



## IRAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS KHAMENEI: VOTING A RELIGIOUS DUTY

Voting in a parliamentary election this week is "a religious duty" for Iranians, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Tuesday, days before the vote seen as a referendum on the clerical establishment's popularity. Due to a large number of disqualified candidates, hardliners loyal to Khamenei are likely to dominate the 290-seat Parliament after the Feb 21 vote.

### TOP OF THE WORLD



USA

### Bloomberg makes debate stage, facing rivals for 1st time

**BILLIONAIRE MIKE Bloomberg** has qualified for the upcoming Democratic presidential debate, marking the first time he'll stand alongside the rivals he has so far avoided by bypassing the early voting states and using his personal fortune to define himself through television ads. A new poll published Tuesday shows Bloomberg with 19% support nationally in the Democratic nominating contest. The former New York City mayor, who launched his campaign in Nov, will appear in Wednesday's debate in Las Vegas alongside former Vice President Joe Biden, Sens. Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar and former mayor Pete Buttigieg.

### 98 MORE DIE IN CHINA, TAKING OVERALL TOLL TO 1,868

# Coronavirus claims life of hospital director in outbreak's epicentre

Liu Zhiming becomes 7th health worker known to have died of the virus; 1,700 doctors, nurses infected

**YANAN WANG**  
BEIJING, FEBRUARY 18

AS A mysterious new virus enveloped central China's Wuhan early this year, Liu Zhiming mobilised all the resources of his hospital in the city's Wuchang district to deal with the thousands of sick people arriving daily, threatening to overwhelm the local health care system.

That dedication appears to have cost him his life, with Wuhan's health bureau announcing Tuesday that he became infected and died despite "all-out" attempts to save him.

Liu is at least the seventh health worker to die of the COVID-19 disease among the more than 1,700 doctors and nurses who have become sick. His death comes as authorities are cautiously cheering a reduction in the number of new daily cases and deaths, along with the results of a study showing most people who contracted the virus experienced only mild symptoms.

China on Tuesday reported 1,886 new cases and 98 more deaths. That raised the number of deaths in mainland China to 1,868 and the total number of



Patients infected with the coronavirus take rest at a temporary hospital converted from Wuhan Sports Center in central China's Hubei Province, Monday. AP

confirmed cases to 72,436.

"Now the prevention and control work is at a critical time," President Xi Jinping told British Prime Minister Boris Johnson in a phone call Tuesday, according to Chinese

state broadcaster CCTV.

The UN secretary general said the virus outbreak "is not out of control but it is a very dangerous situation." Antonio Guterres said in an interview in Lahore, Pakistan, that "the risks

are enormous and we need to be prepared worldwide for that."

The outbreak has caused massive disruptions and China may postpone its biggest political meeting of the year to avoid having people travel to Beijing

### WHO: 92 cases of human-to-human transmission outside China

**Geneva:** There have been 92 cases of human-to-human spread of the coronavirus in 12 countries outside China but the World Health Organisation does not have the data to make comparisons with China, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Tuesday. He said the WHO had not seen sustained local transmission except in specific cases, such as on the Diamond Princess cruise ship quarantined in Japan. China has reported 72,528 cases to WHO including 1,868 deaths as of Tuesday, Tedros said.

while the virus is still spreading. One of the automotive industry's biggest events, China's biannual auto show, also is being postponed, and many sports and entertainment events have been delayed or canceled. AP

## Quarantine on cruise ship in Japan comes under question

Those who have tested negative for the virus on the *Diamond Princess* set to go home starting today

**MARIA CHENG & MARI YAMAGUCHI**  
TOKYO, FEBRUARY 18

AN EXTRAORDINARY two-week quarantine of the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship ends Wednesday, with thousands of passengers and crew set to disembark over the next several days in the port of Yokohama, near Tokyo.

A growing number of scientists, however, say the ship served as an incubator for a worrying new virus from China instead of a quarantine facility meant to prevent the worsening of an outbreak that has sickened tens of thousands.

As of Tuesday, 542 cases of the virus have been identified among the 3,711 quarantined passengers and crew, making the ship the site of the most infections outside of China.

The question now is: Why? The Japanese government has repeatedly defended the effectiveness of the quarantine. But some

scientists suggest that it may have been less than rigorous.

In a possible sign of lax quarantine protocols, three Japanese health officials who helped in the quarantine checks on the ship were also infected.

Japan's health minister, Katsunobu Kato, told reporters Tuesday that all passengers who

remained on the cruise ship have had their samples taken and that those who tested negative would start getting off the vessel beginning Wednesday, when their required 14-day quarantine is scheduled to end. The process is expected to take until Friday because of the large number of people involved. AP

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### UN CHIEF IN PAKISTAN

## 'Kartarpur corridor opening is proof of Pak's desire for peace'

**MZULQERNAIN**  
LAHORE, FEBRUARY 18

UN CHIEF Antonio Guterres on Tuesday said the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor is a practical example of Pakistan's desire for peace and inter-faith harmony, as he visited the revered Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, the final resting place of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev.

The Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbhandhik Committee and Evacuee Trust Property Board officials received the UN Secretary General at Kartarpur Sahib, some 125kms from Lahore. A Sikh boy presented him a bouquet.

Guterres was also briefed about the Kartarpur Corridor pact between Pakistan and India. He was told that Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan took this initiative to facilitate the Sikh community of India and elsewhere to visit the shrine. The corridor links Gurdwara



UN chief Antonio Guterres

Darbar Sahib in Pakistan's Kartarpur — the final resting place of Sikh faith's founder Guru Nanak Dev — to Dera Baba Nanak shrine in India's Gurdaspur district.

Wearing an orange scarf, Guterres visited different parts of the Gurdwara. He was served with traditional food in lunch along with Sikhs and Pakistani officials. Strict security measures were taken during the visit.

Indian Sikhs in good number were also present at Kartarpur Sahib.

Later talking to media persons, the UN Secretary General said the Kartarpur Corridor is a practical example of Pakistan's desire for peace and inter-faith harmony, Radio Pakistan reported. PTI

## Ghani named winner of disputed presidential polls in Afghanistan

**TAMEEM AKHGAR & RAHIM FAIEZ**  
KABUL, FEBRUARY 18

ASHRAF GHANI won a second term as President of Afghanistan, the country's independent election commission announced Tuesday, but his closest opponent refused to recognise the results, declaring himself winner and potentially endangering peace negotiations with the Taliban.

The Taliban also rejected Ghani's win, further putting into question a US peace plan that calls for a reduction in violence followed by a more permanent agreement expected to be signed Feb 29, between Washington and the Taliban. That agreement would pave the way for US troops to return home, ending America's longest war, and trigger negotiations between Afghans on both sides of the conflict.

The bickering in Kabul and Ghani's surprise suggestion that the Taliban participate in elections would seem to throw a wrench into peace plans announced last weekend at the Munich Security Summit.



Ashraf Ghani secured his second term as Afghan President after winning 50.64% of the vote

The election commission said Ghani garnered 923,592 votes, or 50.64%, in the troubled election that took place last Sept 28. The country's chief executive, Abdullah Abdullah received 720,841 votes, or 39.52%.

Ghani and Abdullah head a fragile national unity government that was put together under US pressure after both leaders claimed victory in Afghanistan's 2014 elections.

Abdullah, in comments broadcast by media outlets, said he considered the election results illegal. "We are going to establish an inclusive government," he said. AP

### EXPLAINED Delayed election, disputed votes

THE ELECTION that took place last Sept was delayed multiple times due to various considerations, including security concerns. It was also marred by uncertainty over the future of the country as the US and the Taliban negotiated a peace deal.

When the election did take place, it saw a relatively low turnout of around 1.8 million. Ghani's main opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, as well as other candidates, dispute around 300,000 of those votes. Many of these votes have been registered in the system either before or after voting hours — by months in some cases. This leaves the conflict-torn country prone to yet another political crisis.

## Qaeda confirms: Pak Lt General joined us after service, has died

**DEEPTIMAN TIWARY**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 18

THE AL QAEDA in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has claimed that a former top military officer of Pakistan, Lt Gen Shahid Aziz, had joined them after his retirement and died a few years ago.

Aziz, who retired from the Pakistan Army in 2005, was once considered very close to General Pervez Musharraf and played a key role in the 1999 Kargil war.

Saudi Arabia-based Arab News said the announcement on Aziz was made by AQIS in the February edition of its Urdu language magazine 'Nawa-e-Afghan Jihad' (Voice of Afghan Jihad).

The Arab News said while rumours of Shahid Aziz's death had been circulating since 2018, this was the first confirmation from al-Qaeda. Notably, after retiring from the Army in 2005, Aziz headed the anti-corruption watchdog of Pakistan for two years under Musharraf's presidency.

In 2013, he slammed Musharraf for the Kargil "misadventure" which, he said, was done in secrecy and was bound to fail because of poor planning. In 2016, he disappeared and was rumoured to have fled to Afghanistan's Kunar province where he was said to have fought alongside the Islamic State (IS).

The AQIS magazine said Aziz had close ties with al-Qaeda members, and that he had written a damning account of his life and associations that would be published in the magazine in the coming months, Arab News reported.

The report quoted Saleem Mehsud, a senior journalist, saying: "For the first time, an organisation has stated that Aziz had any sort of contacts with any entity, and now the magazine will publish his alleged articles from his book, which is expected to make startling revelations."

In the past, Aziz's family rejected reports of his jihadi affiliations, insisting that he led a very private life devoted to religion. While the Indian establishment has not reacted to the revelation officially, intelligence officers say this comes as no surprise.

"I am not surprised at all by this revelation. Pakistan has a long tradition of its military officers joining ranks with terror groups. It only validates my consistent assertion that ISIS and AQIS in the Indian

### 37 YRS IN PAK ARMY

■ Lt Gen Shahid Aziz served the Pakistan Army for 37 years and held a number of key posts, including Director General Military Operations, Chief of General Staff, and Commander of the IV Corps in Lahore.

■ Aziz was part of Musharraf's close circle, and also served as director of the ISI's Analysis Wing.

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subcontinent are merely an extension of the Pakistani establishment. Aziz was a key player in the Kargil war. Later, he went on to attack Musharraf in public for the botched operation. In fact, there are recordings where he is telling Musharraf that all preparations are done," former Research and Analysis Wing chief Alok Joshi said.

Aziz served the Pakistan Army for 37 years and held a number of key posts. These included Director General Military Operations (DGMO), Chief of General Staff, and Commander of the IV Corps in Lahore. Aziz was part of Musharraf's close circle, and as Director of the ISI's Analysis Wing, one of the architects of Kargil.

Post retirement, however, Aziz was reported to have been attracted to jihadi groups and was said to have harboured such ideology for long. In an interview later, Musharraf spoke of Aziz "having grown a beard" and leaving for Afghanistan.

Husain Haqqani, a journalist who served as Pakistan's ambassador to the US from 2008 to 2011, and was an aide to both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, said a book written by Aziz in 2013 revealed his "preference for an Islamist Pakistan". According to Haqqani, for Aziz "only the Quran stands in the way" of the modern world's "Satanic way of life".

This is not the first case of a Pakistan Army officer joining militant ranks after retirement. Lt Gen Hamid Gul was reported to have joined the Haqqani network.

## Boy Scouts of America file for bankruptcy after abuse cases



The Boy Scouts of America headquarters in Irving, Texas. It has 2.2 million members between the ages of five and 21. Reuters

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 18

THE BOY Scouts of America filed for bankruptcy Tuesday in what it said was an effort to safeguard compensation payouts for sexual abuse victims.

The organisation has been accused of covering up generations of abuse inflicted on thousands of its young members and failing to do enough to root out pedophiles using the youth movement to prey

on minors over its 110-year history. Bankruptcy proceedings will help the Boy Scouts to "equitably compensate" victims through the establishment of a victims' compensation trust and allow the organisation to continue at a local level, the group said.

More than 12,000 members of the Boy Scouts had been sexually abused since 1944, the victims' lawyer said. The Boy Scouts of America has around 2.2 million members between the ages of five and 21, the organisation said.

### LEAKED DOCUMENT OUTLINES INFORMATION THAT AUTHORITIES GATHERED ON RESIDENTS OF XINJIANG'S KARAKAX COUNTY

# How China monitored, selected people for internment camps in Xinjiang

**AUSTIN RAMZY**  
FEBRUARY 18

THE LAST time she heard from her family was over three years ago, before China began rounding up Muslims in the country's far west. She lived abroad and knew nothing of her family's fate — until the contents of a leaked government document surfaced, describing their lives in chilling detail.

Rozinisa Memettohti, an ethnic Uighur who has lived in Turkey since 2003, learned in the document that two of her sisters

had been sent to indoctrination camps for having more children than the region allowed. One of the sisters was also targeted for obtaining a passport. "The reality is already far worse than any of my fears," Memettohti said in a telephone interview this month. "My father, my brothers and my sisters are in danger."

For the past few years, authorities in the Xinjiang region have placed hundreds of thousands of Uighurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim minority groups into indoctrination camps in the most sweep-

ing mass detentions since the Mao era. The document provides a rare, finely grained view of how the ruling Communist Party has carried out the system of detentions that has shredded the fibers of society in Xinjiang.

The leaked document, a 137-page spreadsheet, outlines information that authorities in Karakax County (also spelled Qaraqash) in south-western Xinjiang have gathered on its residents. It includes the names and government identification numbers of more than 300 people held in indoctrination camps and information on hun-



A call to prayer in the old city of Kashgar in Xinjiang. NYT

dreds of their relatives and neighbors. Even children as young as 16 were closely monitored for signs of what Beijing considered to be wayward thinking.

The document, one of numerous files kept on the more than one million people who have been detained in the camps, shows the range of behaviours that authorities see as problematic that would be normal elsewhere, such as giving up alcohol, wanting to go on a religious pilgrimage or attending a funeral.

In Memettohti's case, her sisters were flagged for praying reg-

ularly and participating in routine religious ceremonies.

The spreadsheet adds to a growing body of evidence on these detentions. Reports on other leaked government documents last year by *The New York Times* and a group of outlets led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists showed the coercive nature of the crackdown and detailed the tight controls placed on detainees in the indoctrination camps.

The latest government document was leaked last year, and overseas Uighur activists shared it

with several media organisations. The data in it shows how China has tried to establish dominance over Uighurs and other minority groups in the name of increasing security, said Adrian Zenz, a researcher who has analyzed the spreadsheet.

"This document is by far the most detailed that we have," said Zenz, a senior fellow at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in Washington. "It allows us to dissect the anatomy of both the internment drive and what the government" is now doing with these people. NYT