

TOP OF THE WORLD



BRITAIN
Assange put lives at risk, US lawyer tells court

London: Julian Assange is wanted for crimes that put at risk the lives of people in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan who had helped the West, said a lawyer for the US in its bid to extradite the 48-year-old. Almost a decade since his WikiLeaks website enraged Washington by leaking secret US documents, Assange appeared before an extradition hearing at London's Woolwich Crown Court. The US asked Britain to extradite Assange last year after he was pulled from the Ecuador embassy in London, where he had spent seven years holed up avoiding extradition to Sweden over sex crime allegations which have since been dropped. He has served a sentence in Britain for skipping bail and remains jailed.

BRITAIN
India asks UK museum for idol stolen from TN

London: India has made a formal request for the return of a 15th century bronze idol of a Tamil saint believed to be stolen from a temple in Tamil Nadu and found its way to a museum at Oxford University through auction. The statue of Saint Tirumankai Alvar was acquired by the Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford from Sotheby's auction house in 1967 from the collection of a collector named J R Belmont. The museum says that it was alerted to the origins of the ancient statue by an independent researcher in November last year, following which it alerted the Indian High Commission.

LESOTHO
PM in court to hear charges of murdering wife

Maseru: Lesotho's Prime Minister Thomas Thabane appeared in court to hear charges of murdering his estranged wife. Thabane, 80, is suspected of involvement in the murder of his then wife Lipolele, who was shot dead in June 2017, two days before he took office for a second stint as premier — and two months before he married his current wife Maesaiah. Maesaiah Thabane, 42, has also been charged with the murder, and police suspect her of ordering assassins to do the job. Both deny any involvement.

CORONAVIRUS: WORLD IN WUHAN'S DEBT, SAYS W.H.O.

Fear of pandemic grows but China eases curbs as new infections fall

GABRIEL CROSSLEY & HYONHEE SHIN
BEIJING, SEOUL, FEBRUARY 24

ITALY, SOUTH Korea and Iran reported sharp rises in coronavirus cases on Monday, but China eased curbs as the rate of infection there slowed and a visiting World Health Organization team said a turning point had been reached in the epicentre, Wuhan.

The virus has put Chinese cities into lockdown in recent weeks, disrupted air traffic to the workshop of the world and blocked global supply chains for everything from cars and car parts to smartphones.

But China's actions, especially in Wuhan, had prevented hundreds of thousands of cases, said the head of the WHO delegation in China, Bruce Aylward, urging the rest of the world to learn the lesson of acting fast.

"The world is in your debt," Aylward, speaking in Beijing, told the people of Wuhan. "The people of that city have gone through an extraordinary period and they're still going through it."

The WHO's Aylward said multiple data sources all suggested that the rate of infection in Wuhan was falling: "They're at a point now where the number of cured people coming out of hospitals each day is much more than the sick going in."

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that using the word "pandemic" did not fit the facts. "We must focus on containment while preparing for a potential pandemic," he said in Geneva, adding that the world was not witnessing an uncontained spread or large-scale deaths.



At a traditional market in Seoul, South Korea, on Monday. Reuters

VIRUS SPREADING FAST ACROSS THE WORLD

SOUTH KOREA
South Korea confirmed 70 more coronavirus cases Monday afternoon, bringing its tally to 833, by far the largest national total outside China. The updated figures brought the country's daily increase to 231, its highest to date.

IRAN
50 people have died in the city of Qom from the virus this month, a lawmaker was quoted as saying Monday, even as the Health Ministry insisted only 12

deaths have been recorded to date in the country. The ministry said the number of those infected by the virus rose to 61.

ITALY
Italy reported its sixth death from the new coronavirus on Monday, including an 84-year old man in the northern Lombardy region, as the number of people contracting the virus continued to mount. At least 150 infections have been reported in the country.

Overall, China reported 409 new cases on the mainland, down from 648 a day earlier, taking the total number of infections to 77,150 cases as of Feb. 23. The death toll rose by 150 to 2,592.

Outside mainland China, the outbreak has spread to some 29 countries and territories, with a

death toll of about two dozen, according to a Reuters tally.

South Korea reported 231 new cases, taking its total to 833. Many are in its fourth-largest city, Daegu, which became more isolated with Asiana Airlines and Korean Air suspending flights there until next month.

THE GULF
Kuwait and Bahrain confirmed on Monday their first coronavirus cases, health ministries in the two Gulf states announced, adding all had come from Iran. Kuwait reported three infections and Bahrain one.

IRAQ
Iraq on Monday confirmed its first coronavirus case in an elderly Iranian national in the southern shrine city of Najaf, according to health officials.

Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Afghanistan and Iraq recorded their first new cases, all people who had been in Iran, where the toll was 12 dead and 61 infected.

Europe's biggest outbreak is in Italy, with some 150 infections — compared with just three before Friday — and six deaths. REUTERS

MEANWHILE

ATTEMPTING RARE WINTER ASCENT OF EVEREST

Four veteran Sherpa climbers left Monday for Mount Everest on a mission to climb the world's highest mountain in five days from the Nepali side, aiming to set a record for its shortest winter ascent in nearly three decades. If successful, the team will be the first to climb the peak in 27 years during winter, when cold and shorter daylight hours make climbing difficult.



Mahathir Mohamad was asked to stay on as interim leader after he submitted his resignation to Malaysia's king. AP

Malaysia's Mahathir steps down as PM, turmoil deepens

AP & REUTERS
KUALA LUMPUR, FEB 24

MALAYSIA'S KING accepted Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's shocking resignation on Monday, but reappointed him as interim leader following the collapse of the ruling alliance in a major political upheaval less than two years after its historic election victory.

The resignation of Mahathir, 94, broke apart a coalition with old rival Anwar Ibrahim, 72, that had scored a surprise election victory in 2018 and was not part of a pre-election promise that Mahathir would one day cede power to Anwar.

Minutes before Mahathir tendered his resignation to the palace, his party, Bersatu, said it would leave the four-party Alliance of Hope and support Mahathir as Prime Minister. Eleven other lawmakers, including several Cabinet ministers, announced they were quitting Anwar's party to form an independent bloc.

Bersatu later said Mahathir had also quit as party chairman. The withdrawal of more than three dozen lawmakers means the ruling alliance has lost its majority in Parliament, throwing the country into an uncertain future and sparking fears of

EXPLAINED
E. May stay on as PM, but with new allies

MAHATHIR'S DECISION to resign as PM has been widely seen as a move to form new political alliances amid reports of talks between the 94-year-old's party and opposition groups. He came to power in 2018 after aligning with former foe Anwar Ibrahim's party. Mahathir had agreed to step aside for Anwar to become PM two years into their coalition's victory. With the two years nearly up, Mahathir's resignation is being seen by analysts as a move to break up the coalition and come back to power with new allies instead of handing over the reins to Anwar.

more turmoil over how the political drama will play out.

King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah also dissolved the Cabinet on Mahathir's advice.



Armed off-duty police officers commandeering an armoured vehicle during an attack on army soldiers amid protests over police pay and working conditions, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. AP

Two dead after Haitian police attack Army HQ

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PORT-AU-PRINCE, FEB 24

HAITIAN POLICE demanding better working conditions shot up the Army headquarters on Sunday, killing two servicemen and wounding a dozen more, the Defense Ministry said, prompting the government to cancel an upcoming carnival.

In a statement issued Sunday evening, the government said it had observed "with concern and dismay that terror has reigned in certain arteries of the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area." It ordered to avoid a "bloodbath... it has been decided to cancel the carnival," which was scheduled to take

place Tuesday, the statement said. Media reports had said six people were wounded in the attack in Port-au-Prince by what the ministry said were gunmen wearing masks.

"We are under siege. We are coming under fire with all kinds of weapons — assault rifles, Molotov cocktails, tear gas," General Jodel Lesage had said earlier.

He said soldiers had returned fire but did not give an injury toll, nor could he say how many people were at the army headquarters, near the presidential palace, at the time of the attack.

For months, Haitian police have been demanding better working conditions, and in particular the right to form a union.

Harvey Weinstein convicted of sexual assault, rape

BRENDAN PIERSON
NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 24

FORMER MOVIE producer Harvey Weinstein was convicted of sexual assault and rape by a New York jury on Monday and handcuffed in court, a milestone verdict for the #MeToo movement that inspired women to go public with misconduct allegations against powerful men.

Once one of Hollywood's

most powerful producers, Weinstein, 67, was convicted of sexually assaulting former production assistant Mimi Haley in 2006 and raping Jessica Mann, a onetime aspiring actress, in 2013.

Weinstein was acquitted on the most serious charges that carried a potential life sentence.

Justice James Burke ordered Weinstein to be held in custody and he was put in handcuffs by officers in court. Officers helped Weinstein unsteadily to his feet



Harvey Weinstein arrives at a Manhattan courthouse on Monday. AP

Car driven into carnival parade in Germany, around 30 injured

MICHELLE MARTIN & JOSEPH NASR
BERLIN, FEBRUARY 24

A DRIVER ploughed his car into a carnival parade in the western German town of Volkmar on Monday injuring 30 people, including children, some of them seriously, police said on Monday.

Regional broadcaster Hessenschau said police believed the driver, identified as a 29-year-old German citizen, had acted deliberately, but that nothing was immediately known about his motive.

German news website HNA cited witnesses as saying the man appeared to have targeted children and had driven "at full



At the scene of the incident in Volkmar, Germany, on Monday. Reuters

throttle" into the crowd, which had gathered for the traditional procession ahead of the Christian season of Lent.

Asked how many were injured, a police spokesman in the regional centre of Kassel said: "I would say about 30."

Police said on Twitter that some people were seriously injured, including children. Bild newspaper said a third of the in-

juries were serious and some were life-threatening.

Police assumed it was an attack but there were no indications that it was politically motivated, Bild said.

Police called off all carnival parades in the German state of Hesse, where Volkmar is located, as a precautionary measure, but said they were not aware of any danger elsewhere. REUTERS

Indian shot dead by masked assailant at Los Angeles store

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 24

AN INDIAN national has been shot dead by a masked assailant in Los Angeles with the police saying the suspect entered the grocery store with a semi-automatic handgun with the intent to commit a robbery.

Maninder Singh Sahi, who turned 31 last month, was married and father of two. He was working at a 7-Eleven grocery store in the Whittier City in Los Angeles County of California.

Hailing from Karnal in Haryana, Sahi had arrived in the US less than six months ago and had sought political asylum. The only earning member of his family, Sahi used to send

money to his wife and two children back home, his relatives in the US said.

According to the Whittier Police Department, the incident occurred at 5.43 am on Saturday.

Preliminarily it appears the suspect entered the store with a semi-automatic handgun with the intent to commit a robbery.

"For unknown reasons the suspect fired the handgun killing the clerk," the police said releasing a picture of the suspect.

Authorities are still seeking the robber, who got away on foot with an unknown amount of cash.

"The suspect fled the location and is outstanding at this time. There were two customers inside the store, both were uninjured..." police said. PTI

SHE CALCULATED THE PRECISE TRAJECTORIES THAT WOULD LET APOLLO 11 LAND ON THE MOON IN 1969

Katherine Johnson, mathematician who broke barriers at NASA, dies at 101

MARGALIT FOX
FEBRUARY 24

THEY ASKED Katherine Johnson for the moon and she gave it to them. Wielding little more than a pencil, a slide rule and one of the finest mathematical minds in the country, Johnson, whose death at 101 was announced Monday by NASA, calculated the precise trajectories that would let Apollo 11 land on the moon in 1969 and, after Neil Armstrong's history-making moonwalk, let it return to Earth.

A single error, she well knew, could have dire consequences for craft and crew. Her impeccable calculations had already helped plot the successful flight of Alan Shepard, who became the first American in space when his Mercury spacecraft went aloft in 1961.

The next year, she likewise helped make it possible for John Glenn, in the Mercury vessel Friendship 7, to become the first American to orbit the Earth.

Yet throughout Johnson's 33 years in NASA's Flight Research Division — the office from which

the US space programme sprang — and for decades afterward, almost no one knew her name.

Johnson was one of several hundred rigorously educated, supremely capable yet largely unheralded women who, well before the modern feminist movement, worked as NASA mathematicians.

But it was not only her sex that kept her long marginalised and long unsung: Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson, a West Virginia native who began her scientific career in the age of Jim Crow, was also African American.

In old age, Johnson became



Her story was told in the 2016 Hollywood film *Hidden Figures*

the most celebrated of the small cadre of black women — perhaps three dozen — who at midcentury served as mathematicians for the space agency and its predecessor, the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics.

Their story was told in the 2016 Hollywood film *Hidden Figures*, based on Margot Lee Shetterly's nonfiction book of the same title, published that year. The movie starred Taraji P. Henson as Johnson, the film's central figure. It also starred Octavia Spencer and Janelle Monáe as her real-life colleagues Dorothy Vaughan and

Mary Jackson.

Of the black women at the center of the film, Johnson was the only one still living at the time of its release. By then, she had become the best-known member of her formerly unknown cohort.

In 2015, President Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, proclaiming, "Katherine G. Johnson refused to be limited by society's expectations of her gender and race while expanding the boundaries of humanity's reach."

In 2017, NASA dedicated a building in her honour, the

Katherine G. Johnson Computational Research Facility, at its Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia.

That year, *The Washington Post* described her as "the most high-profile of the computers" — "computers" being the term originally used to designate Johnson and her colleagues, much as "typewriters" was used in the 19th century to denote professional typists.

She "helped our nation enlarge the frontiers of space," NASA's administrator, Jim Bridenstine, said in a statement Monday. NYT