

# 14 THE WORLD

**TOP OF THE WORLD**



Rouhani said Tehran's help was essential in establishing security in the Middle East. Reuters

**IRAN**  
Will never yield to US pressure for talks: Rouhani

Dubai: Iran will never hold talks with the US under pressure, President Hassan Rouhani said, adding that Tehran's help was essential in establishing security in the Middle East. Tensions between the two countries spiked after the killing of Iran's most prominent military commander Qassem Soleimani on Jan 3 by US drone attacks at Baghdad airport. "Iran will never negotiate under pressure... We will never yield to America's pressure and we will not negotiate from a position of weakness," Rouhani said in a televised news conference. Although the reimposed US sanctions have crippled Iran's economy, Tehran has repeatedly dismissed talks over any new deal.

**PAKISTAN**  
Provincial lawmaker shot dead in Sindh

Karachi: A provincial lawmaker of the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was shot dead in Naushero Feroze district in Sindh province, police said. Member of Provincial Assembly Shahnaz Ansari was shot dead on Saturday allegedly by a nephew of her recently deceased brother-in-law Zahid Khokar in Darya Khan, Naushero Feroze, Sindh police said. Ansari, who was nominated on a reserved seat, was attending a mourning ceremony for Khokar when the attack took place. She was rushed to a hospital where she was declared brought dead, Geo News reported.

**WEST ASIA**  
Israel: Hamas hackers tried to 'seduce' soldiers

Jerusalem: The Israeli military said it has thwarted an attempt by the Hamas militant group to hack soldiers' phones by posing as young, attractive women on social media, striking up friendships and persuading them into downloading malware. Lt Col. Jonathan Conricus told reporters that the phones of dozens of soldiers had been infected in recent months, although he said the army detected the scam early on and prevented any major secrets from reaching the militant group.

**BANKSY'S VALENTINE'S DAY MURAL DEFACED**



The Banksy artwork in Bristol, England, before it was defaced. AP

■ The family that owns a house in England where an artwork from Banksy appeared in time for Valentine's Day has covered the mural after it was defaced.

■ Temporary fencing was also added Saturday to the home in Bristol and closed-circuit television has been installed to protect the artwork, which shows a young girl firing red flowers from a catapult.

■ The elusive artist confirmed the mural as his creation on his official Instagram account on Feb 14. It was later defaced with an expletive.

■ Kelly Woodruff, daughter of the man who owns the home on which the mural appeared, said the family felt a "strong responsibility" to ensure it could be enjoyed by the public.

**Airstrikes in Yemen kill 31 civilians after Saudi jet crash**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
DUBAI, FEBRUARY 16

THIRTY-ONE PEOPLE were killed in air strikes on Yemen Saturday, the United Nations said, the victims of an apparent Saudi-led retaliation after Iran-backed Huthi rebels claimed to have shot down one of its jets.

The Tornado aircraft came down Friday in northern Al-Jawf province during an operation to support government forces, a rare shooting down that prompted operations in the area by a Saudi-led military coalition fighting the rebels.

The deadly violence follows an upsurge in fighting in northern Yemen between the warring parties that threatens to worsen the war-battered country's humanitarian crisis.

"Preliminary field reports indicate that on 15 February as many as 31 civilians were killed and 12 others injured in strikes that hit Al-Hayjah area... in Al-Jawf governorate," the office of the UN humanitarian coordinator for Yemen said in a statement.

Lise Grande, the UN coordinator, denounced the "terrible



A view of an explosion in Al-Jawf, Yemen. Reuters

strikes".  
"Under international humanitarian law, parties which resort to force are obligated to protect civilians," she said.

"Five years into this conflict and belligerents are still failing to uphold this responsibility. It's shocking." The rebels reported multiple coalition air strikes in the area where the plane went down, adding that women and children were among the dead and wounded, according to rebel television station Al-Masirah.

The coalition conceded the "possibility of collateral damage" during a "search and rescue operation" at the site of the jet crash, which left the fate of its crew uncertain.

**Rockets land on US base in Baghdad, no casualties reported**

**REUTERS**  
BAGHDAD, FEBRUARY 16

ROCKETS HIT A US-led military coalition's Baghdad headquarters early on Sunday but caused no casualties, a coalition spokesman said, in the latest attack to target US facilities in Iraq. Washington has blamed Iran-backed paramilitary groups for increasingly regular rocketing and shelling of bases hosting US forces in Iraq and of the area around the US Embassy in Baghdad.

An attack last month hit the US Embassy compound itself, and a rocket attack on a military base in the north in Dec killed a US civilian contractor. There have been no claims for the attacks.

Tension between Iran and the administration of US President Donald Trump has mostly played out on Iraqi soil in recent months.

The United States killed top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi paramilitary chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a drone strike in Baghdad last month, after which the region braced for full-scale conflict. Iran launched its first direct missile

**Washington has blamed Iran-backed paramilitary groups for increasingly regular attacks on bases hosting US forces in Iraq and on the area around the US Embassy in Baghdad**

attack on two bases hosting US forces in response.

Sunday's attack, before dawn, was carried out with "small rockets" and caused no casualties, the coalition spokesman said in a statement on Twitter. He provided no further details.

An Iraqi military statement said three Katyusha rockets had hit the fortified Green Zone which hosts the US Embassy, other foreign missions and Iraqi government buildings. It said a fourth hit a nearby logistics base for Iraqi paramilitary groups.

Iraq, caught between its two allies Washington and Tehran, also faces an unprecedented domestic crisis as months of anti-government unrest continues.

**Britain battered as 'weather bomb' Storm Dennis brings heavy rain, travel chaos**

**STEPHEN CASTLE**  
LONDON, FEBRUARY 16

BRITAIN HAS been battered by severe weather for the second consecutive weekend, prompting an official warning on Sunday that lives were at risk as streets became flooded, rail tracks submerged and dozens of flights cancelled.

The storm, named Dennis and classified as a "weather bomb" by the national weather service, the Meteorological Office, unleashed wind gusts of 91 miles per hour, becoming one of the most intense winter storms to grip the North Atlantic. The term weather bomb is applied when the air pressure of a storm drops by a certain measure in 24 hours, causing huge turbulence and high wind speeds. The impact on the ground



An ambulance and a car are submerged after flooding in Nantgarw, Wales, on Sunday. AP

brought chaos to parts of England, Wales and Scotland, with more than half a month's worth of rainfall falling in one day. In addition, the body of a teenager was pulled from the sea during the storm, and a man died

after he apparently fell overboard from a ship moored off the coast.

The extreme weather slammed areas that were still recovering from last week's storm, Ciara. That storm, called Sabine in German-speaking countries, tore

through Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, and Poland with winds of more than 90 miles per hour. It left at least five people dead and forced the cancellation of hundreds of flights, train services and sports matches.

At least 170 flights were cancelled Sunday, a weekend that is especially busy in Britain because of a weeklong school vacation. A red warning for parts of Wales early Sunday expired around 11 am, but most of Britain remained under an amber alert, the second-highest warning after red.

Also on Sunday, about 320 flood warnings were issued across the country, including in South Wales, where fast-flowing or deep floodwater caused by the storm posed a risk to life, the Met Office said. It added that 109.4 millimetres of rain had already fallen in Tredegar, a town in Wales, since 4 am Friday. NYT

**CORONAVIRUS TOLL RISES TO 1,665 IN CHINA**

## Virus curbs starting to work, says China

Americans set to fly home from virus-stricken cruise ship

**ENGEN THAM & STELLA QIU**  
SHANGHAI, BEIJING, FEBRUARY 16

THE NUMBER of new coronavirus cases in China fell on Sunday and a health official said intense efforts to stop its spread were beginning to work, as another 70 people tested positive on a virus-stricken cruise ship quarantined in Japan.

China's latest figures showed 68,500 cases of the illness and 1,665 deaths, most of them in Hubei.

The National Health Commission reported 2,009 new cases on Sunday, down from 2,641 the previous day, and 142 new deaths, just one lower than the 143 on the previous day. All but four of the new deaths were in Hubei.

The province and its capital, Wuhan, have been virtually sealed off and locked down since Jan. 23, with schools, offices and factories shut and most travel suspended.

The virus is believed to have an incubation period of 14 days which would appear to indicate it has been spreading since the lockdown was imposed. But health commission spokesman Mi Feng said the campaign was beginning to show results.

"The effect of the coronavirus controls is appearing," Mi told reporters. Increased medical support and preventive measures in Hubei had headed off more critical cases and the proportion of critical cases among confirmed cases had fallen to 21.6% on Saturday, from 32.4% on Jan 27, Mi said.



Workers disinfect a residential compound in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, China. Reuters

US officials in hazmat suits boarded the cruise liner, *Diamond Princess*, on Sunday to fly home Americans quarantined for two weeks off Japan.

After being held on board the ship since Feb 3, American passengers were told to get ready for Sunday evening charter flights home from the cruise liner, which accounts for around half of all confirmed coronavirus cases outside China.

Canadian, Italian, South Korean and Hong Kong passengers were expected to follow, after their governments also announced plans to repatriate passengers. 70 new cases were confirmed on board the ship, bringing the total on the ship to 355.

Meanwhile, Taiwan reported its first fatality on Sunday. The first fatality in Europe was reported on Saturday, an 80-year-old Chinese man who died at a Paris hospital. REUTERS

**WOMAN WHO LEFT CRUISE SHIP TESTS POSITIVE FOR VIRUS**

AN AMERICAN woman who left a cruise ship in Cambodia last week and flew to Malaysia with more than a hundred other passengers has tested positive for the coronavirus, alarming experts who fear that exposed passengers who then travelled onward could become a new source for global transmission. In all, 1,455 passengers and 802 crew members were aboard the *Westerdam*, which left Hong Kong on Feb 1. It was at sea for just under 14 days, the time frame that is believed to be the maximum incubation period for the virus.

## Xi speech claims he led virus fight in early days of outbreak

**YANAN WANG**  
BEIJING, FEBRUARY 16

A RECENT speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping that has been published by state media indicates for the first time that he was leading the response to a new virus outbreak from early on in the crisis.

The publication of the Feb 3 speech opens Xi up to criticism over why the public was not alerted sooner.

In the speech, Xi said he gave instructions on fighting the virus on Jan 7 and ordered the shutdown that began on Jan 23 of cities at the epicentre of the outbreak. His remarks were published by state media late Saturday.

"On Jan 22, in light of the epidemic's rapid spread and the challenges of prevention and control, I made a clear request that Hubei province implement comprehensive and stringent controls over the outbreak of people," Xi told a meeting of the party's standing committee. Xi's role was muted in the early days of the epidemic, which has grown into one of the biggest political challenges of his seven-year tenure.

The disclosure of his speech indicates top leaders knew about the outbreak's potential severity weeks before such dangers were made known to the public. It was only in late Jan that



Chinese President Xi Jinping receives a temperature check at a community health centre in Beijing last week. AP

officials said the virus can spread between humans.

Trust in the government's approach to outbreaks remains fractured after the SARS epidemic of 2002 and 2003, which was covered up for months.

Authorities in Hubei and Wuhan faced public fury over their initial handling of the epidemic. Wuhan on Jan. 23 became the first city to impose an unprecedented halt on out-bound transportation, a measure since expanded to other cities with a combined population of more than 60 million.

The anger reached a peak earlier this month following the death of Li Wenliang, a young doctor who was reprimanded by local police for trying to spread a warning about the virus. AP

**EXPLAINED**  
Bid to build trust may have backfired

THE PUBLICATION of Xi's speech, which shows that he knew about the dangers posed by the virus long before he publicly commented on it, was likely a move to assure the public that the leader was working to contain the virus even though he wasn't seen in public during that period. However, the speech has triggered backlash with many asking why, if the top leadership knew about the dangers, the public were not alerted sooner. The measures he took are also being criticised for not being effective enough as the virus continues to spread.

**CAROLINE FLACK, 40, WAS FORMER HOST OF POPULAR BRITISH SHOW 'LOVE ISLAND'**

## UK TV host commits suicide, stirring debates on tabloids, reality shows

**DERRICK BRYSON TAYLOR**  
FEBRUARY 16

CAROLINE FLACK, a well-known television personality and former host of ITV's *Love Island* and other shows in Britain, died Saturday in London. She was 40. The Associated Press, citing a statement from her family, confirmed her death. A lawyer for the family said she had died by suicide and was found in her home, the AP reported.

In 2015, Flack began hosting *Love Island*, a British dating-real-

ity show on which the public voted off "islanders" until one couple remained.

She was replaced in December after being charged with assault after an episode involving her boyfriend, tennis star Lewis Burton, *The Guardian* reported.

"Caroline was a much loved member of the *Love Island* team and our sincere thoughts and condolences are with her family and friends," ITV, which broadcasts the show, said on Twitter.

Laura Whitmore, who replaced Flack as the show's host, said on Twitter that she was "try-

ing to find the words but I can't." Flack's management agency and team were not immediately available for comment Saturday.

Flack was no stranger to reality television. In 2014, she won *Strictly Come Dancing* with her dance partner Pasha Kovalev and also hosted several other shows, including *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here! Now!* and *Xtra Factor*, according to ITV.

Flack, who had several famous partners including Prince Harry and Harry Styles, is a fixture in the British tabloids. She also had to deal with their in-



Flack was replaced as host of *Love Island* in December after being charged with assault after an episode involving her boyfriend, tennis star Lewis Burton. AP

cessant prying and constant criticism.

She once told *The Sun*, "Not everyone is going to like you, so you have to filter it."

*The Sun*, which had blanket coverage of the assault allegations against Flack, called her "Caroline Whack" in a December story.

The tabloid faced online backlash in the aftermath of Flack's death as social media users attacked it for its articles about her. At one point, #dontbuythesun and #thesun were both trending on Twitter. In a 2019 Instagram post,

Flack wrote that she was "in a really weird place" and that she found it hard to talk about it. She said when she reached out to someone to talk about her feelings, they called her "draining".

"I feel like this is why some people keep their emotions to themselves," she said. "I certainly hate talking about my feelings. And being a burden is my biggest fear."

Flack said she was "lucky" to be able to pick herself up, adding "but what happens if someone can't".

"Be nice to people," she continued. "You never know what's