

TOPOF THE WORLD



Nawaz Sharif

PAKISTAN

'Nawaz Sharif diagnosed with complicated heart disease'

Islamabad: Former Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif, under treatment in London, has been diagnosed with a complicated heart disease, his personal physician has said. In a tweet on Thursday, Sharif's physician Adnan Malik said he underwent comprehensive cardiovascular evaluation at the Royal Brompton & Harefield Hospital in London, the Dawn News reported. Sharif is "diagnosed of complicated coronary artery/Ischemic Heart Disease with significant disease burden", he said.

SYRIA

Over 80 killed in latest clashes, says monitor

Beirut: Clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed groups in the country's last major opposition bastion have killed more than 80 on both sides in the past 24 hours despite UN calls for de-escalation, a war monitoring group said Friday. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 38 jihadists and allied rebels had been killed in battles with regime forces in the northwestern province of Idlib since Thursday night. The fighting near the jihadist-held town of Maaret al-Numan also killed 23 Syrian regime loyalists, the Observatory said.

JAPAN

Rouhani, Abe meet amid tension with US

Tokyo: President Hassan Rouhani became the first Iranian head of state to visit Japan for two decades on Friday, as Tokyo seeks to mediate between Tehran and Washington amid spiralling nuclear tensions. The two men inspected a guard of honour at Abe's central Tokyo office before summit talks and a dinner scheduled to last into Friday evening. Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei has played down the mediation aspect of the trip, saying the visit to Tokyo had "nothing to do with issues such as negotiations with America".

Angry Trump looks to vindication after House impeachment: 'It's a hoax, a setup'

NEW YORK TIMES WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 20

PRESIDENT TRUMP sat forward on the edge of his chair and chatted at length with reporters in the Oval Office Thursday, unbowed but for him a little subdued. The day after he was impeached for high crimes and misdemeanors, he dismissed the judgment of the House of Representatives and punched back by celebrating with a Democratic congressman who switched parties to stand with him.

"I don't feel like I'm being impeached because it's a hoax, it's a setup," Trump insisted as he showcased Representative Jeff Van Drew of New Jersey, the newly minted Republican, and looked beyond his seemingly certain acquittal in a Senate trial to next fall's election.

"I'm beating everybody by a lot," the president said, "and I think that's where we're going."

For Trump, it was the first day of his new reality, the first day when he woke up with the scarlet letter of impeachment marked with indelible ink on his page in the history books. No matter what else happens, he now enters posterity as the third president to be impeached.

But barring the unforeseen, he will also be the first impeached president to face re-election, setting up a 320-day campaign to convince voters that he was right and his accusers were wrong. He has a chance that Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton never



I don't feel like I'm being impeached because it's a hoax, it's a setup... I'm beating everybody by a lot (ahead of polls) and I think that's where we're going

— DONALD TRUMP

had — to mitigate, at least, the sting of impeachment — and his political operation wasted little time mounting a counterassault on what Trump characterises as the corrupt, liberal Democrats who orchestrated a largely party-line scheme to nullify his election.

In a blistering editorial on Thursday evening, a prominent magazine, Christianity Today, called for Trump to be removed from office. The move was a pointed departure from the vast majority of Trump's white evangelical base.

"The president of the United States attempted to use his political power to coerce a foreign leader to harass and discredit one of the president's political opponents," wrote Mark Galli, the editor in chief.

Democratic debate: Seven candidates clash, slam Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA LOS ANGELES, DECEMBER 20

DEMOCRATIC WHITE House candidates have attacked President Donald Trump but also clashed sharply with one another during Democratic debate, where a smaller field allowed lesser-known candidates to shine against the frontrunners.

One day after Trump's ignominious impeachment, seven candidates united to declare the president must be defeated at the 2020 ballot box. "We need to restore the integrity of the presidency," said frontrunner Joe Biden on Thursday, who accused Trump of "dumbing down" the office "beyond what I even thought he would do."

Senator Bernie Sanders blasted Trump as "running the most corrupt administration in the modern history of this country," while fellow Senator Elizabeth Warren said the president ignores the poor to do "everything he can for the wealthy and the well-connected."

Warren launched her sharpest attacks yet on rival Pete Buttigieg, saying the 37-year-old mayor of South Bend, Indiana, has been holding closed-door fundraisers for the wealthy, including at a billion-



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Presidential hopefuls Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Pete Buttigieg. Reuters



aire-owned "wine cave" in California.

"Your net worth is 100 times mine," Buttigieg, whose star has risen substantially in the past two months of campaigning, said. "I don't sell access to my

time," Warren shot back.

The showdown marks a significant drop from the 10 candidates in November's debate. The centrist Biden is leading polls, trailed by Bernie Sanders, age 78, and 70-year-old Warren.

Duterte says won't answer to ICC: 'Hang me'

REUTERS MANILA, DECEMBER 20

PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte dared the International Criminal Court (ICC) Friday to jail him or hang him over alleged extrajudicial killings in his war on drugs, but said he would refuse to cooperate with foreigners.

"You do not scare me that you will jail me in the International Criminal Court. I will never allow myself to answer these whities," Duterte said. "I will never, never, never answer any question coming from you. It's bulls**t to me. I am only responsible to the Filipino. Filipinos will judge."

He added: "And if you hang me for all what I did, go ahead. It will be my pleasure."

Won't ALLOW INTERFERENCE IN HK, MACAU: XI



Macau Chief Executive Ho Iat-seng (left) takes oath in front of Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday. Reuters

President Xi Jinping said on Friday China would never allow foreign forces to interfere with Hong Kong and Macau, as he swore in a new pro-Beijing government for the gambling hub of Macau.

Xi, speaking at a ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of Macau's handover to Chinese rule, heaped praise on the former Portuguese colony for its patriotism and loyalty

While protesters in Hong Kong, across the mouth of the Pearl River, are furious about what they see as Beijing's erosion of their freedoms, Macau has seen little dissent

French surgeon accused of molesting 349 children

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA LORIENT, DECEMBER 20

A RETIRED French surgeon may have raped or sexually abused as many as 349 children over his near 30-year career, a prosecutor investigating what could be France's biggest-ever paedophilia case said Friday.

Joel Le Scouarnec, 68, is set to go on trial in March for the rape and sexual abuse of four child victims. Allegations against him cover the three decades he practised in hospitals.

They include accusations

that he raped a six-year-old girl living in his neighbourhood, raped a young relative and sexually assaulted another, abused a child patient, and indecently exposing himself. After charges were brought against him in these cases, investigators discovered secret diaries in which Le Scouarnec described sex scenes involving scores more children.

Le Scouarnec's lawyers have said the entries were "fantasies".

On Friday, Laureline Peyrefitte, chief prosecutor of Lorient in Brittany, northwest France, said the number of possible victims now stood at 349.

ICC to investigate alleged war crimes in Palestinian Territories

REUTERS THE HAGUE, DECEMBER 20

THE INTERNATIONAL Criminal Court's chief prosecutor said on Friday she will launch a full investigation into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian Territories, which could include charges against Israelis or Palestinians.

"I am satisfied that ... war crimes have been or are being committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip," Fatou Bensouda said in a statement.

The court has no jurisdiction in this case. The ICC only has jurisdiction over petitions submitted by sovereign states. But there has never been a Palestinian state

— BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the ICC has no jurisdiction to investigate in the Palestinian Territories. "The court has no ju-

risdiction in this case. The ICC only has jurisdiction over petitions submitted by sovereign states. But there has never been a Palestinian state," Netanyahu said in a statement.

Bensouda said the preliminary examination into alleged war crimes, opened in 2015, had rendered enough information to meet all criteria for opening an investigation. The ICC prosecutor said she had filed a request with judges for a jurisdictional ruling, because of the contested legal and factual status of the Palestine territories.

'ON TRACK FOR JAN 31 EXIT'

UK PM wins vote for Brexit deal in House

ELIZABETH PIPER & KYLIE MACLELLAN LONDON, DECEMBER 20

PRIME MINISTER Boris Johnson won approval for his Brexit deal in parliament on Friday, the first step towards fulfilling his election pledge to deliver Britain's departure from the European Union by January 31 after his landslide victory.

Lawmakers voted by 358 to 234 to pass the second reading of the legislation, underlining Johnson's large majority in parliament that should ensure a smooth ratification of the divorce deal.

More than three years since Britain voted to exit the EU in a 2016 referendum, the deep uncertainty over Brexit has now been replaced by a firm deadline of the end of January. Only after that will the prime minister face talks to secure a trade deal with the bloc and another target date of the end of next year.

Getting "the Brexit vote wrapped up for Christmas" was the main aim for Johnson showing that, unlike his predecessor Theresa May who was thwarted in parliament, he now has free reign to drive Brexit forward.

"This is the time when we move on and discard the old labels of 'leave' and 'remain' ... now is the time to act together as one reinvigorated nation, one United Kingdom," Johnson said.

E. The next few steps

HAVING PASSED through the House with little difficulty, as was expected, the final ratification of Brexit will happen after Christmas. Parliament's lower house will have to approve it by January 9, after which it will have about 3 weeks to get through the upper house. Meanwhile, the prime minister will also have to engage in negotiations with the European Union to work out the finer details of the divorce deal. Boris will also have to secure new terms of trade with the EU and set other terms on how future engagements with the bloc will work.

"Now is the moment to come together and write a new and exciting chapter in our national story, to forge a new partnership with our European friends, to stand tall in the world, to begin the healing for which the people of this country yearn." REUTERS

Malicious campaign against me, judiciary: Pak's Chief Justice

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, DECEMBER 20

PAKISTAN'S OUTGOING Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa on Friday said he was retiring with a crystal clear conscience but noted that a "malicious campaign" has been launched against him and the judiciary following the death sentence handed out to Pervez Musharraf in the treason case against the ex-military ruler.

Khosa, 64, who would retire at midnight on Friday, said the judiciary and he were being singled out in the criticism.

A three-member special court bench sentenced 76-year-old Musharraf to death in absentia on Tuesday for high treason following a six-year legal case.

He was given death sentence for abrogating the Constitution in 2007, angering the powerful military and the Imran Khan government. Law minister Farogh Naseem said on Thursday that the judge who wrote the judgment was mentally unfit and should be stopped from performing his duties.

UK-educated Khosa said: "A malicious campaign has been started against the judiciary and myself. The allegations are baseless and incorrect. We know the limits of our powers

BAR COUNCIL SLAMS ARMY RESPONSE

THE PAKISTAN Bar Council has slammed the Army for criticising the judgement, terming it a violation of legal and constitutional provisions

WE DISAPPROVE of the statement of Director General ISPR, who has criticised the judgment of the special court..." the PBC said in a statement

THE CRITICISM gives an impression that all institutions are "subservient to the Armed Forces, to follow its dictation", it said

and we know that the truth shall always prevail".

Addressing a gathering in his honour, the outgoing Chief Justice said that he tried to give "100 per cent to the job, tried to perform beyond the call of duty, never raised my voice, spoke mainly through my pen, never delayed a judgment unduly and after giving the best years of my life to this public service..." PTI

'I'VE KILLED MORE THAN 80 CRIMINALS... I'M A HERO TO MY PEOPLE'

Masked vigilantes, Brazil's police leave a trail of bodies and fear

AZAM AHMED BELÉM, DECEMBER 20

THE MASKED gunmen pulled up to Wanda's Bar at 3:49 p.m. on May 19 and began firing the moment they left their vehicles. Two people, including Wanda herself, died on the patio.

Inside, the gunmen worked in silence: two in front, shooting unarmed patrons at the bar and in the main room, while a third followed behind with a gun in each hand, firing a single shot into the head of anyone still moving.

When the massacre ended, 11 people lay dead, slumped

over the bar, draped across chairs or huddled on the floor. Only two people survived, one by hiding under a friend's lifeless body, case files show.

Once again, masked gunmen had struck in the Brazilian city of Belém, as they have for nearly a decade, stalking the streets in open defiance of the law. Robbing, extorting and killing without compunction. Yet they did not belong to one of the many gangs that traffic drugs or guns in Brazil, leaving a trail of corpses.

They were cops.

The killings drew national attention to the police militias that have long plagued Belém, a di-

lapitated port city on the Amazon River. Part death squad, part criminal enterprise, their ranks are filled with retired and off-duty police officers who kill at will, often with total impunity.

In fact, the slaughter at Wanda's Bar was not unique because off-duty police officers gunned down civilians without cause. Such killings are routine. What made this case stand out beyond its brutality was the government's response: It decided to prosecute.

Of the seven people charged with the crime, four were off-duty police officers — including the three suspected gunmen.



The ROTAM police force is known for its military culture. NYT

"We've discovered a cancer inside the police," said Armando

Brasil, one of the prosecutors. "Now, we are seeing just how far

it has spread."

The militias operate in the shadows of a severe crackdown on crime by the Brazilian government, which has openly declared war on the gangs, thieves and drug dealers afflicting the nation. Killings by the police have soared in recent years, as a force long known for its deadliness has managed to outdo itself.

But even police officers acknowledge that the official statistics are only part of the picture. There is a parallel form of police violence, masked from the public and carried out by illegal militias that draw their ranks from officers with little patience or re-

spect for due process, according to interviews with militia members here in Belém.

"We're going after criminals who hurt innocent people," said one militia commander who, like others, asked that his name be withheld because he confessed to extrajudicial killings.

In their telling, militia members are delivering a public service, eliminating threats to society who, they fear, may never get convicted or will simply participate in sprawling criminal networks from prison, as often happens in Brazil.

"I've killed more than 80 criminals in my time as a police

officer," said another militia leader. "I'm a hero to my people. They love me."

The militia men interviewed for this article all felt the killings at Wanda's Bar were inexcusable, but they defended the militias in general. To them, violence was the only solution, and the only question was how to wield it.

"There's a way to fix this," said one of the militia leaders. "The governor should call the good cops and let us go and allow us to kill anyone. Only the bad people, the criminals, those who prey on the weak."

"That will finish the violence once and for all," he said. NYT