

# 14 THE WORLD



## MEANWHILE GROWING BILL TO FIX BIG BEN

The bill to repair London's iconic Big Ben clock tower has increased by millions of pounds after the discovery of World War II bomb damage, pollution and asbestos, Britain's Parliament said Thursday. The cost of renovating the Elizabeth Tower housing the famous clock, which began in 2017, is now set to rise to nearly £80 million

### TOP OF THE WORLD



Duterte announced termination of the 20-year-old Visiting Forces Agreement

### PHILIPPINES Duterte ends pact with US, Trump says he doesn't mind

Washington: US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday he did not mind Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's decision to end a decades-old military agreement with the United States, a position at odds with that of his defense secretary who viewed the move with dismay. Duterte on Tuesday announced termination of the two-decade-old Visiting Forces Agreement. US Defence Secretary Mark Esper called the decision "unfortunate" as Washington and its allies press China to abide by "international rules" in Asia.

## CORONAVIRUS DEATH TOLL GOES UP TO 1,367

# 254 more die as China sees deadliest day of outbreak

Sharp rise also seen in number of infections after new method used for diagnosis

YANAN WANG  
BEIJING, FEBRUARY 13

CHINA ON Thursday reported a sharp spike in deaths and infections from the coronavirus after the hardest-hit province of Hubei applied a new classification system that broadens the scope of diagnoses for the outbreak, which has spread to more than 20 countries.

The new diagnostic approach came on the same day that Hubei and its stricken capital, Wuhan, replaced their top officials in an apparent response to public criticism of how authorities have handled the epidemic.

The death toll in China reached 1,367, up 254 from the previous day. The number of confirmed cases jumped 15,152 to 59,804. The unusually large increases were due to the change in Hubei's approach.

The total now includes more than 13,000 cases of "clinical diagnosis" in Hubei, which appears to include those based on a doctors' analysis combined with lung imaging, as opposed to waiting for laboratory test results.

In breaking down the large number of new cases in China, National Health Commission spokesman Mi Feng said Hubei had adopted a revised diagnosis and treatment plan aimed at accelerating the identification and treatment of patients.

One expert said the changed case definition in Hubei likely speaks to the crush of patients the health system is experiencing and the backlog of untested samples. "Clearly in Wuhan, the health



Medical workers inside an isolated section at a community health service centre in Qingshan district of Wuhan. Reuters

## EXPLAINED Quicker method for diagnosing Covid-19

CHINA'S HUBEI province used to confirm cases of coronavirus (Covid-19) infections only after conducting RNA tests that can take multiple days to come up with a result. The epicentre of the virus outbreak, Wuhan, is the capital of Hubei province, and is the region from which the most number of Covid-19 cases are reported. The daily number of new infections has increased sharply after the province has started using a quicker method for diagnosis. It now includes "clinically diagnosed cases" in the number of confirmed infections. Under this method, those showing symptoms of the illness and whose CT scans show a lung infection can be considered as infected with the coronavirus.

system is under extreme pressure and so the first priority has to be the patient," said Mark Woolhouse, a professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh.

In an unprecedented measure to contain the disease, recently named COVID-19, the

Chinese government has placed the hardest-hit cities — home to more than 60 million — under lockdown. One district in Shiyan, a city in Hubei, has implemented "wartime measures," barring residents from leaving even their apartment compounds for two weeks. AP

## Hubei, Wuhan Communist Party chiefs removed

Beijing: China's Communist Party has replaced the party heads in the coronavirus stricken province of Hubei and its capital Wuhan, state media said on Thursday, reporting the most high profile officials to be dismissed in the wake of the epidemic. The removal of Jiang Chaoliang, the leading Communist Party official of Hubei province, and Ma Guoqiang, his counterpart in Wuhan, follows the dismissal of two provincial health officials on Tuesday, and is part of a wider effort by Beijing to remove bureaucrats it accuses of shirking their duties. Shanghai mayor Ying Yong has been appointed as the new secretary of the Hubei Provincial Committee. REUTERS

## Japan confirms first virus death

Tokyo: A woman in her 80s has become the first person with the new coronavirus to die in Japan, the country's health minister said Thursday, cautioning it was not clear if the virus caused her death. "The relationship between the new coronavirus and the death of the person is still unclear," Katsunobu Kato said at a late-night briefing. "This is the first death of a person who tested positive." PTI

## UK CABINET RESHUFFLE

# Johnson asserts control over govt, Finance Minister quits

Narayana Murthy's son-in-law Rishi Sunak to replace Javid

REUTERS & PTI  
LONDON, FEBRUARY 13

BRITISH FINANCE minister Sajid Javid resigned on Thursday, a surprise move that underlined Prime Minister Boris Johnson's desire to tighten his grip on government by jettisoning a minister who refused to toe the line.

Johnson, who had wanted to minimise any disruption from the cabinet reshuffle, quickly appointed Javid's deputy Rishi Sunak, a loyal supporter of the prime minister who has often been put in front of the cameras to sell government policy.

Indian-origin lawmaker Sunak, the son-in-law of Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy, will join Home secretary Priti Patel on the top government bench as the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Johnson's team had carefully choreographed the reshuffle, presenting it as an opportunity to foster new talent, particularly among women, while also rewarding loyal supporters to deliver his vision for Britain beyond Brexit.

But the finance minister's resignation — which some commentators said might have been sought by Johnson's team — due to a dispute over Javid's advisers added to the picture that the prime minister will not tolerate dissent in his government.

"He has turned down the job of Chancellor of the Exchequer (finance minister)," a source close to Javid said.

The source said Johnson had told Javid he would have to sack his advisers and replace them with advisers from the prime minister's Downing Street office. "The Chancellor said no self-respecting minister would accept those terms."

Johnson had not been ex-

## RISHI SUNAK: RISING CONSERVATIVE STAR

■ The MP for Richmond in Yorkshire, who married Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy's daughter Akshata, first entered the UK Parliament in 2015 and has quickly risen up the Conservative Party ranks as a staunch Brexiteer who backed Johnson's strategy to leave the EU

■ Sunak attended the prestigious Winchester College before going on to study Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford. He also has an MBA from Stanford University in the United States

■ His father was a doctor and his mother ran a chemist shop. Before



entering politics, he worked for investment bank Goldman Sachs and a hedge fund, then co-founded an investment firm

## OTHER CHANGES IN RESHUFFLE



Indian-origin MP, Alok Sharma, was promoted to the post of business minister. The 52-year-old Agra-born Sharma, MP for Reading West, was previously international development minister

■ Suella Braverman, 39, another Indian-origin MP, was appointed the Attorney General

■ Julian Smith was removed as Northern Ireland minister, and no replacement was immediately announced

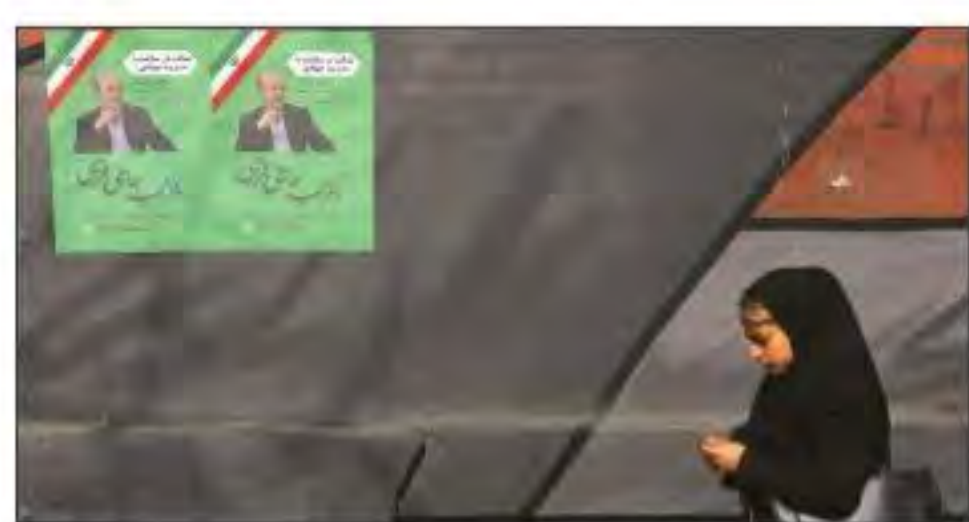
■ George Eustice replaced Theresa Villiers as the environment minister

pected to change the biggest-hitting posts in his government, but most saw even the smallest

changes lower down the order as a sign that he wanted to tighten his grip on power.

## AFRICA Family burnt alive as 'bandits' kill 21 in Nigeria

Kano: Armed attackers burned 21 people alive, including 16 members of the same family, in a revenge attack by criminal gangs on a village in northern Nigeria, residents said Thursday. Gunmen on motorcycles raided the village of Bakali in Kaduna state Tuesday, shooting and burning homes and vehicles to avenge a raid on their hideout by local vigilantes, inhabitants said. "They killed 21 people in the attack," Bakali's community leader, Sani Nuhu, said. Residents said the assailants burned alive 16 members of a family, including six children.



As campaign for parliamentary polls start, 6,850 applications from moderates and conservatives have been rejected. AP

## Iran starts election campaign with thousands barred from contesting

PARISA HAFEZI  
DUBAI, FEBRUARY 13

IRAN'S WEEK-LONG parliamentary election campaign started on Thursday, state TV reported, a vote seen as a popularity test for the clerical establishment at a time when relations with Washington are at their worst since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The Guardian Council, which must approve candidates, has rejected around 6,850 moderate or conservative hopefuls in favour of hardliners from among the 14,000 applicants seeking to contest the Feb. 21 vote.

About a third of lawmakers

have also been barred from standing again.

"The 7,150 candidates who are running for parliamentary elections have started campaigning on Thursday," state TV reported.

Pragmatist President Hassan Rouhani has criticised the disqualifications, but like Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, he has called for a high turnout as the country faces challenges over its disputed nuclear programme.

Khamenei, the final authority in Iran's complex system of clerical rule and limited democracy, backed the Guardian Council, saying the next Parliament was no place for those scared of speaking against foreign enemies. REUTERS

## AFGHANISTAN

# US announces 7-day partial truce with Taliban

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BRUSSELS, FEBRUARY 13

THE UNITED STATES has secured a seven-day reduction in violence in talks to help seek a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan, Pentagon chief Mark Esper said Thursday.

The announcement came as NATO defence ministers met in Brussels and a day after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani reported "notable progress" in negotiations with the Islamist insurgents.

"The United States and the Taliban have negotiated a proposal for a seven-day reduction in violence," Esper told reporters, dubbing his meetings with



US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper at a news conference following a NATO defence ministers meeting in Brussels. Reuters

NATO colleagues "productive". "We've said all along that the best, if not the only, solution

in Afghanistan is a political agreement. Progress has been made on that front and we'll

# Harvard, Yale investigated over foreign money

BRENDAN O'BRIEN  
FEBRUARY 13

THE US Department of Education said on Wednesday it has opened an investigation into whether the universities of Harvard and Yale failed to report hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign gifts and contracts as required by law.

Yale University in New

Haven, Connecticut, may not have reported at least \$375 million in foreign money over the last four years, the department said in a statement.

"This is about transparency," US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos said in the statement. "If colleges and universities are accepting foreign money and gifts, their students, donors, and taxpayers deserve to know how much and from whom."

Federal law requires most colleges and universities to report gifts from and contracts with foreign sources that are more than \$250,000 twice a year.

Yale spokesperson Karen Peart said the university was reviewing a request from the education department for records of gifts and contracts from foreign sources.

Education department records over the last three decades show US universities and colleges

have more to report on that soon, I hope." Esper did not say when the partial truce would begin, but on Wednesday a Taliban official said the group would begin a "reduction of violence" on Friday.

"It is our view that seven days for now is sufficient, but in all things our approach to this process will be conditions-based, I will say it again, conditions-based," Esper said.

"So it will be a continual evaluative process as we move forward, if we go forward." Washington and the insurgents have been locked in gruelling talks that have stretched over more than a year, seeking an end to what has already become America's longest war.

have reported more than \$6.6 billion in donations from Qatar, China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The education department said that it is also concerned that it is also concerned that Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, lacked the proper controls over foreign money and may have not fully reported all donations and contracts coming from outside the US.

Harvard did not respond to a request for comment. REUTERS



## Russian court fines Twitter, FB for keeping data abroad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MOSCOW, FEBRUARY 13

A MOSCOW court on Thursday fined social networking giants Twitter and Facebook for ignoring a Russian law requiring them to store Russian citizens' user data inside the country.

A court slapped the US-based companies with fines of four million rubles each (about \$63,000) for failing to move their servers containing data of Russian users into Russia, Russian news agencies reported.

They have 10 days to appeal. Twitter said the company did not comment on court decisions. Both companies have been in a long-running dispute with Russia's Internet watchdog, Roskomnadzor, since a 2014 law passed requiring messaging services, search engines and social networking sites to store Russian data inside Russia.

Russia has already blocked the Telegram messaging app and LinkedIn professional network, although the former remains widely accessible in the country.

Twitter and Facebook are widely used by the political opposition in Russia and activists have expressed concern that locating data inside Russia will make them vulnerable to prosecution.

Russia has launched many cases over extremism and incitement to unrest after users on the country's popular VK social media network reposted messages on political protests or pictures judged as xenophobic.

A recent report by rights groups Agora and Roskomsvoboda said that in 2019 there were 200 prosecutions for "internet activity", and the courts handed down 38 jail sentences after criminal convictions.

## CRITICS SAY HE HAS MOVED WITH HASTE TO CLEAR HIS ADMINISTRATION OF THOSE HE SEES AS INSUFFICIENTLY LOYAL

# With impeachment over, critics see Trump 'retribution tour'

AAMER MADHANI, JONATHAN LEMIRE & MARY CLARE JALONICK  
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 13

IN THE week since his acquittal on impeachment charges, a fully emboldened US President Donald Trump is demonstrating his determination to assert an iron grip on government, pushing his Justice Department to ease up on a longtime friend while using the levers of presidential powers to exact payback on real and perceived foes.

Trump has told confidants in recent days that he felt both vin-

dictated and strengthened by his acquittal in the Senate, believing Republicans have rallied around him in unprecedented fashion while voters were turned off by the political process, according to four White House officials and Republicans close to the West Wing who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak publicly about private conversations.

Since then, Trump and his aides have moved with haste to clear his administration of those he sees as insufficiently loyal, reaching all the way back to the time of former special counsel Robert Mueller's probe



Trump has told confidants in recent days that he felt vindicated and strengthened by his acquittal in the Senate. AP

into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Democrats and outside analysts are raising red flags that Trump is exhibiting a post-impeachment thirst for vengeance

that's gone beyond bending norms and could potentially cause lasting damage to institutions.

Some Republican senators, including Tennessee's Lamar Alexander, Maine's Susan Collins

and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski, said they found Trump's effort to pressure Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy inappropriate. But they also expressed hope following his acquittal that Trump had learned a lesson from the episode.

Murkowski acknowledged Wednesday that "there haven't been very strong indicators this week that he has".

After Trump vented on Twitter this week about federal prosecutors recommending up to nine years in federal prison for his confidant Roger Stone, the Justice Department abruptly announced that it would reevaluate the rec-

ommended sentence. Justice officials insisted the timing was coincidental; they'd already been planning to pull the recommendation.

Stone was convicted in November of tampering with a witness and obstructing the House investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to tip the 2016 election. The Justice Department move to back away from the sentencing recommendation prompted the four attorneys who prosecuted Stone to quit the case. One left the Justice Department altogether.

In recent days, the White House has yanked a senior Treasury Department nomina-

tion away from a former Justice Department official who supervised the prosecutions of several of Trump advisers. The administration also fired an EPA official who claims he was ousted because he was too friendly with Democrats.

Trump even suggested this week that the Pentagon investigate and potentially discipline former White House aide Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who provided damaging testimony about the president in the impeachment inquiry. That came after White House officials last week told Vindman his services were no longer needed. AP