House hearing Thursday on special counsel Robert Mueller’s Trump-Russia report, escalating an already acrimonious battle between Democrats and President Donald Trump’s Justice Department.

Barr’s decision, made after a disagreement with a House committee over questioning, came the day the department also missed a committee deadline to provide it with a full, unredacted version of Mueller’s report and its underlying evidence. In all, it’s likely to prompt a vote on holding Barr in contempt and possibly the issuance of subpoenas, bringing House Democrats and the Trump administration closer to a prolonged battle in court.

As the hearing opened, lawmakers faced an empty chair with a place card set for Barr. Democratic members of the committee had fun with the spectacle, placing a prop chicken by Barr’s microphone — to underscore their contention that he was afraid to appear — and jokingly looking under the desk to



A chicken figurine was placed near the empty seat of the US Attorney General, who was scheduled to appear for a Congressional hearing. Reuters

make sure he wasn’t there.

Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler of New York said that if Barr doesn’t provide the committee “with the information it demands and the respect that it deserves, Mr Barr’s moment of accountability will come soon enough.”

Republicans were not amused by the antics or Nadler’s tough talk. “The reason Bill Barr isn’t here today is because the Democrats decided they didn’t want him here today,” said the top Republican on the panel, Georgia Rep. Doug Collins. Nadler and the Democrats had demanded that staff attorneys in addition to lawmakers be allowed to question Barr. Barr said he wouldn’t attend under that condition. **AP**

Cyclone Fani: Bangladesh orders mass evacuations

ANISUR RAHMAN
DHAKA, MAY 2

THE BANGLADESH government on Thursday issued mass evacuation orders in 19 coastal districts to prevent casualties as meteorologists predicted cyclonic storm ‘Fani’ to make landfall on Friday after hitting Indian coastlines.

The armed forces were also kept ready for disaster operations.

“Directives have been issued asking the administrations of 19 districts in the coastlines to start evacuating people to safe shelters from 10 am tomorrow (Friday),” disaster management ministry’s senior secretary Shah Kamal told a news briefing.

Residents from the 19 districts will be shifted to over 4,000 shelters erected along the coastlines, while local authorities took possession of safe installations like schools to be used as shelters if required, he said. **PTI**

In a first, voters eject convicted British lawmaker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, MAY 2

VOTERS in eastern England will elect a new member of Parliament next month after ejecting the incumbent in the first move of its kind, it was announced Thursday.

Fiona Onasanya lost her seat after voters in the city of Peterborough signed a recall petition triggered by her conviction for lying over a speeding offence.

The 35-year-old was expelled from the main opposition Labour party after she was jailed for three months in January for perverting the course of justice.

She had hoped to continue as an independent MP, but 28 per cent of eligible voters signed the petition, well over the 10 per cent threshold required to oust her.

MPs who receive sentences of less than a year in prison are not automatically excluded from Parliament.

‘It Excites Us And We Can Even Learn Tricks’

War on the phone front: PUBG all the rage among Libyan fighters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
TAJOURA (LIBYA), MAY 2

IT’S A day of rest from fighting on the front line in Libya and Abdelaziz and his comrades down their weapons only to pick up their phones and resume combat.

“(Khalifa) Haftar’s guys are coming to get us,” shouts Abdelaziz, referring to the military strongman who launched a bid to capture Tripoli last month.

The eyes of the young men are fixed on mobile phones as they shoot it out in PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds, or PUBG, a brutal “battle royale” game in which the winner is the last survivor.

The online multiplayer video game is among the world’s most popular with more than 360 million downloads.

The Iraqi Parliament voted last month to ban the game for “inciting violence” and it has also been outlawed in Gujarat and Nepal.

In Libya, PUBG is all the rage, especially on the front line in the suburbs of Tripoli and around the city where forces loyal to the internationally recognised Government of National Accord have been fighting Haftar’s self-styled Libyan National Army for the past month.

“We play it when we come back from the front, and sometimes even on the front,” the burly



The game has faced bans in Gujarat and Nepal. The Iraqi Parliament says it incites violence. *Reuters*

Abdelaziz says in his raspy voice.

The 25-year-old and his fellow fighters from a “katiba” or

battalion in Misrata are battling alongside other pro-GNA forces in Ain Zara, a district in Tripoli’s

southern suburbs.

That afternoon, they rested at their camp in Tajoura, a coastal town in the eastern part of the capital.

Under a large awning, Abdelaziz and his comrades — mostly in their 20s — put their Kalashnikov assault rifles patched up with tape and their rocket-propelled grenade launchers on a table.

They reach for their phones, go online and fire up the game with their carefully selected out-fits and avatars, some more colourful than others.

They jump out of planes along with 100 other players and are parachuted onto an island

where they collect weapons and eliminate each other until the last one is standing.

“I discovered the game a year ago thanks to these guys. I tried it out of curiosity and fell in love,” says Abdelaziz. “At night, we play. You don’t sleep,” another player says with a laugh.

Mohamed Shaafi, a 19-year-old in a camouflage cap, chips in.

“Whether it’s morning, afternoon or night, we have to play,” he says. “It excites us and we can even learn tricks (for the real battlefield): where to look, how to crawl, how to train.”

“It motivates us when we play it before going to the front line,” he says, looking from under the vi-

sor of his cap raised like a cyclist’s.

Around the table, the first crackles of gunshots are heard from their phones.

Without ever taking their eyes off their screens, the four young men talk to each other as though in battle. “There’s someone under the tree: watch out!”, “Get down!”, “You’re far away!”, “You don’t have a gun? I’m here, don’t worry.”

For Abdelaziz, his virtual opponents are the same as “Haftar’s guys” who he fights in the potholed streets of Ain Zara.

“The front is PUBG in real life. That’s why we love this game,” Akram says with a smile, his combat helmet still on his head.