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TOP OF THE WORLD



Former Malaysian PM Najib Razak

MALAYSIA
Never ruled out 'murder-suicide plot' by MH370 pilot: Ex-PM

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia has never ruled out the possibility that missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 could have been downed by a suicidal pilot, the country's former prime minister Najib Razak said on Wednesday. Najib, who was premier when MH370 vanished with 239 people on board nearly six years ago, was responding to remarks by former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott that Malaysian leaders had considered from the outset that flight captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah may have committed mass murder.

PAKISTAN
Court sentences three over 2014 bombing

Lahore: A Pakistani anti-terrorism court on Wednesday handed down death sentence and 300 years imprisonment to three terrorists of the banned Jamaat-ul-Ahrar for their involvement in the 2014 Wagah border bombing that killed over 60 people. Wagah is a village located in Lahore, Pakistan's Punjab province and Attari in India's Punjab state along the Indo-Pak border. Over 60 people, including women and children, were killed in the horrific suicide attack on November 2, 2014 at the Wagah border on the Pakistani side.

AUSTRALIA
Mid-air plane collision kills 4

Melbourne: Four people were killed in a mid-air collision between two light planes in Australia on Wednesday, scattering debris across a rural area north of Melbourne. Police said the two twin-engine aircraft were each carrying a pilot and a passenger when they crashed around 4,000 feet above the town of Mangalore. Images from the crash scene on the ground showed twisted metal and chunks of fuselage scattered in a field and among trees. Police said both planes were flying legally in the area. One aircraft had just taken off from the nearby airfield but the other plane's origin was still unclear.

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK: CHINA DEATH TOLL CROSSES 2,000

Passengers begin leaving cruise ship after virus quarantine ends

One Indian among 79 new cases discovered on board; Iran reports two virus deaths in the country



A bus, believed to be carrying passengers from the cruise ship *Diamond Princess*, leaves Daikoku Pier Cruise Terminal in Yokohama, Japan, on Wednesday. Reuters

REUTERS & PTI
TOKYO, BEIJING, FEBRUARY 19

HUNDREDS OF people began disembarking a cruise ship in Japan on Wednesday after being held on board for more than two weeks under quarantine, as criticism mounted of Japan's handling of the biggest coronavirus outbreak outside China.

Even as patients trundled off the *Diamond Princess* cruise liner with their suitcases, Japanese authorities announced 79 new cases had been discovered on board, bringing the total above

620, well over half the known cases outside mainland China. One more Indian was among those to have tested positive for the virus and was shifted to hospital, taking the number of Indian nationals infected with the virus on the vessel to seven, according to the Indian Embassy. In China, the death toll from the coronavirus climbed above 2,000, but the tally of newly reported cases fell for a second day to the lowest since January, offering hope and helping Asian shares and US stock futures rise. The *Diamond Princess* has been quarantined at a dock at

Yokohama near Tokyo since Feb 3, initially with 3,700 people aboard. From Wednesday, passengers who tested negative and showed no symptoms were free to leave. Around 500 were expected to disembark on Wednesday, with the rest of those eligible departing over the next two days. The Indian Embassy earlier said it was making efforts for de-boarding of all the Indians from the ship after the end of the quarantine period. Meanwhile, two people have died in Iran after testing positive Wednesday for the coronavirus, the health ministry said, in the country's first cases of the disease.

BEIJING HITS OUT AT NEWSPAPERS

CHINA REVOKES CREDENTIALS OF THREE 'WALL STREET JOURNAL' REPORTERS

Beijing: China on Wednesday said it has revoked the press credentials of three reporters for the *Wall Street Journal* over a headline for an opinion column deemed by the government to be racist and slanderous. The headline referred to the current virus outbreak in China and called the country the "Real Sick Man of Asia". In a statement Wednesday, foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said the Feb 3 op-ed by Bard College Professor Walter Russel Mead "smears

the efforts of the Chinese government and people on fighting (the virus) epidemic". "The editors used such a racially discriminatory title, triggering indignation and condemnation among the Chinese people and the international community," he said. The statement said the expulsions came after the *Journal* refused to "make an official apology". Like most foreign media, the *Wall Street Journal* is unavailable within China. AP

CHINESE EMBASSY ACCUSES 'KATHMANDU POST' OF BIAS, THREATENS FURTHER ACTION

Kathmandu: The Chinese embassy here accused the *Kathmandu Post*, the English daily from the Kantipur Media House, of being biased on China-related issues. The immediate provocation was an article titled 'China's secrecy has made coronavirus much worse' that the *Post* reproduced from the *Korean Herald*. It was authored by Ivo Daalder, former US envoy to NATO. "It is regrettable that Mr Anup Kaphle, Chief Editor of The

Kathmandu Post has always been biased on China-related issues. This time, he went as far as disregarding the facts and becoming a parrot of some anti-China forces... The Chinese Embassy in Nepal has made solemn representations to the newspaper and himself and reserves the right of further action," the embassy said. The Kantipur Media House was joined by other publications in condemning the embassy's statement. YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

'Barr mulls quitting as Attorney General over Trump tweets'

MICHAEL BALSAMO & ZEKE MILLER
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 19

US ATTORNEY General William Barr has told people close to him he's considering quitting his post after President Donald Trump wouldn't heed his warning to stop tweeting about Justice Department cases, an administration official told *The Associated Press*.

The revelation came days after Barr took a public swipe at the President, saying in a television interview that Trump's tweets about Justice Department cases and staffers make it "impossible" for him to do his job. The next day, Trump ignored Barr's request and insisted that he has the "legal right" to intervene in criminal cases and sidestep the Justice Department's historical independence.

The administration official was not authorised to discuss Barr's private remarks and requested anonymity. It's unclear how seriously Barr has considered resigning or whether he is instead trying to pressure Trump to back off his provocative tweets about the Justice Department. Barr's spokeswoman said late Tuesday that the attorney general "has no plans to resign."

EXPLAINED
E.
Barr a key ally for the President at an important time

AS A-G, William Barr has been a very important ally for Trump, especially in dealing with the Mueller report's fallout. Barr, who has been criticised by Democrats who say he politicised the Justice Department, remains a key figure for the Trump administration at another important period. An overhaul of the FBI and an investigation into the Russia probe are two important initiatives for Trump, which Barr is expected to oversee. So, losing the A-G at this time would constitute a major blow for the President.

Trump tweeted on Tuesday that he's considering suing those involved in special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation and opined that his confidant Roger Stone deserved a new trial after being convicted of witness tampering and obstruction. AP



Mike Bloomberg

Bloomberg to sell his firm if elected as US President, says campaign

JASON LANGE
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 19

DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL contender Michael Bloomberg will sell Bloomberg LP, the financial information company that made him a billionaire, if he is elected to the White House in November, his campaign confirmed on Tuesday.

Bloomberg has risen quickly in opinion polls since entering the race for the Democratic nomination in November and he will appear in his first debate of the election cycle on Wednesday in Las Vegas. Democrats are vying for the right to challenge Republican President Donald Trump in the Nov. 3 election.

The former New York mayor has said before he would likely sell Bloomberg LP if elected, which his campaign affirmed on Tuesday. "If elected President, Mike will sell the company," spokeswoman Galia Slayen said. REUTERS

Syria's Aleppo airport receives first scheduled flight in 8 years

REUTERS
ALEPPO, FEBRUARY 19

A SYRIAN AIR passenger plane landed on Wednesday at Aleppo's civilian airport, the first scheduled flight to touch down in the country's war-devastated economic hub for eight years.

The reopening of the airport comes days after the Russian-backed Syrian army said it had seized rural areas northwest of Aleppo, a major strategic gain in weeks of bombing of the last rebel bastion in north-western Syria.



An airliner landed at Aleppo airport Wednesday. AP

Government officials hope the resumption of commercial flights will help revive economic activity in the city, which was the scene of some of the most vicious fighting of the war between 2012 and 2016. Rebel-held eastern Aleppo was

regained by government forces in 2016.

Transport Minister Ali Hammoud said authorities were waiting for approvals to resume international flights, with plans to reopen the route to Cairo next month.



Hasan Minhaj

Hasan Minhaj to perform at White House Correspondents' Dinner: WHCA

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 19

POPULAR INDIAN-AMERICAN stand-up comedian Hasan Minhaj, who has been critical of US President Donald Trump, will perform at the annual dinner of the White House Correspondents Association.

Minhaj, whose parents come from Aligarh, will serve as the entertainer at the event. Kenan Thompson, the actor and *Saturday Night Live* cast member, will serve as the host for the annual White House Correspondents Association (WHCA) dinner on April 25.

"Hasan Minhaj, the Peabody award-winning host of Netflix's *Patriot Act* with Hasan Minhaj, will return to the dinner as featured entertainer," the WHCA announced. Trump, who has skipped the WHCA dinner for the last three years, is unlikely to attend. PTI

STUDENTS TO BE PROVIDED PLASTIC STICKERS WITH FOUR PRONOUN OPTIONS: 'HE/HIM,' 'SHE/HER,' 'THEY/THEM' AND 'ZE/HIR'

Gender pronouns can be tricky on campus. Harvard is making them stick

ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS
FEBRUARY 19

FOR GENERATIONS of future diplomats and cabinet officials educated at Harvard's renowned John F Kennedy School of Government, orientation day has come with a name placard that the students carry from class to class, so their professors can easily call on them.

When Diego Garcia Blum, 30, got his placard last fall, the first-year graduate student immediately took a Sharpie to it, writing "He/Him" next to the big block

letters of his name. Other students did the same thing, writing "She/Her" and "They/Them."

"Yup! Day 1," Garcia Blum, recalled, adding, "That's when I thought, the students are ahead of the school." But despite its reputation as a bastion of the establishment, the Kennedy School followed the students' lead, agreeing to provide plastic stickers this semester with four pronoun options that students could apply to their name cards: "He/Him," "She/Her," "They/Them" and "Ze/Hir."

"I think it's valuable, generally speaking, to challenge the norm that you can assume a per-



Harvard's John F Kennedy School of Government has introduced the initiative

nouns in the system that provides class rosters and seating charts to faculty members. At least 39 other schools allow students to indicate their pronouns on course rosters, according to a national clearing-house maintained by the director of the University of Massachusetts Amherst's Stonewall Center.

Skyler L. Spear, a first-year law student at New York University who is transgender and nonbinary, said the ability to enter pronouns when registering for classes would remove some of the obstacles that students face.

In the past, Spear, 24, has emailed professors in advance to

say that their pronouns are they/them. One professor maintained a tradition of addressing students by last names and an honorific like "Mr" or "Miss" Spear asked the professor to refer to them by their last name, without any honorific. "It took him awhile to get used to it," said Spear, who empathised with the professor's discomfort. "I appreciated that he was trying. But it did make me uncomfortable to speak up in class, because I wasn't sure what he would call me for a while."

For professors who are used to wielding broad authority in their classrooms, and who often bristle

at being told to change their ways, the evolving use of pronouns can sometimes be a power struggle. The University of Minnesota's faculty senate approved a pronoun policy in December, but only after three years of debate.

Professors and their students can also find themselves gazing across a generational divide when it comes to an understanding of gender identities. A recent survey by Pew Research found that Americans in their teens and early 20s are far more likely to know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns than people of previous generations. NYT