

# 11 THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Police released an image of a suspect connected with the shootings. AP

USA  
Same gunman attacks New York cops in two shootings

New York: A gunman walked into a police station in the Bronx and started shooting early Sunday, wounding an officer just hours after he shot a different officer in a patrol van. The same gunman was responsible for the back-to-back shootings, New York City Police Commissioner Dermot Shea said Sunday at a press conference. "For the second time in less than 12 hours, NYPD officers have been targeted specifically," Shea said. The suspect, whose name has not been released, was taken into custody.

KAZAKHSTAN  
10 killed in rare clashes

Nur-Sultan: The toll from rare clashes in a part of ethnically-mixed southern Kazakhstan has risen to 10 dead, officials said Sunday with signs that tensions had eased since the violence flared two days ago. Deputy Interior Minister Aleksei Kalaichidi told reporters the toll was ten dead from Friday's unrest in the Jambyl region, which saw many flee over the border to Kyrgyzstan. Authorities had previously said eight people died. Kalaichidi said 39 people were still receiving treatment in Kazakh hospitals on Sunday.

USA  
Mother, 6 kids die in Mississippi house fire

Clinton: A mother and her six children died when a fire destroyed their home early Saturday in central Mississippi, authorities said. The father was the lone survivor of the 12.30 am blaze in Clinton, a city of about 26,500 people just outside the capital city of Jackson. He tried unsuccessfully to save family members and suffered smoke inhalation, burns, cuts and bruises, city spokesman Mark Jones said. He was taken to a local hospital but "wanted to stay at the scene," Jones said.

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK: TOLL RISES TO 811 IN CHINA

## China's virus death toll surpasses SARS, but number of new cases fall

Pace at which virus spreads likely to see 'dramatic reduction'; Chinese employees to return to work

AP & REUTERS  
SHANGHAI, BEIJING, FEB 9

CHINA'S VIRUS death toll rose by 89 on Sunday to 811, passing the number of fatalities in the 2002-2003 SARS epidemic, but fewer new cases were reported in a possible sign its spread may be slowing as other nations stepped up efforts to block the disease. Some 2,656 new virus cases were reported in the 24 hours ending at midnight Saturday, most of them in the central province of Hubei, where the first patients fell sick in December. That was down by about 20% from the 3,399 new cases reported in the previous 24-hour period.

"That means the joint control mechanism of different regions and the strict prevention and control measures have worked," a spokesman for the National Health Commission, Mi Feng, said at a news conference. "Dramatic reductions" in the pace of the disease's spread



At a medical waste disposal centre in Chengdu, Sichuan province, China. Reuters

should begin this month if containment works, said Dr Ian Lipkin, director of Columbia University's Center for Infection and Immunity. He assisted the World Health Organization and Chinese authorities during the outbreak of SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome.

However, he said, if new cases spike as people return to work after the Lunar New Year holiday, which was extended to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, then "we'll know we're in trouble". China's Cabinet said on Sunday it would coordinate with

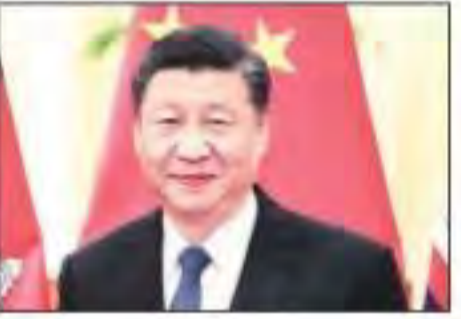
transport authorities to ensure the smooth return to work of employees in key industries such as food and medicines. The State Council's special coronavirus group also said workers should return in "batches", rather than all at once, in order to reduce infection risks.

## Xi commands virus fight from safe heights

CHRIS BUCKLEY & STEVEN LEE MYERS  
WUHAN, FEBRUARY 9

PRESIDENT XI Jinping strode on-stage before an audience in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing less than three weeks ago, trumpeting his successes in steering China through a tumultuous year and promising "landmark" progress in 2020.

"Our progress will not be halted by any storms and tempests," he declared to applause on the day before the Lunar New



Year holiday. As he spoke, the government was locking down Wuhan, a city of 11 million people, in a frantic attempt to stop the virus spreading from its epicentre. The epidemic comes as Xi has struggled with a host of

other challenges: a slowing economy, huge protests in Hong Kong, an election in Taiwan that rebuffed Beijing and a protracted trade war with the United States. Yet as China's battle with the coronavirus intensified, Xi put the country's No. 2 leader, Li Keqiang, in charge of a leadership group handling the emergency, effectively turning him into the public face of the government's response. It was Li Keqiang who travelled to Wuhan to visit doctors. Xi, by contrast, receded from public view for several days. That was not without precedent,

though it stood out in this crisis, after previous Chinese leaders had used times of disaster to try to show a more common touch. State television and newspapers almost always lead with fawning coverage of Xi's every move. That retreat from the spotlight, some analysts said, signalled an effort by Xi to insulate himself from a campaign that may falter and draw public ire. Yet Xi has consolidated power, sidelining or eliminating rivals, so there are few people left to blame when something goes wrong. **NYT**

## Netanyahu: Israel drawing up map for West Bank annexations

MAAYAN LUBELL  
JERUSALEM, FEBRUARY 9

ISRAEL HAS begun to draw up maps of land in the occupied West Bank that will be annexed in accordance with US President Donald Trump's proposed peace plan, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday.

"We are already at the height of the process of mapping the area that, according to the Trump plan, will become part of the state of Israel. It won't take too long," Netanyahu said at an election campaign rally in the Maale Adumim settlement.

Netanyahu said the area would include all Israeli settlements and the Jordan Valley - territory Israel has kept under military occupation since its capture in the 1967 Middle East war but which Palestinians want in a future state.

"The only map that can be accepted as the map of Palestine is the map of the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital," said

## EXPLAINED Upcoming election makes timing of announcement key

ALTHOUGH TRUMP'S 'Middle East peace plan' called on Israel to annex parts of the West Bank, Washington has told Netanyahu to wait, at least until after the March 2 Israeli election, before he moves towards taking action. The Israeli PM, however, is facing a third election in under a year after not having been able to form a government on the previous two occasions. This time, he is also fighting criminal corruption charges that could derail his political career. This makes the annexation a very important issue for Netanyahu, whose Likud party has a large right-wing voter base. Whether his current caretaker government actually has the authority to annex territory is an issue that remains undecided with the judiciary. However, Netanyahu will seek to keep annexation at least a topic of conversation as the election approaches.

Nabil Abu Rdainah, spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

A US envoy warned Israel on Sunday not to declare sovereignty over West Bank land without Washington's consent. "Israel is subject to the completion (of) a mapping process by

a joint Israeli-American committee. Any unilateral action in advance of the completion of the committee process endangers the Plan & American recognition," envoy David Friedman tweeted.

Prospects for annexations, which have been widely condemned, remain unclear. **REUTERS**

## US says two American soldiers killed in Afghanistan

RAHIM FAIEZ & KATHY GANNON  
KABUL, FEBRUARY 9

TWO US soldiers were killed and six wounded in a so-called insider attack in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province late Saturday when an Afghan dressed in an Afghan army uniform opened fire, the US military said.

A member of Nangarhar's provincial council, Ajmal Omer, told The Associated Press that the gunman was killed. There have been numerous attacks by Afghan national army soldiers on their allied partners during 18 years of America's protracted war in Afghanistan.

Six US service members have been killed in Afghanistan since the start of 2020, including Saturday's casualties. An Afghan defense ministry official said the shooter was an Afghan soldier who had argued with the US forces before opening fire. **AP**

MEANWHILE  
NEW TAMIL ALLIANCE LAUNCHED IN SRI LANKA

An alternative alliance to the moderate Tamil National Alliance, the main Tamil political party in Sri Lanka, was formed in Jaffna on Sunday to participate in the next Parliamentary Elections expected to take place in April. The Thamizhi Makkal Tesiya Kootani or the Tamil People's National Alliance was forged under the leadership of former Northern Province chief minister CV Wigneswaran.



Thai security forces evacuate students stranded inside the Terminal 21 shopping mall following a gun battle, in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, on Sunday. Reuters

## 'Unprecedented' mass shooting: Thai city holds vigil for 30 killed

Attacker shot dead after 17-hour ordeal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NAKHON RATCHASIMA, FEB 9

HOLDING CANDLES and writing condolences as monks chanted prayers, hundreds of Thais held an evening vigil Sunday for the 30 victims of an "unprecedented" mass shooting carried out by a soldier. Sharpshooters killed the gunman on Sunday morning after a 17-hour ordeal, including a night of firefights and terrifying dashes for mall exits by shoppers trapped in the Terminal 21 mall in Nakhon Ratchasima, also known as Korat.

The provincial governor told reporters that the death toll stood at 30 with dozens injured. The dead include civilians - one of them a 13-year-old boy - and security forces going after the rogue soldier, who was upset over a debt dispute, according to Thailand's prime minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha.

"It is unprecedented in Thailand, and I want this to be the last time this crisis happens," he said earlier outside a hospital where victims - some in critical condition - were being treated. Those who attended the somber vigil scrawled messages on white sheets of paper laid out on the ground, including "Remember Forever" and "I wish you a good afterlife". Prayut, a former Army Chief, blamed a "personal problem" over the sale of a house for the soldier's rampage, which began on Saturday afternoon near an army barracks and was for several hours relayed by the gunman via Facebook posts.

The attacker, identified as Sergeant-Major Jakrapanth Thomma, used a stolen M60 machine gun and rifles from one of Thailand's largest barracks as well as a military humvee to carry out the attack. Prayut said the gunman overpowered security at the barracks' arsenal and that "carelessness" was not a factor.



Most of the victims were at the Terminal 21 shopping centre in Nakhon Ratchasima city. AP

## THOUSANDS FROM CRUISE SHIP IN HONG KONG FREED

Hong Kong: Thousands of people stranded aboard a cruise ship in Hong Kong for five days were allowed to disembark on Sunday after its 1,800 crew tested negative for the deadly new coronavirus. Health authorities in the city said the crew and a similar number of passengers had been released from a quarantine imposed because of fears some staff could have contracted the virus on a previous voyage and passed it on. The *World Dream* carried three Chinese passengers to Vietnam between January 19 and 24 who were later found to be infected with the virus.



## VIRUS FEARS: OVER 70 EXHIBITORS SKIP SINGAPORE AIRSHOW

Singapore: Over 70 exhibitors, including US aerospace giant Lockheed Martin and 12 Chinese companies, have pulled out of Asia's biggest aviation and defence event Singapore Airshow amid mounting concerns over the coronavirus outbreak in China that has claimed 811 lives and spread to more than 25 countries.

## British govt puts final touches to its post-Brexit visa regime

ADITI KHANNA  
LONDON, FEBRUARY 9

BRITISH PRIME Minister Boris Johnson and UK Home Secretary Priti Patel have finalised plans for a new post-Brexit points-based visa and immigration system, which is expected to see the UK

allowing greater numbers of skilled professionals from around the world, including India, to live and work in the country.

At a meeting earlier this week, they reportedly accepted the UK Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) recommendation to lower the minimum salary threshold requirement for

such professionals from 30,000 pounds to 25,600 pounds, with additional points being scored for skill levels, job offers and English language abilities.

The details of the new system are expected to be formally unveiled by Patel next Friday, following an expected Cabinet reshuffle by Johnson on Thursday. **PTI**

## Political gridlock looms for Ireland after Sinn Fein surge

PADRAIC HALPIN & CONOR HUMPHRIES  
DUBLIN, FEBRUARY 9

IRELAND BEGAN counting votes on Sunday in a national election that an exit poll indicated would show a historic breakthrough for left-wing nationalists Sinn Fein but leave a fractured political landscape with no clear path to a governing coalition. In a major realignment, Sinn



Sinn Fein candidate Paul Donnelly and his wife Angela at a counting centre in Citywest, near Dublin. Reuters

Fein support surged 50% to bring it into joint first place with Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, the two centre-right parties that have dominated Irish politics for a century, according to the exit poll.

But Sinn Fein is likely to fall behind the other two because it fielded fewer candidates. Fine Gael and rival Fianna Fail are likely to be left slugging it out for first place - before starting what is likely to be a torturous process of forming a governing coalition. **REUTERS**

ETHIOPIA IS STAKING ITS HOPES ON ITS \$4.5-BN HYDROELECTRIC DAM, EGYPT FEARS IT WILL CUT INTO ITS WATER SUPPLIES

## For thousands of years, Egypt controlled the Nile. A new dam threatens that

DECLAN WALSH & SOMINI SENGUPTA  
MINYA, FEBRUARY 9

THE EGYPTIAN farmer stood in his dust-blown field, lamenting his fortune. A few years ago, wheat and tomato-filled greenhouses carpeted the land. Now the desert was creeping in.

"Look," he said, gesturing at the sandy soil and abandoned greenhouses. "Barren."

The farmer, Hamed Jarallah, attributed his woes to dwindling irrigation from the overtaxed Nile, the fabled river at the heart of Egypt's very identity. Already, the Nile is under assault from pollution, climate change and

Egypt's growing population, which officially hits 100 million people this month.

And now, Jarallah added, a fresh calamity loomed. A colossal hydroelectric dam being built on the Nile 2,000 miles upriver, in the lowlands of Ethiopia, threatens to further constrict Egypt's water supply - and is scheduled to start filling this summer.

"We're worried," he said. "Egypt wouldn't exist without the Nile. Our livelihood is being destroyed. God help us."

The dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia over the \$4.5 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam - Africa's largest, with a reservoir about the size of London - has become a national

preoccupation in both countries, stoking patriotism, deep-seated fears and even murmurs of war.

To Ethiopians, the dam is a cherished symbol of their ambitions - a megaproject with the potential to light up millions of homes, earn billions from electricity sales to neighbouring countries and confirm Ethiopia's place as a rising African power.

After years of bumpy progress, including corruption scandals and the mysterious death of its chief engineer, the first two turbines are being installed. Officials said the dam will start filling in July.

That prospect induces dread in Egypt, where the dam is seen as the most fundamental of threats.



The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, under construction on the Blue Nile in Ethiopia. NYT

Egypt is one of the driest countries on earth, with 95% of its people living along the Nile or its teeming Delta. The river, which

flows south to north, provides nearly all of their drinking water. Never before has Egypt had to contend with a country upstream

enjoying a chokehold over the Nile - a country, moreover, that an Egyptian ruler once tried to invade.

Egyptian experts have issued dire predictions of parched fields, empty taps and threats to farmers in the sprawling Nile Delta, which produces two-thirds of Egypt's food supply. The growing risks of frequent, intense droughts on a hotter planet add to the tension.

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, the country's autocratic ruler, has staked his authority on defending the river.

"The Nile is a question of life, a matter of existence to Egypt," he said at the UN last September.

For eight years, officials from Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan - which lies between the two

countries - squabbled fruitlessly over the dam. Egyptians worry that, if filled too quickly, the dam could drastically curtail their water supply.

In November, in a last-ditch effort, the talks moved to Washington, where the White House has been mediating.

US President Donald Trump, playing on his self-image as a deal-maker, has suggested that his efforts might merit a Nobel Prize. The White House is pushing for an agreement by the end of February, but Egyptian and Ethiopian officials warn it will not be easy.

In an interview last month, Seleshi Bekele, Ethiopia's water minister, called Egypt's claims to the Nile "the most absurd thing you ever heard".

For millennia, Egyptians were the unchallenged masters of the Nile, drawing on the river to build ancient empires and modern republics. The pharaohs worshipped crocodiles and used the Nile to transport the giant granite blocks for the Great Pyramid of Giza. In 1970, Egypt's towering post-independence leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, oversaw the completion of the Aswan High Dam, taming the Nile's seasonal flows and transforming Egyptian agriculture.

The Renaissance Dam spans the Blue Nile, the river's main tributary, which supplies most of Egypt's water. Ethiopia's young, modernizing leader, Abiy Ahmed, insists that Egyptian fears about its impact are overblown. **NYT**