

14 THE WORLD



STORM DENNIS UK ISSUES SEVERE FLOOD WARNINGS

Britain issued five severe flood alerts on Monday, warning of danger to life after Storm Dennis dumped weeks worth of rain in some places. It gale-force winds also injured nine people in weather-related car accidents in Germany and caused flooding and power outages elsewhere in northern Europe.

TOP OF THE WORLD

Kizito Mihigo's music was banned by the ruling regime

AFRICA

Rwandan dissident singer found dead in police custody

Kigali: A popular Rwandan singer whose music was banned by the ruling regime "committed suicide" in custody, police announced Monday, three days after he was caught trying to flee the country. Kizito Mihigo, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide whose songs angered the government of strongman President Paul Kagame, was found dead in a police cell in the capital Kigali around 5am. Mihigo, who was sentenced to 10 years' jail in 2015 for conspiracy against the government but later released on pardon, was captured trying to cross the border in Rwanda's south.

THE GULF

UAE issues licence for first Arab nuclear power plant

Abu Dhabi: The United Arab Emirates said it has issued a licence for a reactor at its Barakah nuclear power plant, the first in the Arab world, hailing it as a "historic moment". The UAE has substantial energy reserves, but with a power-hungry population of 10 million it has made huge investments in developing alternative power sources including solar. The Barakah plant, located on the Gulf coast west of Abu Dhabi, had been due to come online in late 2017 but faced a number of delays that officials attributed to safety and regulatory requirements.

SINGAPORE

FB told to block anti-govt site

Singapore: Singapore on Monday ordered Facebook to block the page of an anti-government website in the city-state, the latest use of a law against online misinformation that critics say stifles free speech. The legislation gives ministers powers to order internet platforms and websites to put warnings next to posts they deem false, as well as order pages blocked from users in the city. While most have complied with the directives, the States Times Review website has refused to obey any of them.

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK: CHINA MAY POSTPONE ANNUAL CONGRESS

Alarm over cruise passengers, as recession looms for Japan

Hundreds of Americans flown home from ship, 14 test positive for virus; global death toll at 1,775

REUTERS & AP
SHANGHAI, BEIJING, FEBRUARY 17

AUTHORITIES SCRAMBLED on Monday to track hundreds of cruise ship passengers scattered across the world after an American woman who had been on board tested positive for the coronavirus, highlighting the danger of the epidemic spreading globally.

Across mainland China, officials said the total number of coronavirus cases rose by 2,048 to 70,548, with 1,770 deaths. Outside China, more than 500 infections have been confirmed, mostly in people who travelled from Chinese cities, with five deaths — in Japan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan and France.

Japan and Singapore appeared to be on the brink of recession as the epidemic disrupted tourism and supply chains around the world, while China imposed tougher restrictions to prevent the virus spreading further.

Holland America Line said it was working with governments and health experts to track passengers who disembarked from its *Westerdam* cruise ship in Cambodia after an American woman tested positive in Malaysia.

The cruise line, which is owned by cruise giant Carnival Corp, said none of the other 1,454 passengers and 802 crew had reported any symptoms.

"Guests who have already returned home will be contacted by their local health department and be provided further information," a statement from the company said.

Passengers had been cleared to travel by Cambodian authorities after health checks when the



GOING DOOR TO DOOR: Workers in protective suits conduct a door-to-door search to inspect residents for coronavirus infection in Wuhan, Hubei province, on Monday. Reuters

cruise ship docked on Thursday. It had spent two weeks at sea after being turned away by Japan, Taiwan, Guam, the Philippines and Thailand.

But on Saturday, Malaysia said an American woman who arrived in Kuala Lumpur on a chartered flight had tested positive for the new coronavirus.

About 137 of the 145 passengers on the chartered flight had already left for other countries as of Sunday after showing no signs of illness, Malaysian authorities said.

Dozens more of the *Westerdam* passengers had flown through Thailand and onward to other countries, Thai officials said.

Meanwhile, more than 300 American passengers have been flown home from the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship after two

weeks under quarantine off Japan, including 14 found to have coronavirus who were kept isolated on the flight.

The *Diamond Princess*, by far the largest cluster of coronavirus cases outside China, has become the biggest test so far of other countries' ability to contain an outbreak.

China said Monday it may postpone its annual congress in March, its biggest political meeting of the year, as the military dispatched hundreds more medical workers and extra supplies to Wuhan, the city hit hardest by the virus outbreak.

The standing committee for the National People's Congress said it believes it is necessary to postpone the gathering to give top priority to people's lives, safety and health, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

ARMED ROBBERS IN HONG KONG STEAL TOILET ROLLS

Hong Kong: Armed robbers who stole hundreds of toilet rolls were being hunted by Hong Kong police Monday, in a city wracked by shortages caused by coronavirus panic-buying. Toilet rolls have become hot property in the densely packed business hub, despite government assurances that supplies remain unaffected by the virus outbreak. Supermarkets have found themselves unable to restock quickly enough, leading to sometimes lengthy queues and shelves stripped bare within moments of opening.



Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan at a conference in Islamabad on Monday. Reuters

Imran: Pak no longer has any safe havens for terrorist groups

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 17

THERE ARE no "safe havens" for terror groups in Pakistan "right now", Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Monday while acknowledging publicly that it was possibly not the case earlier.

Addressing an international conference marking 40 years of hosting Afghan refugees in the country, he said Pakistan seeks peace in Afghanistan and instability in the war-torn neighbouring country was not in its interest.

Khan's assertion on terror safe havens came as the Financial Action Task Force, the global anti-money laundering watchdog, began a crucial meeting in Paris where Pakistan is trying to wriggle out of being blacklisted for not doing enough to combat terror financing.

"I can tell you that there are no safe havens here," Khan said at a conference here, also attended by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

"Whatever the situation might have been in the past, right now, I can tell you... there is one thing we want: peace in Afghanistan," Khan said.

He admitted that it was possible that such safe heavens were operating in the country after

SUICIDE BOMBING KILLS 10 IN QUETTA

Quetta: At least 10 people were killed in a suicide blast that hit a police vehicle in southwestern Pakistan on Monday, officials said. Two police personnel were among those killed in the blast in the city of Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, which borders Afghanistan and Iran. "We have received 10 bodies so far and 35 injured in Civil Hospital," a hospital official told Reuters. Two police officers were among the dead, a senior police official confirmed. The suicide bomber wanted to target rally of a religious group, but blew himself up when police stopped him, police said.

9/11 in the Afghan refugee camps, *The News* reported.

Khan's assertion came after Afghanistan's second vice-president, Sarwar Danish accused Pakistan of allowing the Taliban to recruit new fighters from Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan to launch attacks in his country.

Gunmen kill 24 in attack on Burkina Faso church

REUTERS
OUAGADOUGOU, FEBRUARY 17

GUNMEN KILLED 24 people, including a pastor, in an attack on a church during Sunday mass in northwestern Burkina Faso, security sources said on Monday.

It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the attack, which comes as jihadist

groups with links to Al Qaeda and Islamic State seek to gain control over once peaceful rural Burkina Faso.

The timing of the shooting, during a church service in the village of Pansi in the Yagha region, mirrors that of other attacks on Christians in the past year.

Eighteen people were also injured in the attack and an unknown number were kidnapped.

Nepal ex-Speaker gets clean chit in attempt to rape case

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 17

THE FORMER Speaker of Nepal's House of Representatives, K B Mahara, was given a clean chit on Monday in an attempt to rape case that had led to his resignation and arrest.

Mahara, a senior leader of the ruling Nepal Communist Party, walked free from the Dillibazar jail soon after a judge at the Kathmandu district court read



out his judgment declaring Mahara innocent in the case.

Mahara had resigned from the Speaker's post in early October after an employee of the Parliament secretariat alleged that had attempted to rape her. He was subsequently arrested.

PARLIAMENTARY POLLS

Khamenei loyalists likely to tighten grip in Iran elections

PARISA HAFEZI
DUBAI, FEBRUARY 17

HARDLINERS ARE set to tighten control of Iran this week in a parliamentary election stacked in their favour, as the leadership closes ranks in a deepening confrontation with Washington.

More hardliner seats in the February 21 vote may hand them a bigger prize — more leeway to campaign for the 2021 contest for president, a job with wide day-to-day control of government.

Such wide command of the power apparatus would open an era in which the elite Revolutionary Guards, already omnipresent in the life of the nation, hold ever greater sway in political, social and economic affairs.

Allies of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have ensured hardliners dominate the field, removing moderates and leading conservatives and permitting voters a choice mostly between hardline and low-key con-

EXPLAINED

This election could further dent moderates' influence

THE ELECTION of moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani as President had led to a period of optimism in Iran, during which it struck a deal with world powers to curb its nuclear programme in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions. However, the optimism was soon replaced by resentment as US President Donald Trump pulled America out of the pact and reimposed sanctions. Trump further imposed a "maximum pressure" policy on Iran which has allowed the country's hardliners, led by the Supreme Leader, to discredit Rouhani's moderate approach and raise the pitch of anti-West rhetoric. With moderate candidates barred from contesting in the parliamentary polls, the hardliners are seeking to gain more control in the government and put themselves in a better position to win the presidency in 2021.

servative candidates loyal to him.

"Literally, it is not a race anymore. Hardliners want the presidency. This is the end of moderation for at least a decade if not more," said an official. Like hardliners, conservatives back the ruling theocracy, but unlike them

support more engagement with the outside world.

Faced with little choice, many voters are likely to be focused on bread-and-butter issues, in an economy hurt by US President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" policy. **REUTERS**

'Locust-hit Pak may make exception to trade freeze with India to import insecticides'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 17

REELING UNDER a major locust attack, Pakistan may allow a one-time exemption to import insecticides from India despite the trade ban which was imposed after New Delhi revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August last, according to a media report on Monday.

Importing insecticides from India will be discussed during the Pakistan federal Cabinet's meeting on Tuesday, *Dawn News* reported.

Pakistan is facing its worst locust attack in decades, after insects destroyed crops on a large scale in Punjab province, the country's main region for agricultural production.

In a meeting earlier in the month, Prime Minister Imran Khan declared the locust attack a national emergency.

The meeting, which was attended by federal ministers and senior officials of the four provinces, also approved a

Pakistan is facing its worst locust attack in decades, after insects destroyed crops on a large scale in Punjab province, the country's top region for agricultural production

National Action Plan that requires a sum of Rs 7.3 billion to overcome the crisis.

Other topics to be discussed by the Cabinet on Tuesday include gas pricing and power bill mandates for getting the International Monetary Fund's next tranche of funds of \$450 million, the report said.

The Pakistan government considering the import of insecticides from India comes seven months after Islamabad on August 9 decided to suspend all trade ties with India following New Delhi's decision to abrogate Article 370, revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

WITNESSES DESCRIBE A RAUCOUS WORKPLACE CULTURE AMONG OFFICERS AT THE AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Life of an elite CIA programmer: Toy guns, pranks and fat jokes

NICOLE HONG
FEBRUARY 17

INSIDE A secret government building west of Washington, D.C. — past the armed guards, through the turnstiles and coded locks, into a vaulted office with the highest security clearance — sat the CIA's team of elite programmers.

They had the weighty mission of creating the hacking tools used by the CIA to spy on foreign governments and terrorists. If that job description conjures Hollywood images of serious officers in dark suits huddling over clandestine

operations, a different picture emerged during a federal trial in Manhattan this month.

The work culture described by CIA officers on the witness stand more closely resembled comedies like *The Office* or *Silicon Valley* than spy thrillers like *Jack Ryan*.

From their cubicles, the programmers sent prank emails, taunted colleagues about their physical appearance and shot each other with toy guns and rubber bands, according to trial testimony.

The man on trial, Joshua Schulte, is a former CIA computer engineer who is accused of stealing a massive archive of

classified documents and giving them to WikiLeaks, the anti-secrecy organisation. Schulte, 31, has denied the allegations.

WikiLeaks published the information in 2017, the biggest leak of classified CIA documents in the spy agency's history.

For the past two weeks, Schulte's former colleagues have taken the stand to explain a thicket of CIA computer networks, guiding jurors through a digital trail that prosecutors say led to Schulte as the leaker. Testimony will resume Tuesday. The government charges that



Schulte stole the documents to retaliate against his managers, who he believed did not take his

workplace complaints seriously. Multiple CIA witnesses — testifying under pseudonyms or

with first names only — have described an office culture at odds with the myth of the agency.

The trial testimony has focused on a corner of the CIA's Center for Cyber Intelligence, where Schulte worked until his resignation in 2016. Every developer in Schulte's group, which was predominantly made up of men, had top-secret security clearance, one witness testified.

The group worked on classified projects, writing the code that allowed other CIA officers to carry out sophisticated cyber operations and penetrate the computer networks of foreign targets.

Though Schulte's former co-workers said the office was focused on the national security mission, it was also a breeding ground for sophomoric pranks and fights.

One CIA employee, identified only as Michael, testified that he and Schulte once flicked each other with rubber bands until late at night in the office. The fight escalated, and they wrecked each other's desks. Then, backed up against a desk, Michael said he hit Schulte.

Another CIA employee, who used the pseudonym Jeremy Weber, testified that once, when he left his computer open, Schulte

used it to send a profane message to everyone in their group under Weber's name.

Schulte, who was known for being a difficult colleague, had a particularly strained relationship with another developer, identified only as Amol.

During an argument in early 2016 between the two men, Weber testified that he tried to intervene, telling Schulte to be "the bigger man." Schulte responded, "We all know who the bigger man is," a reference to Amol's weight, according to Weber.

A spokesman for the CIA declined to comment. **NYT**