

TOP OF THE WORLD



Mike Pompeo

UK

Communist Party central threat of our times: Pompeo

London: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday called China's ruling Communist Party "the central threat of our times" that challenges Western principles. "The Chinese Communist Party presents the central threat of our times," Washington's top diplomat said at an appearance with Britain's Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab. He added Western allies must "ensure that the next century is governed by these Western democratic principles". The US-UK intelligence sharing "relationship is deep, it is strong, it will remain," he said.

SYRIA

Russian airstrike kills 10 civilians in rebel-held Idlib

Ariha: Russian air strikes near a bakery and a medical clinic in Syria's Idlib killed 10 civilians Thursday as government forces kept up a ground offensive. The government and its allies have upped their bombardment of the last major rebel bastion, slowly chipping away at it from the south. Early Thursday, Russian air strikes hit Ariha, between Maaret al-Numan and the city of Idlib to its north, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The latest deaths bring to 21 the number of civilians killed by Russian air strikes in Idlib since Wednesday.

SRI LANKA

Court extends remand of 61 'terrorists'

Colombo: The remand of 61 Islamic extremists, arrested in connection with the Easter Sunday attack, has been extended till February 12 by a court on Thursday. Nine suicide bombers on April 21 last year carried out a series of blasts that tore through three churches and as many high-end hotels, killing 258 people, including eight Indians. The 61 suspects are members of the National Thawheed Jamaath (NTJ), police said. The Batticaloa HC extended their remand till February 12. The IS had claimed responsibility for the attacks.

MOSCOW HALTS E-VISAS FOR CHINESE NATIONALS

Coronavirus death toll hits 170, Russia to close border with China

7,736 confirmed cases; Taiwan angry over China refusal for evacuation

AGENCIES

BEIJING, JANUARY 30

THE DEADLY coronavirus has hit all provinces in China, including the remote region of Tibet, mostly due to travellers from Wuhan city, the ground zero of the epidemic, as the virus claimed 170 lives, infected 7,736 others and spread to 20 countries, including India.

Chinese health officials on Thursday announced 38 more fatalities mainly from the worst-affected central Hubei province, taking the death toll to 170. Tibet, which till now remained the only Chinese province untouched by the virus, reported its first case on Thursday.

Russia said it was closing its border with China to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and would stop issuing electronic visas to Chinese nationals. Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin told a government meeting that the order had been signed "to take measures to close the border (with China) in the Far East".

"We have to do everything to

protect our people," he said.

The foreign ministry also advised Russians to refrain from travelling to China and for those in China to get in touch with the Russian embassy.

In Taiwan, anger has been growing over China's refusal this week to let Taiwan evacuate about 300 of its people from Wuhan, even as it has given the United States, Japan and other countries permission to do so.

China's ruling Communist Party considers Taiwan, a democratically governed island, to be part of China, and the two sides have no formal ties. Referring to the rebuffed evacuation request on Tuesday, Ma Xiaoguang, a spokesman for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said in a statement that Taiwanese people in Hubei Province, which includes Wuhan, were receiving "appropriate care."

Kolas Yotaka, a spokeswoman for Taiwan's government, said China was prioritising politics over lives. Many of the Taiwanese seeking evacuation from Wuhan were tourists or on business trips, while others were residents of the city who suffered from chronic diseases, Kolas said. "We call on



A scuffle over a decision to quarantine South Koreans returning from Wuhan. AP

the Chinese government to demonstrate basic humanity and agree to our request as soon as possible," she said.

Asian stocks and currencies fell, with fears growing that the hit to China's economy will ripple around the world. "Markets will remain highly volatile as long as they feel that they only have an incomplete picture of what is going on, and what is going to happen next," said Agathe Demarais, global forecasting director at the Economist Intelligence Unit.

AUSTRALIA DEFENDS ISLAND CAMP

AUSTRALIA DEFENDED its plan to send evacuated citizens to a remote island used to banish asylum seekers and criminals

THE AUSTRALIAN Medical Association said Australians quarantine on mainland would be better, which the minister dismissed

A MINISTER said Christmas Island struck a balance between supporting those stranded and protecting the wider population

WENBO YU, whose wife and children are in Wuhan, said of rejecting the evacuation offer, "We'd rather they stay in Wuhan..."

Wary of irking Beijing, Trump offers rosy take on virus threat

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 30

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump had plenty to talk about during his latest big campaign rally, regaling a friendly crowd in New Jersey with his thoughts about impeachment, the economy, the border wall, local politics and much more.

But the president was conspicuously quiet about one big issue that has much of the globe on pins and needles: the spread of a deadly new type of coronavirus. And he speaks in broad terms when he does talk about it.

"We're very much involved

"China has been working very hard to contain the coronavirus... The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well."

— DONALD TRUMP

with them, right now, on the virus that's going around," Trump said of China before signing a trade deal at the White House on Wednesday. He said he had discussed the situation with Chinese President Xi Jinping and

added, "We're working very closely with China."

Aides and confidants say Trump's careful approach is part of a political strategy crafted to avoid upsetting the stock market or angering China by calling too much attention to the virus or blaming Beijing for not managing the situation better, according to a White House official and a Republican close to the White House.

Trump also tweeted out photos from a briefing on the virus he attended with administration officials in the Situation Room, writing "We have the best experts anywhere in the world and they are on top of it 24/7!"

TRUMP LAWYER AT IMPEACHMENT TRIAL

'Anything a president does to get re-elected is in the public interest'



Mitch McConnell. Reuters

NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 30

THE WHITE House and Senate Republicans worked aggressively on Wednesday to discount damaging revelations from John R. Bolton and line up the votes to block new witnesses from testifying in President Trump's impeachment trial, in a push to bring the proceeding to a swift close.

Before the trial convened, Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, and other Republicans signaled that they were regaining confidence that they would be able to cobble together the 51 votes needed to block new witnesses

and documents and bring the trial to an acquittal verdict as soon as Friday.

Alan Dershowitz, one of President Trump's lawyers, appeared to make a new argument for broad presidential powers —

so broad that anything a president does to help himself get re-elected, he said, is inherently in the public's interest, including a "quid pro quo." "If the president does something that he thinks will help him get elected, in the public interest, that cannot be the kind of quid pro quo that results in impeachment," Dershowitz said.

The lead house manager, Representative Adam B Schiff, called the theory "very odd."

Later, when answering another question, Schiff pushed back against Dershowitz's view. Schiff said Trump is "a president who identifies the state as being himself." Addressing Trump directly, Schiff said, "You are not a king."

Won't evacuate to show solidarity with China: Pak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 30

PAKISTAN GOVERNMENT has decided not to evacuate its citizens from the coronavirus-hit Wuhan city to show "solidarity" with its all-weather ally, a senior official announced on Thursday though four Pakistani nationals have contracted the deadly disease in China.

There were up to 800 Pakistanis studying in various universities in Wuha. Pakistan has decided not to evacuate its nationals from China in accordance with the recommendations of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Special

Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Dr Zafar Mirza said.

"We believe that right now, it is in the interest of our loved ones in China (to stay there). It is in the largest interest of the region, world, country that we don't evacuate them now," he was quoted as saying by Dawn News.

"This is what WHO is saying, this is China's policy and this is our policy as well. We are standing with China in full solidarity... Right now the government of China has contained this epidemic in Wuhan city. If we act irresponsibly and start evacuating people from there, this epidemic will spread all over the world like wildfire," Mirza said.

US sanctions Iran's nuclear entity, Tehran says sign of despair

REUTERS

WASHINGTON/DUBAI, JAN 30

THE US Thursday said it will allow Russian, Chinese and European companies to continue work at Iranian nuclear sites to make it harder for that country to develop a nuclear weapon but has imposed sanctions on Iran's nuclear entity and its top official.

The waivers' renewal for 60 days will allow nonproliferation work to continue at the Arak heavy-water research reactor, the Bushehr nuclear power plant, the Tehran Research Reactor and other nuclear cooperation initiatives.

"We will closely monitor all

developments in Iran's nuclear program and Secretary (Mike) Pompeo can end these projects as developments warrant," Brian Hook, US special representative for Iran, said.

The US also placed Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI), and the organisation itself under US sanctions, Hook said.

"Imposing sanctions on Ali Akbar Salehi and Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran is a sign of America's despair and is a political game played by Washington. These sanctions have no value and are childish measures," spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi told Iran's Fars news agency.

IN COLD NUMBERS

\$30 BILLION

The amount of cash funneled to fossil fuel projects each year by rich nations through government-backed financial institutions, an act which runs 'counter to the Paris Agreement', as per an analysis

Press send for Brexit: EU seals pact with email



UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson in London on Thursday. AP

MATINA STEVIS-GRIDNEFF

LONDON, JANUARY 30

THE EUROPEAN Union gave its official approval of Brexit on Thursday, taking the last step in its internal procedures before Britain leaves the bloc on Friday.

Following a sometimes emotional vote in the European Parliament on Wednesday, the countries remaining in the union gave a last seal of approval to the agreement on Britain's withdrawal. In the end, the way the decision became final was vintage Brussels: bureaucratic and undramatic.

Diplomats from the European Union's remaining 27 countries were given plain instructions over email just after 8 p.m. Wednesday, once the European Parliament had voted to enact Brexit: Answer these four questions with "yes," "no," or "abstain" and send them in an email to the European Council.

At 1 pm local time on Thursday, the answers came in, formally completing the withdrawal agreement. The process used — known in European Union parlance as "written procedure" — is reserved for technical decisions that can be handled by officials and don't require top diplomats or heads of government to meet in person.

"The council has adopted, by written procedure, the decision on the conclusion of the withdrawal agreement on behalf of the EU," the European Council, the branch of the European

Up next: Trade, unity

BREXIT leaves the UK PM with a number of issues to deal with, ranging from internal unity to forging new trade ties. Johnson had recently attempted to woo African nations at a recent investment summit, and has also referenced a deal with the US, though this has come under doubt after recent differences over Huawei, among other things. Another issue has to do with the UK's internal cohesion — while Britain voted to leave the EU, Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to stay. This has strained ties and will present a significant challenge to Johnson.

Union that brings together its member countries' governments, said in a brief statement. "The withdrawal agreement will enter into force upon the UK's exit from the EU, on 31 January 2020 at midnight CET," it added. "From that time on, the UK will no longer be an EU member state and will be considered as a third country." NYT

Netanyahu to Putin: Trump Mideast deal a new opportunity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MOSCOW, JANUARY 30

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday hailed US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan as a new opportunity after flying to Moscow to discuss it with President Vladimir Putin.

"I think there's a new and perhaps unique opportunity here," said the Israeli premier, who stood alongside Trump at the White House when the plan was announced Tuesday and called it a victory for Israel.

Trump's plan angered Palestinians by proposing Israel retain control over Jerusalem as its "undivided capital" and giving the green light to annex Jewish settlements in the West



Benjamin Netanyahu with Vladimir Putin. Reuters

Bank. "I'd like to speak to you and hear your insights and see how we can combine all our forces for security and peace," Netanyahu told Putin at the start of their Kremlin meeting.

"You're actually the first leader I'm speaking with after my visit to Washington about President Trump's Deal of the Century," he added.

NEW ZEALAND VOLCANO ERUPTION

After wife, Indian-origin man succumbs to burns; three children orphaned

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

WELLINGTON, JANUARY 30

AN INDIAN-American businessman has become the latest victim of a massive volcanic eruption in New Zealand after he succumbed to his burn injuries, over a month after his wife died in the same tragedy, leaving their three children orphaned.

Pratap Singh and his wife Mayuani were visiting White Island when the volcano erupted on December 9. Mayuani died on December 22. Forty-seven people from a Royal Caribbean

cruise ship were visiting the tourist destination when the volcano erupted, killing 13 initially and leaving more than two dozen hospitalised with severe burns.

Twenty-one people have now died as a result of the eruption.

The family said in a statement, "...I disclose that my Uncle Pratap Singh (nicknamed 'Paul') is the latest victim who did not survive from the Whakaari White Island incident." "Paul and Mary are survived by three children: 11-year-old son, and 6-year-old twin daughters."

TRUMP HAD DISMISSED TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURIES AS 'HEADACHES', LEADING TO OUTRAGE

Spotlight on invisible war wounds after Iraq brain injuries

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 30

THE SPOTLIGHT on brain injuries suffered by US troops in Iraq this month is an example of America's episodic attention to this invisible war wound, which has affected hundreds of thousands over the past two decades but is not yet fully understood.

Unlike physical wounds, such as burns or the loss of limbs, traumatic brain injuries aren't obvious and may take time to diagnose. The full impact may not be evident for some time, as studies have shown links be-



Iranian bombing caused a crater at Ain al-Asad airbase. AP/FILE

tween TBI and mental health problems. They cannot be dismissed as mere "headaches" -

the word used by President Donald Trump as he said the injuries suffered by the troops in

Iraq were not necessarily serious.

"TBI is a serious injury and one that cannot be taken lightly," said William Schmitz, national commander for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. "TBI is known to cause depression, memory loss, severe headaches, dizziness and fatigue," sometimes with long-term effects.

The VFW called on Trump to apologise for his "misguided remarks". Rep Bill Pascrell, Jr, a New Jersey Democrat and founder of the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force, faulted Trump for displaying "a clear lack of understanding of the devastating impacts of brain injury".

The Pentagon says 50 service members have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury caused by the January 8 Iranian missile attack on an air base in Iraq where US and coalition troops had taken cover in advance.

Details of the injuries have not been made public, though the Pentagon said that 31 of the 50 who were diagnosed with traumatic brain injury have recovered enough to return to duty.

The arc of attention to TBI began in earnest, for the US military, in the early years after it invaded Iraq in 2003 to topple President Saddam Hussein. His demise gave rise to an insurgency that

confounded the Americans with crude but devastatingly effective roadside bombs. Survivors often suffered not just physical wounds but also concussions that, along with psychological trauma, became known as the invisible wounds of war.

Concern about TBI has recently given rise to questions about whether military members may suffer long-term health damage even from low-level blasts. "We're finding that even a mild blast can cause long-term, life-changing health issues," said Riya Shi, a professor of neuroscience and biomedical engineering at Purdue University.