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Tunisian President in 'critical condition'

Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi, 92, was in "critical condition" on Thursday after being taken to hospital with a serious illness, a key adviser said. Mr. Essebsi "was taken seriously ill and transferred to the military hospital in Tunis," the presidency said on its Facebook page. AFP

Court rebuffs Trump on citizenship question

The Supreme Court ruled on Thursday against adding a question about citizenship to the U.S. census, calling the rationale for it "contrived," in a separate ruling, the court's conservative majority refused to rule against electoral redistricting practices. AFP

Democrats clash on health care, border

In their first debate, presidential hopefuls attack Trump, saying his policies benefited the wealthy

REUTERS
MIAMI

Democratic presidential contenders battled over health care coverage and border policy on Wednesday during a surprisingly heated first debate that laid bare the party's divisions on whether to abolish private insurance and shift to a Medicare-for-All system.

In the first round of back-to-back debates, several of the lesser-known candidates vied for attention in the crowded race to take on President Donald Trump, shouting over one another to grab the spotlight and prove that they are capable of standing up to the Republican in the November 2020 election.

The Democratic contenders repeatedly attacked Mr. Trump, saying his economic policies benefited the wealthy at the expense of working Americans, and calling his border policies heartless.

"On January 20, 2021, we'll say 'Adios' to Donald Trump," said former Housing Secretary Julian Castro.

But they also turned their fire on each other, most often targeting Beto O'Rourke. The former Congressman tangled with Mr. Castro, a fellow Texan, on border policy, and New York Mayor Bill de Blasio on health care.

The intensity of the exchanges after six months of a relatively mild campaign reflected the high stakes in what could be a make-or-break moment for some of the contenders struggling to be noticed in the Democratic field of more than 20 candidates.

Second debate

No one mentioned front-runner Joe Biden, who took the stage with top rival Bernie Sanders and eight other candidates in the second debate on Thursday night.

The battle over health



Debating points: (From left) Democratic presidential hopefuls Julian Castro, Cory Booker and Elizabeth Warren during a break at the debate in Miami, Florida, on Wednesday. ■ REUTERS

care began when the candidates were asked to raise their hands if they support eliminating private health insurance. Only Senator Elizabeth Warren and Mr. de Blasio did so, but they quickly challenged the other eight candidates on stage.

Ms. Warren, a leader of the party's progressive wing who has been surging in opi-

nion polls, said private insurance was taking advantage of Americans. She backs a government-sponsored Medicare-for-All approach and criticised those who say it is not politically feasible.

"What they are really telling you is they just won't fight for it. Health care is a basic right, and I will fight for it," she said.

But former U.S. Representative John Delaney, an outspoken critic of Medicare for All who supports a universal health care approach that includes private insurance, said Democrats should not throw away a system that some Americans are happy with. "I think we should be the party that keeps what's working and fixes what's broken," Mr. Delaney said.

After years of defending former Democratic President Barack Obama's landmark health care law known as 'Obamacare' from Republican attempts to repeal it, Democrats have struggled during the campaign to agree on the best approach to fixing it.

Mr. Trump hinted that he would not tweet his reactions to the debate live. It was taking place as he flew to Osaka, Japan, for a G20 summit. But shortly after it began, he could not help himself. "BORING!" he tweeted.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa faces new lawsuits in U.S.

Cases could jeopardise his poll plan

REUTERS
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan torture victims have filed 10 new claims for damages in a U.S. court against wartime defence chief Gotabaya Rajapaksa, lawyers for the plaintiffs and a rights group said, possibly jeopardising his plan to run for President.

Mr. Gotabaya, the younger brother of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, is seeking to renounce his U.S. citizenship to enable him to run in Sri Lanka's presidential election this year, and lawsuits over alleged human rights abuse during the war against separatist Tamil fighters could complicate his bid.

The plaintiffs have alleged that Mr. Rajapaksa was from 2005 to 2015 in command of security forces who systematically abducted, tortured, raped, and extorted money from sus-



Former Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa

pects, the South Africa-based International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP) and U.S. law firm Hausfeld that filed the case in the U.S. District Court in central California said on Wednesday.

A spokesman for Mr. Gotabaya rejected the allegations and said the lawsuits were aimed at tarnishing his image ahead of the election, which is expected by December.

Islamic State, al-Qaeda are products of U.S. adventurism, says Iran

'U.S. is trying to trigger hostilities among friendly nations'

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

Terror groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda and lingering conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq were products of American adventurism in West and South Asia, Iran said on Thursday, in response to allegations of terrorism made by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in New Delhi.

"The rise of extremist groups like the Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS are contemporary demonstrations of U.S. adventurism. The crises in our region, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and

Yemen, are rooted in the occupation, illegal military interventions, hegemonic and social engineering policies of the United States," said a statement issued by a spokesperson of Embassy of Iran here.

Pompeo's statement

Mr. Pompeo, during his press conference with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, had described Iran as the "biggest" sponsor of terrorism.

Iran said the U.S., through its actions and utterances, was trying to sow seeds of hostilities among friendly

countries and described sanctions as a "brutal form of terrorism". Ties between the U.S. and the rest of the world were affected by the U.S.'s actions, stated the Embassy. "[M]iscalculations and wrong understanding of the U.S. administration towards other nations and many international and regional issues have aggravated the situation between the U.S. and the rest of world."

Iran has claimed it is a victim of terrorism, and urged for "regional dialogue" in the Gulf region for ensuring security for the stakeholders.

'Iran won't breach nuclear deal now'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
VIENNA

Iran will not exceed on Thursday a uranium stockpile limit agreed under a nuclear deal with world powers, contrary to what Tehran said earlier this month, according to a diplomatic source in Vienna.

"They won't exceed it today," the source said.

The source suggested that there might be a "political reason" for this, given intensified efforts by European governments in recent days to de-escalate tensions in the Gulf region.

There was no indication at present to suggest that the agreed limit would be

exceeded this weekend either, the source added, saying that Tehran can suspend its uranium enrichment activities at any time. Iran had said 10 days ago that it would surpass the agreed 300-km reserve of enriched uranium on June 27.

Speaking at a seminar that took place in Vienna, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said: "We are in the middle of an economic war with the U.S., not a military war - yet."

Tensions rose because of the economic war. "There will be no de-escalation unless there is a ceasefire in this economic war," he added.

Family says no information from Australian reportedly held in N. Korea

Govt. has got a 'report' of a citizen being detained there

REUTERS
SYDNEY

The family of an Australian student reportedly detained in North Korea said on Thursday they had not heard from him for several days and the Australian government said it was seeking urgent clarification on his whereabouts.

Alek Sigley's family said they had not heard from the 29-year-old university student in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, since Tuesday, a spokeswoman for the family said in an emailed statement.

"He has not been in digi-



Australian student Alek Sigley. ■ AFP

tal contact with friends or family since Tuesday morning Australian time, which is unusual for him," the spokeswoman, Lesley Parker, said.

Ms. Parker confirmed Mr. Sigley was missing but said his family had received no

indication he had been detained in North Korea.

Australia's Foreign Affairs Department said it has received a report that a citizen had been detained in North Korea. The detention was first reported in South Korea and Australian media.

"The Department is providing consular assistance ... to the family of an Australian man who has been reported as being detained in North Korea," a spokesman said.

Mr. Sigley's family said he is a postgraduate student at Kim Il Sung University and had travelled to North Korea several times since 2012.

Merkel suffers episode of trembling

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BERLIN

Chancellor Angela Merkel suffered another episode of uncontrolled trembling on Thursday, a week after a similar incident sparked questions about her health. It came hours before Ms. Merkel was due to board a plane for the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan.

She began to tremble as she stood next to President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who was addressing a ceremony to formally appoint a new Justice Minister. The shaking went on for about two minutes, according to a DPA photographer who was present.

Ms. Merkel folded her arms in a bid to stop the trembling, which finally subsided after she took a few steps.

Ex-Pak. envoy sues newspaper

Haqqani seeks retraction of article calling him a U.S. agent

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

Pakistan's former Ambassador to the U.S., Hussain Haqqani, has initiated legal proceedings against *The Nation* newspaper for calling him an American agent and saying that he is a fugitive under Pakistani law.

Mr. Haqqani's lawyer, Yasser Latif Hamdani, has sent a legal notice to the paper, asking for an apology and retraction for the offending article, a statement from Mr. Haqqani said.

Legal proceedings

Failing this, Mr. Hamdani "would start legal proceedings not only in Pakistan but also in the U.K. and other jurisdictions where the newspaper's online edition is read, seeking damages to the tune of Pakistan Rupees 15 billion [\$95 million]," Mr.



Hussain Haqqani

Haqqani's statement read.

Mr. Haqqani, who heads the South and Central Asia programme at the Hudson Institute, was Pakistan's Ambassador to the U.S. between 2008 and 2011. He resigned following his alleged involvement in a memo that was passed to then U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen seeking American inter-

vention to prevent the military from overthrowing the civilian government. The incident came to be known as 'memogate'.

Mr. Hamdani's notice said Mr. Haqqani "has always endeavoured lawfully and constitutionally to uphold democracy and civilian supremacy in Pakistan and that contrary to propaganda he had not been found guilty of any crime in any court of law," as per the statement.

The article prompting Mr. Haqqani's legal notice is attributed to Andrew Korybko, whose (non-verified) Twitter profile says he is a "Moscow-based political analyst".

Mr. Korybko's piece said Mr. Haqqani is likely a CIA agent. By Thursday, the article had been taken down from *The Nation* website.

Honouring an iconic Punjab Maharaja

Ranjit Singh's sculpture was unveiled in Lahore to mark his 180th death anniversary

MEHMAL SARFRAZ
LAHORE

On the 180th death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the legendary ruler of Punjab, a statue was unveiled at the Lahore Fort on Thursday. Around 500 people crossed the Wagah border to attend the unveiling event. The main ceremony will take place on Saturday at Gurdwara Dera Sahib.

The sculpture is the result of collaboration between Fakir Khana Museum and Sar-kar Khalsa Foundation.

How the idea took shape
Fakir Syed Saifuddin, whose ancestors were emissaries of the Maharaja, runs the prestigious museum. He said the idea was mooted about 15 years ago when U.K.-based Bobby Singh Bansal, chairperson of the S.K. Foundation, came to Pakistan and agreed to sponsor the sculp-



The statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

ture. But many years passed before the idea became a reality. "It was a very lengthy and tiring process - from getting permission from the government to commissioning the sculpture - but it was worth it," Mr. Saifuddin told *The Hindu*.

He added that while India has many statues of the famous Maharaja and this will be his first sculpture in Pakistan, "this is by far the best sculpture when it comes to

expressions, anatomy and overall look."

8 months in the making

Mr. Saifuddin asked three artists - Salman, Burhan and Zark - to design it. Two of them are students of the National College of Arts in Lahore and Rawalpindi, while Mr. Zark works with Mr. Saifuddin and has studied from Naqsh School of Arts. "This took eight months to make," said Mr. Saifuddin.

Mr. Saifuddin spoke of how they selected the horse. A model of Ashq-e-Laila, the Maharaja's famous horse, would have overshadowed the personality of the Maharaja himself, who was just 5-feet, 5-inches tall. So the sculptors chose a horse called Kahir Bahar, gifted to the Maharaja by Dost Mohammad.

Kamran Lashari, Director General Walled City of La-

hore Authority, said that their basic objective is to promote religious tourism, which is in line with the present government's policy as well. Kartarpur Corridor is one such initiative.

"Maharaja Ranjit Singh's sculpture is a small step in that direction. Lahore Fort and its vicinity have his footprints all around... He figures very prominently in the history and culture of Punjab," Mr. Lashari told *The Hindu*.

Federal Minister for Science and Technology Farwad Chaudhry, an admirer of the Maharaja, said Ranjit Singh's governance reforms, especially land reforms, were "the most practical reforms made by any ruler... He was also extremely wise to call French Generals to train his army - which was a very progressive decision," he told *The Hindu*.

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