

# 15 THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Jeff Bezos

USA

Amazon urged to stop selling Nazi propaganda

New York: Two organisations that educate the public about the Holocaust are calling on Amazon to stop selling Nazi propaganda, rekindling a debate over what should be sold through the world's biggest digital marketplace. On Friday afternoon, Amazon did not appear ready to commit to a course of action. "We believe that providing access to written speech is important, including books that some may find objectionable, though we take concerns from the Holocaust Educational Trust seriously and are listening to its feedback," a representative told *NYT*.

SOUTH SUDAN

Rebel leader sworn in as vice president

Juba: South Sudan rebel leader Riek Machar was sworn in as first vice president on Saturday, formally rejoining the government in the latest bid to bring peace to a nation ravaged by six years of war. "I do hereby swear that I shall be faithful and bear diligence to the Republic of South Sudan," Machar said in his oath in front of a room packed with diplomats, the leader of Sudan, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and other regional representatives. Machar embraced and shook hands with his bitter rival President Salva Kiir.

USA

Weinstein trial jury 'split' on 2 serious charges

New York: Jurors in Harvey Weinstein's rape trial sent a note to the judge suggesting that they were deadlocked on the most serious charges in the indictment, but also that they might have reached a verdict on three other counts. In their note, on the fourth day of deliberations, the jurors asked if they were allowed to return a unanimous verdict on the three lesser charges on their verdict sheet, which include rape and criminal sexual act, but remain split on the two charges of predatory sexual assault.

CHINA FLAGS DIP IN NO. OF NEW INFECTIONS

## Concerns over spread of virus amid new cases in Iran, S Korea

AGENCIES BEIJING, FEBRUARY 22

CHINA REPORTED a sharp decrease in new deaths and cases of the coronavirus on Saturday but a doubling of infections in South Korea and 10 new cases in Iran added to unease about its rapid spread and global reach.

Meanwhile, a second person in Italy has died from complications from the new coronavirus, Italian news agency ANSA said on Saturday. The death of a woman in the northern region of Lombardy follows that of a 78-year-old man who died on Friday. The new wave of cases in Italy's northern regions have triggered shut-downs of shops, offices and community centres.

The death toll in China climbed to 2,345 with 109 more deaths reported, while the confirmed cases rose to 76,288 as a team of WHO experts, currently in the country to investigate the covid-19 outbreak, is expected to visit the worst-affected Wuhan city on Saturday, Chinese health officials said.

Mainland China had 397 new confirmed cases of coronavirus infections on Friday, down from 889 a day earlier, but only 31 cases were outside of the virus epicentre of Hubei province, the lowest number since the National Health Commission started compiling nationwide



Near a hospital at Chuncheon, South Korea, Saturday. Reuters

data a month ago.

But infection numbers continued to rise elsewhere, with outbreaks worsening in South Korea, Italy and Lebanon and Iran, prompting a warning from the WHO that the window of opportunity to contain the international spread was closing.

South Korea saw another spike in infections, with 229 new confirmed cases, taking its tally to 433. Officials warned that could rise substantially as more than 1,000 people who attended a church at the centre of the outbreak had shown flu-like symptoms.

Iran, which had no reported cases earlier this week, saw 10 new cases, one of which had died, taking the number to 28 infections and five deaths.

Two more people in the UAE

have tested positive for the deadly coronavirus, taking the total number of such cases to 11, health authorities said on Saturday.

The two male patients include a 34-year-old from Philippines and a 39-year-old from Bangladesh, who got infected as they were in direct contact with the Chinese patients recently diagnosed with coronavirus, the UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention (MoHAP) said in a statement.

Japan confirmed 14 new coronavirus cases on Saturday, among those a teacher who had shown symptoms while working at her school. It is facing growing questions about whether it is doing enough to contain its spread, and concern about whether it could scupper the Tokyo Olympics.

EXPLAINED Outside China, no. of cases small, but causality a worry

EVEN AS the WHO welcomed a reported drop in new cases in China with cautious optimism, the growth of the virus abroad has worried experts, particularly when it comes to causality.

Though the number of cases outside China is relatively small, it is growing at a rapid pace, with an increasing list of countries reporting first cases of infection. Of these cases, the ones that are raising the most flags, as per the WHO chief, are those in which the epidemiological link is not clear. As per reports, this includes cases wherein patients have no travel history to China and no contact with a confirmed case. These unknown factors could potentially complicate efforts to combat the virus.

PREPAREDNESS IN AFRICA: WHO SOUNDS ALARM, POINTS TO ILL-EQUIPPED SYSTEMS

Addis Ababa: The World Health Organisation warned Saturday that African health systems would be ill-equipped to respond to the deadly coronavirus outbreak should cases start to proliferate on the continent.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called on African Union member states "to come together to be more aggressive in attacking" the virus, known as covid-19.

"Our biggest concern continues to be the potential for covid-19 to spread in countries

with weaker health systems," Tedros, speaking by video link from Geneva, said during a meeting of African health ministers at AU headquarters.

The WHO has shipped more than 30,000 sets of personal protective equipment to several African countries, and is ready to ship almost 60,000 more sets to 19 countries, he said.

The WHO has also appointed two specialists as special envoys to help African countries prepare for the potential arrival of the virus. AGENCIES

AHEAD OF US-TALIBAN PEACE DEAL

## On day 1, partial truce mostly holds across Afghanistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA KABUL, FEBRUARY 22

A PARTIAL truce marking a potential turning point in Afghanistan's gruelling war appeared to be holding Saturday, with only isolated attacks threatening to mar a process that drew jubilant civilians across the shattered country onto streets to celebrate.

The Taliban, US and Afghan forces have all agreed to a so-called "reduction in violence", marking only the second lull in fighting since the US-led invasion of 2001.

"It is the first morning that I go out without the fear of being killed by a bomb or suicide bomber. I hope it continues forever," Kabul taxi driver Habib Ullah said, while in other parts of the country people danced in the streets after the truce kicked in.

However in Balkh province in the north, Taliban fighters attacked a district headquarters near the provincial capital of Mazar-i-Sharif, killing two Afghan soldiers, a local official told AFP. There were also reports of a separate incident in central Uruzgan province.

General Scott Miller, who leads US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, did not directly address those incidents, but stressed that Western forces would continually monitor the situation.



UN REPORT ON CASUALTIES

100,000 civilians killed in 10 yrs IN 2019 3,493 civilians killed 6,989 civilians injured 21% increase in civilian casualties by Taliban 18% rise in casualties blamed on Afghan forces, US allies

"We've stopped our offensive operations as part of our obligations," Miller told reporters.

In the event of any breaches of the truce, Miller said the US would communicate with the Taliban through various channels set up in Doha, where the insurgents have a political office. "As more days go on we will have a better understanding of what trends are," Miller said.

"Very clearly this is a conditional effort, this is a trial period."

HE WARNS MOSCOW

## Russia said to be interfering to aid Bernie in primaries

JULIAN E BARNES & SYDNEY EMBER WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 22

RUSSIA HAS been trying to intervene in the Democratic primaries to aid Senator Bernie Sanders, according to people familiar with the matter, and Sanders said on Friday that intelligence officials recently briefed him.

The disclosure came a day before the Nevada caucuses, where Sanders is a favourite, and followed revelations a day earlier that Moscow was interfering on President Trump's behalf this year, as it did in 2016.

Sanders denounced Russia in a statement, calling President Vladimir V Putin an "autocratic thug" and warning Moscow to stay out of the election. Drawing a contrast with Trump, he said he would stand against any efforts by Russia or another foreign power to interfere in the vote.

"The intelligence community is telling us they are interfering in this campaign right now in 2020," Sanders separately told reporters in Bakersfield, California, where he held a rally on Friday. "And what I say to Putin: 'If elected president, trust me, you are not going to be interfering in American elections.'"



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—BERNIE SANDERS

Sanders said he was briefed about a month ago. Asked why the disclosure came out now, he said: "I'll let you guess about one day before the Nevada caucus. Why do you think it came out?"

On Friday, the president aggressively disputed that Russia was interfering on his behalf. He called the disclosures a hoax and part of a partisan campaign against him. At a campaign rally in Las Vegas, Trump suggested that Putin would prefer Sanders, "who honeymooned in Moscow." *NYT*

## HARDLINERS TAKE EARLY LEAD IN IRAN POLLS



Poll workers empty full ballot boxes after the parliamentary election voting time ended in Tehran on Saturday. Reuters

■ Candidates affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guards looked on course to win a majority on Saturday, reportedly leading the race after a vote stacked in favour of anti-American hardliners

■ An Interior Ministry official said a list of candidates affiliated with the Guards led in the capital. Lists linked to hardliners captured 83 seats in towns and villages, as per a tally

■ A clean sweep for hardliners would confirm the political demise of the country's pragmatist politicians, weakened by a US decision to quit a 2015 nuclear deal and reimpose sanctions.

## Pak must crack down on terrorists: White House

LALIT K JHA WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 22

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump is encouraging a reduction in tensions between India and Pakistan, the White House said on Friday, emphasising that any successful dialogue between the two neighbours would be possible only if Pakistan cracks down on terrorists and extremists on its territory.

"I think what you'll hear from the President is very much encouraging a reduction in tensions

between India and Pakistan, encouraging the two countries to engage in bilateral dialogue with each other to resolve their differences," a senior administration official said.

The White House official's comments came after the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) retained Pakistan for four more months on the 'Grey List' with a stern warning from the global anti-terror financing watchdog to complete the 27-point action plan it has been given by June 2020 or face being put on the 'Black List'. *PTI*

'WAR AGAINST TERRORISM TO BE CONSOLIDATED'

PAKISTAN ARMY chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa said the war against terror will be consolidated to achieve enduring peace in the country and region

THE REMARKS came on the third anniversary of Operation Radd ul Fasaad, a counter-terrorism operation launched under his leadership in Pakistan

AN ARMY spokesman said it consolidate gains of all past operations and 'indiscriminately eliminating residual and latent threat of terrorism...'

OPERATION RuF, involved the military carried out over 49,000 intelligence based operations to foil terror attacks and prevent militant attacks

70TH EDITION OF THE BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL — DAY 2

## Full of warmth and fun, 'Onward' is about coming to terms with grief, loss



EXPRESS IN BERLIN SHUBHRA GUPTA FEBRUARY 22

IN THE usual course, I would have plumped for Jeanette Nordahl's debut feature *Wildland*, which promises to be a dark Nordic drama about a matriarch who presides over a family of small-time hoods, and a young woman who may have unusual criminal tendencies of her own. But it's an overcast rainy

morning, and I want to chase away the greys with something warm and fuzzy. So I head into Pixar's *Onward*, and am immediately enveloped by warm fuzziness. It's a fantasy featuring elves, unicorns, centaurs and more mythical creatures. All the primary colours and their combinations can be seen, all at once. Our hero is an awkward, gangly teen elf called Ian (voiced by Tom Holland) and his loud, overbearing big brother Barley (Chris Pratt) as well as their cuddly, caring mom (Julia Louis Dreyfus). The father is a photo on the wall. Ian misses his dad, and is to be found shying away from his brother's and mother's ministrations.



'Onward' actors Tom Holland (left) and Chris Pratt. AP

It's a film about growing up and finding yourself. What else, it's a Pixar film. Within minutes, I'm finding all the talking a little too much: all the characters keep

explaining everything, and that's the bane of all animated films. But soon, despite myself, I'm charmed. Ian and Jack set out On An Adventure, On A Path Of Peril,

to find a shiny object which will lead them to their father. For One Day Before The Sun Goes Down. All those capital letters! All those blinding colours! All the cuteness! *Onward* cannot be more clear about where it wants to go and the place it nudges us towards: to let go of the past, make peace with ourselves and go on. Director Don Scanlon lost his father when he was very young, and the story is also about coming to terms with loss and grief, and that's where it locks into true feelings, making us moist-eyed.

Before this teary-eyed denouement, the film manages to be a lot of fun. The two brothers use spells as they go on their quest, leaving behind the free-

way: one of the most telling moments is how young Ian learns to merge into rushing traffic. That requires confidence and fearlessness: no magic wand will help.

Finally, Ian and Barley face down a monster, with help from their mom and a jovial mantico-re — a combination of a winged dragon and scorpion (Octavia Spencer). They get their moment with their dad, who has been just a pair of legs until then (the upper half is missing). That figure is one of the more unusual things about this movie. It starts off making one uncomfortable, and then we start looking at this incomplete person with affection. It's a smart way of telling us that no one is perfect. And that

imperfections matter.

*Onward* also manages to slip in some boys' stuff, the kind that family-oriented animations don't usually touch. How it's alright to say what you feel and to show those feelings. Yes, it's Okay For Boys To Cry. That is a moment which is truly moving, and makes up for ducking dark crime dramas.

But darkness is never far, especially at the Berlinale, and I make up for my sins with Natalia Meta's psychosexual Spanish drama, *The Intruder*. How does the mind deal with trauma? Ines, a dubbing artist who is also part of a choir, finds herself battling nightmares. A holiday with a domineering lover which ends

in a tragedy has led to sleepless nights. The microphone keeps picking up strange noises: where are they coming from? Who is inside her?

That the mind plays games, we have known. And that fevered minds beat their own drums is also something we know. Ines, wonderfully played by Erica Rivas, is on the verge of a breakdown, and we see her getting inexorably to the edge: who controls us? Are we really ever in control? And what is for real?

It leaves us with an even more provocative question: is a relationship which refuses to be equal and respectful the most long-lasting intruder in our lives?