

# Reporters freed from Myanmar prison

The Pulitzer Prize winning journalists were released under a presidential amnesty for 6,520 prisoners

**REUTERS**  
YANGON

Two Reuters journalists jailed in Myanmar after they were convicted of breaking the Official Secrets Act walked free from prison on Tuesday after more than 500 days behind bars.

Wa Lone, 33, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 29, had been convicted in September and sentenced to seven years in jail in a case that raised questions about Myanmar's progress towards democracy and sparked an outcry from diplomats and human rights advocates.

They were released under a presidential amnesty for 6,520 prisoners. President Win Myint has pardoned thousands of other prisoners in mass amnesties since last month.

It is customary in Myanmar for authorities to free prisoners across the country around the time of the traditional New Year, which began on April 17.

Reuters has said the two men did not commit any



**Sense of joy:** Wa Lone, left, and Kyaw Soe Oo wave as they walk out from the Insein Prison in Yangon on Tuesday. **AP**

crime and had called for their release.

Swamped by media and well-wishers as they walked through the gates of Insein Prison, on the outskirts of Yangon, a grinning Wa Lone

gave a thumbs up and said he was grateful for the international efforts to secure their freedom.

"I'm really happy and excited to see my family and my colleagues. I can't wait to

go to my newsroom," he said. Mr. Kyaw Soe Oo smiled and waved to reporters.

The two were then driven away by Reuters colleagues and reunited with their wives and children.

**Killing of Rohingya**

Before their arrest in December 2017, they had been working on an investigation into the killing of 10 Rohingya Muslim men and boys by security forces and Buddhist civilians in western Myanmar's Rakhine State during an army crackdown that began in August 2017.

The operation sent more than 730,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh, according to U.N. estimates.

The report the two men authored, featuring testimony from perpetrators, witnesses and families of the victims, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting in May, adding to a number of accolades received by the pair for their journalism.

Government spokesman

Zaw Htay said the decision to release the two was made after the families wrote to government leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We took the letters into consideration and released them in the interest of the country," Mr. Zaw Htay told reporters.

**Press freedom**

Reuters Editor-in-Chief Stephen J. Adler welcomed the news. "We are enormously pleased that Myanmar has released our courageous reporters, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo. Since their arrests 511 days ago, they have become symbols of the importance of press freedom around the world. We welcome their return," Mr. Adler said.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was relieved to learn of the release, a spokesman said. The United Nations in Myanmar said it saw the release as a sign of the government's commitment to the transition to democracy.

## IN BRIEF



### Toll from Niger tanker truck blast rises to 60

**NAMEY**

The death toll from a tanker truck explosion in Niger's capital Niamey has risen to 60, authorities said on Tuesday. The tally is likely to rise further as the prognosis is poor for several people who sustained severe burns, an official said. **AFP**

### Google promises smarter and smaller AI assistant

**MOUNTAIN VIEW**

Google CEO Sundar Pichai kicked off the company's annual developer conference on Tuesday with updates to artificially intelligent voice assistant. It will get a series of updates this year, including one that lets it book rental cars and movie tickets. The Assistant will be shrunk down so that it can work directly on a phone, eliminating the need to communicate with cloud servers to understand some commands. **AP**

# It is safe for tourists to return to Sri Lanka, says Sirisena

'99% of the suspects in the Easter Sunday attacks arrested'

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena on Tuesday said that "99%" of the suspects in the Easter Sunday attacks on churches and hotels have been arrested and their explosive materials seized, and that it is safe for tourists to return to the island nation.

"The country is in a safe position right now," Mr. Sirisena said. "Our intelligence divisions have identified how many terrorists are there and 99% of them have been arrested. One or two may have been left and they too will be arrested."

Mr. Sirisena spoke hours after an interim report was submitted by a committee his office formed to examine why Sri Lankan security forces did not heed Indian intelligence information ahead of the attacks that



Devotees at Colombo's St. Anthony's church on Tuesday when it was partially opened after the April 21 attacks. **AP**

killed more than 250 people.

Mr. Sirisena declined to discuss the report but said that "heads of security divisions have failed to take appropriate measures and failed to inform me too."

Acting police chief C.D. Wickramaratne had on Monday said that authorities had seized improvised explosive devices and hundreds of swords, \$1,40,000 in cash in

bank accounts and \$40 million in assets connected to the suspects.

Those things weren't discovered earlier because of "weaknesses" in Sri Lanka's intelligence divisions, Mr. Sirisena said.

The President added that violence wasn't a problem specific to Sri Lanka, instead ascribing it to "global terrorism."

# Erdogan hails Istanbul poll re-run

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
ISTANBUL

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday welcomed an order to re-run the recent Istanbul election.

His ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost the mayorship of Turkey's biggest city by a narrow margin and has refused to accept defeat. "We sincerely believe there was organised corruption and irregularities," Mr. Erdogan told party members in Parliament on Tuesday, saying the re-run was the "best step" for the country.

On Monday, Turkey's top election body annulled the results of the March 31 mayoral vote, which was won by Ekrem Imamoglu of the main Opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). The party's leader described the seven members of the election board as "gang members" under Mr. Erdogan's control.

# 'Trump would have been charged were he not President'

Former prosecutors disagree with A-G Barr's conclusion

**SRIRAM LAKSHMAN**  
WASHINGTON

Hundreds of former federal prosecutors (439 on Monday evening) have signed a statement countering Attorney-General William Barr's testimony to the U.S. Senate last week that there was not sufficient evidence to say President Donald Trump had obstructed justice with regard to Special Counsel Robert Mueller's probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential elections.

The statement by former prosecutors – Democrats and Republicans – says each of the signatories believes that without his Presidential office protecting him Mr. Trump would have faced "multiple felony charges for the obstruction of justice." It is Department of Justice practice not to indict a sitting President.

**Obstruction charge**

"The Mueller report describes several acts that satisfy all of the elements for an obstruction charge: conduct that obstructed or attempted to obstruct the truth-finding process, as to which the evidence of corrupt intent and connection to pending proceedings is overwhelming," the statement says.

While the statement does not ask for or recommend a particular course of action, it stresses that Mr. Trump would have been prosecuted



William Barr

if he was not President.

The statement goes on to outline and then describe the incriminating acts.

**Incriminating acts**

First, an attempt to fire Mr. Mueller and alter the evidence around those attempts. It describes Mr. Trump trying to get his personal counsel Don McGahn to fire Mr. Mueller and write a memo covering it up.

Second, the statement describes Mr. Trump's attempts to get then Attorney-General Jeff Sessions to reverse his decision to recuse himself from the probe, so he could go back to overseeing it and protecting the President, including by limiting the probe's scope.

Third, it describes Mr. Trump's attempts at intimidation and "the dangling of pardons" in the cases of his fixer, Michael Cohen, and his campaign manager, Paul Manafort.

"We emphasise that these are not matters of close professional judgment. Of course, there are potential defences or arguments that could be raised in response to an indictment of the nature we describe here. In our system, every accused person is presumed innocent and it is always the government's burden to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt," the prosecutors say.

**Critical case**

"As former federal prosecutors, we recognise that prosecuting obstruction of justice cases is critical because unchecked obstruction, which allows intentional interference with criminal investigations to go unpunished, puts our whole system of justice at risk," the statement says.

The statement not only counters Mr. Barr's position but also comes days after he refused to appear before the House Judiciary Committee for a hearing, on the grounds that he did not agree to the format House Democrats, who control the Committee, had requested.

The House Judiciary Committee is expected to vote to recommend to the House that Mr. Barr be held in contempt of Congress because the Department of Justice, which Mr. Barr heads, missed a subpoena-mandated deadline for handing in an non-redacted version of the Mueller report and underlying evidence.

# Pompeo slams China, Russia

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
ROVANIEMI

The U.S. on Monday said it planned to beef up its Arctic presence to keep Russia and China's "aggressive behaviour" in check in the resource-rich region.

"The region has become an arena of global power and competition" owing to vast reserves of oil, gas, minerals and fish stocks, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned in a speech in Rovaniemi, Finland.

Speaking on the eve of a meeting of the Arctic Council, Mr. Pompeo said, "China's pattern of aggressive behaviour elsewhere will inform how it treats the Arctic," he said.

Mr. Pompeo warned against scenarios whereby nations become ensnared by debt and corruption, of low-quality investments, militarisation and uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, all of which he said were potential effects of allowing

rising Chinese influence.

He also denounced Russia's "provocative actions", accusing Moscow of wanting to remilitarise the region.

China on Tuesday hit back, saying that Mr. Pompeo's remarks were "a misrepresentation of the facts that has ulterior motives".

"We have no geopolitical calculations, and seek no exclusionary blocs," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a press briefing.

# China marriage market targets Pakistan's Christian minority

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
GUJRANWALA

Muqadas Ashraf was just 16 when her parents married her off to a Chinese man who had come to Pakistan looking for a bride. Less than five months later, Ms. Ashraf is back in her home country, pregnant and seeking a divorce from a husband she says was abusive.

She is one of hundreds of poor Christian girls who have been trafficked to China in a market for brides that has swiftly grown in Pakistan since late last year, activists say. Brokers are aggressively seeking out girls for Chinese men, sometimes even cruising outside churches to ask for potential brides. They are being helped by Christian clerics paid to target impoverished parents in their congregation with promises of wealth in exchange for their daughters.

Parents receive several thousand dollars and are told that their new sons-in-law are wealthy Christian

converts. The grooms turn out to be neither, according to several brides, their parents and government officials. Once in China, the girls most often married against their will can find themselves isolated in remote regions, vulnerable to abuse, unable to communicate and reliant on a translation app even for a glass of water.

**Turning a blind eye**

"This is human smuggling," said Ijaz Alam Augustine, the Human Rights and Minorities Minister in Pakistan's Punjab province. "Greed is really responsible for these marriages ... I have met with some of these girls and they are very poor."

Mr. Augustine accused the Chinese government and its embassy in Pakistan of turning a blind eye to the practice by unquestioningly issuing visas and documents.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied that, saying China has zero tolerance for illegal transnation-

al marriage agencies.

On Monday, Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency arrested eight Chinese nationals and four Pakistanis in raids in Punjab province in connection with trafficking, Geo TV reported. It said the raids followed an undercover operation that included attending an arranged marriage. The Chinese embassy said last month that China was cooperating with Pakistan to crack down on unlawful matchmaking centers.

In China, demand for foreign brides has mounted, a legacy of the one-child policy that skewed the country's gender balance toward males. Brides initially came largely from Vietnam, Laos and North Korea. Now men are looking further afield, said Mimi Vu, director of advocacy at Pacific Links, which helps trafficked Vietnamese women. "It's purely supply and demand," she said. "It used to be, 'Is she light-skinned?' Now it's like, 'Is she female?'"

# 'Iran to reduce nuclear commitments'

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
TEHRAN

Iran will reduce some of its commitments to the nuclear deal in response to the United States' decision to withdraw from the 2015 multilateral deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), state news agency IRNA said on Tuesday.

"This will be communicated to the Ambassadors of the five countries" still party to the deal – Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia – at a meeting on Wednesday with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi, IRNA reported.

President Hassan Rouhani is also set to send a letter to the five countries' heads of

state in order to "clearly emphasise how much Iran has commanded patience regarding the JCPOA," it said.

"But opportunities have been lost, and the counterparts have been unable to live up to their commitments in the JCPOA, in a way that Iran is left no way but to reduce its commitments," the news agency said.