



EGYPT HOSNI MUBARAK LAID TO REST

Egypt held a full-honours military funeral on Wednesday for the country's former autocratic President Hosni Mubarak, who held power for decades before he was ousted in the 2011 Arab Spring. The funeral, replete with cannon fire and a horse-drawn carriage carrying his coffin, highlighted the wartime achievements of Mubarak.

TOP OF THE WORLD



BRITAIN Call me Harry, prince says as royal exit looms

Edinburgh: Prince Harry asked to be introduced as just "Harry" at an event on Wednesday, kicking off a final round of public engagements before he and wife Meghan step back from their royal duties. The Duke of Sussex, a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, will stop using "His Royal Highness" from the end of March when the couple stop being working royals. But at a conference in Edinburgh for his sustainable tourism project Travalyt, it emerged he was already adopting a more informal approach. "He's made it clear that we are all just to call him Harry, so ladies and gentlemen — please give a big, warm Scottish welcome to Harry," host Ayesha Hazarika said. Harry's announcement came as he wanted to step back from their royal positions had rocked the monarchy.

MALAYSIA Mahathir and Anwar in new showdown

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia's decades-old political rivals Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar Ibrahim set out claims to lead the Southeast Asian country on Wednesday after Mahathir's shock resignation as prime minister sparked turmoil. Mahathir proposed a unified administration without political party allegiances at a time Malaysia faces a flagging economy and the impact of the new coronavirus. Anwar later said he opposed forming a "back-door government" and that three parties from the former Pakatan ruling coalition had proposed his name to the king as candidate for prime minister.

VATICAN For Lent, give up trolling, Pope tells Catholics

Vatican City: During Lent, Catholics are called on to give up something, like sweets. On Wednesday, Pope Francis added a modern twist to the list of things to quit during the season and beyond: insulting people on social media. The pope made his appeal to tone things down while speaking to tens of thousands of people in St. Peter's Square for his general audience on Ash Wednesday, the start of the 40-day season that leads up to Easter.

CORONAVIRUS: NEARLY 80,000 INFECTED, OVER 2,700 DEAD

Pandemic likely, US warns as virus spreads across globe

Pakistan confirms first two cases; South America's first case reported in Brazil

REUTERS & PTI
SHANGHAI, ISLAMABAD, FEB 26

ASIA REPORTED hundreds of new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, including an American soldier stationed in South Korea, as the United States warned of a pandemic, the disease spread in Europe and Brazil confirmed Latin America's first infection.

Pakistan also confirmed its first two cases of the coronavirus on Wednesday.

"I can confirm first two cases of coronavirus in Pakistan. Both cases are being taken care of according to clinical standard protocols & both of them are stable," Dr Zafar Mirza, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health, tweeted. At least one of them had travelled to Iran, according to the Sindh health department.

The disease is believed to have originated in a market selling wildlife in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year and has infected about 80,000 people and killed more than 2,700, the vast majority in China.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged Americans to prepare, saying that while the immediate risk there was low the global situation suggested a pandemic was likely.

"It's not a question of if. It's a question of when and how many people will be infected," the CDC's principal deputy director, Anne Schuchat, said on Tuesday. The United States has reported 57 cases of the virus. President Donald Trump, back in Washington after a visit to India, said on Twitter that he would meet US officials for a briefing on the coronavirus on Wednesday.

Dr Bruce Aylward, head of a joint WHO-China mission on the outbreak, told reporters on his return to Geneva that world



At a market in Seoul, South Korea, on Wednesday. Reuters

EXPLAINED Virus screening may be missing over half of cases

A STUDY by researchers in the US and Britain has shown that the screening of travellers when leaving or entering a country could be missing more than half of COVID-19 cases. Even the best screening procedures at airports are likely to miss many cases, the study said, because of the nature of the virus. The new coronavirus has an incubation period of up to 14 days, which means it may take up to two weeks after someone contracts the virus for the person to show any symptoms. This means that screening mechanisms like temperature checks and looking for other symptoms may not be enough to flag someone who has the virus.

preparations should not wait.

"Think the virus is going to show up tomorrow. If you don't think that way, you're not going to be ready," he said. "This a rapidly escalating epidemic in different places that we have got to tackle super-fast to prevent a pandemic."

South Korea, which with 1,261 cases has the most outside China, reported 284 new ones including a US soldier, as authorities readied an ambitious plan to test more than 200,000 members of a church at the centre of

the outbreak.

The US military said a 23-year-old soldier based in Camp Carroll, about 20 km from Daegu, had been infected and was in self-quarantine at home.

Brazil reported the first case in Latin America, a source said on Wednesday — a 61-year-old who had visited Italy.

In Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for sports and cultural events to be scrapped or curtailed for two weeks to stem the virus as concern mounted for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Coronavirus cases emerging faster outside China: WHO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GENEVA, FEBRUARY 26

THERE ARE now more new cases of the coronavirus reported each day outside China than inside the hardest-hit country, the World Health Organisation said on Wednesday.

"Yesterday, the number of new cases reported outside China exceeded the number of new cases in China for the first time," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told diplomats in Geneva, according to a written version of his speech.

The UN health agency put the number of new cases in China at 411 on Tuesday and those registered outside the country stood at 427.

Governments worldwide are scrambling to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus after a surge of infections in Italy, Iran and South Korea.

Tedros said the "sudden increase of cases" in those countries was "deeply concerning", adding that a WHO team would travel to Iran this weekend to evaluate the situation.

While new case numbers and deaths are dwindling at the disease epicentre in China, the country remains by far the hardest hit.

But WHO has said the epidemic in China peaked and on February 2 and has been declining since. Tedros acknowledged that the hike in cases outside China had prompted a push for a pandemic to be declared.

U.S. DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Sanders faces brunt of attacks at debate in South Carolina

STEVE PEOPLES, MEG KINNARD & AAMER MADHANI
CHARLESTON, FEBRUARY 26

DEMOCRATS UNLEASHED a roaring assault against Bernie Sanders and seized on Mike Bloomberg's past with women in the workplace during a contentious debate that tested the strength of the two men at the center of the party's presidential nomination fight.

As the undeniable Democratic front-runner, Sanders faced the brunt of the attacks for much of the night, and for one of the few times, fellow progressive Elizabeth Warren was among the critics. The Massachusetts senator pressed the case that she could execute ideas that the Vermont senator could only talk about.

"Bernie and I agree on a lot of things," she said. "But I think I would make a better president than Bernie."

A group of moderates, meanwhile, fought to emerge as the chief Sanders alternative.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, who is seeking a strong win in South Carolina to keep his campaign afloat, argued only he has the experience to lead in the world. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar repeatedly contended that she alone could win the votes of battleground state moderates. And former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg pointed to Sanders' self-described democratic socialism and his recent comments expressing admiration for Cuban dictator Fidel Castro's push for education.

"I am not looking forward to a scenario where it comes down to Donald Trump with his nostalgia for the social order of the 1950s and Bernie Sanders with a nostalgia for the revolutionary politics of the 1960s," Buttigieg declared.

But the moderates did little to draw separation among themselves, a dynamic that has so far only benefited the Vermont senator. Sanders fought back throughout the night, pointing to



Democratic 2020 US presidential candidates Michael Bloomberg, Pete Buttigieg, Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden, Amy Klobuchar and Tom Steyer in Charleston, South Carolina, on Tuesday. Reuters

HEAT ON BERNIE

Bernie and I agree on a lot of things, but I think I would make a better president than Bernie... We need a president who is going to dig in and actually do the hard work.

ELIZABETH WARREN

Vladimir Putin thinks that Donald Trump should be president of the United States and that's why Russia is helping you (Bernie Sanders) get elected, so you lose to him.

MICHAEL BLOOMBERG

If you think the last four years has been chaotic, divisive, toxic, exhausting, imagine spending the better part of 2020 with Bernie Sanders versus Donald Trump.

PETE BUTTIGIEG

We are looking at a party that has decided we're either going to support someone who is a democratic socialist (Sanders) or someone who has a long history of being a Republican (Bloomberg).

TOM STEYER

SANDERS HAS HIS SAY

If you want to beat Trump, what you're going to need is an unprecedented grassroots movement of black and white and Latino, Native American and Asian, people who are standing up and fighting for justice. That's what our movement is about.

BERNIE SANDERS

polls that showed him beating the Republican president and noting all the recent attention

he's gotten: "I'm hearing my name mentioned a little bit tonight. I wonder why." AP

Anti-migrant party leader to be Slovenia PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LJUBLJANA, FEBRUARY 26

THE LEADER of an anti-migrant party was nominated on Wednesday as prime minister of Slovenia, setting him on track for a return to high office after a nearly seven-year absence.

"I hope our collaboration will be constructive and for the benefit of our state and our people," President Borut Pahor said after nominating Janez Jansa for premier.

Parliament has yet to confirm Jansa as the premier, which is expected to happen next week.

Jansa's Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) party announced on Tuesday that it had agreed with three other parties to form a coalition government.

The previous centre-left government fell in January when then premier Marjan Sarec stepped down amid infighting in his minority five-party coalition.

Along-time leader of the anti-migrant SDS and ally of Hungarian nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Jansa, 61, led two previous governments before being forced to step down in 2013 over a corruption scandal.

Pak govt declares Sharif absconder for violating terms of his bail: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 26

PAKISTAN'S FORMER prime minister Nawaz Sharif has been declared an "absconder" by the government for violating the bail requirements by not presenting his medical report from his doctors in London, according to a media report on Wednesday.

Sharif, 70, left for London in November last for treatment after the Lahore High Court allowed him to go abroad on medical grounds for four weeks.

According to Sharif's physician, the three-time prime minister is suffering from complex multi-vessel coronary artery disease and substantial ischemic and threatened myocardium for which he is due to undergo surgery.

The government on Tuesday decided not to extend the bail of Sharif and declared him an "absconder" for violating the bail requirements by not presenting his medical report before a board formed on the order of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), Dawn newspaper reported.



Sharif, 70, left for London in November for treatment

The decisions were taken at a meeting of the federal Cabinet presided by PM Imran Khan.

"After Nawaz Sharif failed to submit his medical report of any hospital in London, the medical board rejected a medical certificate sent by him and (the government) declared him an absconder," Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information Firdous Ashiq Awan said at a post-Cabinet meeting press conference.

"From today, Nawaz Sharif is an absconder according to the law of land and if he does not return to the country he will be declared a proclaimed offender," Awan said.

German court scraps ban on assisted suicide

REUTERS
KARLSRUHE, FEBRUARY 26

A GERMAN law that bans assisted suicide services breaches the constitution, the country's top court ruled on Wednesday in a landmark decision in favour of groups that help people die when they choose.

The plaintiffs wanted to overturn a law that has since 2015 outlawed assisted suicide undertaken by organisations or doctors who accepted a fee for their help.

"The prohibition of assisted suicide services...violates the Basic Law and is void," the Constitutional Court in



The Second Senate of the Federal Constitutional Court announced the ruling in Karlsruhe, Germany, Wednesday. AP

Karlsruhe said in its ruling. Lawmakers must now draw up new rules to reflect the decision.

Euthanasia is particularly sensitive in Germany due to the

legacy of the Holocaust, when Nazis killed and carried out inhumane experiments on Jews.

Because of existing German law, some people seek euthanasia via relatives or go abroad.

In its ruling, the court said Germany's constitution includes a right to a self-determined death which encompasses the freedom to take one's own life and use assistance provided voluntarily by third parties.

This decision by an individual must be respected, the court said. Some had argued against changing the law, fearing premature action in cases not properly based on a wish to die.

Only a few countries in the world have legalised euthanasia whereby a doctor administers lethal doses of drugs to patients willing to die, or people perform the action themselves.

Harvard's expansive use of race in admissions violates civil rights law: US Supreme Court told

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 26

THE "EXPANSIVE use of race" in the admission process of the prestigious Harvard University violates the civil rights law, the Trump administration has told the US Supreme Court as the justice department continues its probe into the allegations that

the Ivy League college discriminated against Asian-Americans.

The US Department of Justice (DOJ) in 2017 launched an investigation into Harvard's admission process after a complaint was filed by more than 60 Asian-American organisations.

Indian-Americans feel that they get discriminated by the Massachusetts-based university under its current admission pol-

icy. The investigation is underway.

Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband for the Civil Rights Division said that race discrimination hurts people and is never benign after the DOJ on Monday filed an amicus brief in Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. versus President and Fellows of Harvard College.

In its amicus brief, the US explains that Harvard's expansive use of race in its admissions

process violates federal civil rights law and Supreme Court precedent.

"Unconstitutionally partitioning Americans into racial and ethnic blocs harms all involved by fostering stereotypes, bitterness and division among the American people. The Department of Justice will continue to fight against illegal race discrimination," Dreiband said. PTI

BIOLOGISTS AND AN ASTRONOMER COLLABORATE TO LOOK INTO HOW SOLAR WEATHER AFFECTS WHALE MIGRATION

Study examines bizarre correlation between sunspots and stranded whales

JOSHUA SOKOL
FEBRUARY 26

AS AN astronomer at Chicago's Adler Planetarium, Lucianne Walkowicz usually has to stretch to connect the peculiarities of space physics with things that people experience on Earth.

Then came the email about whales.

Sönke Johnsen, a biologist at Duke University, told Walkowicz that his team had stumbled upon a bizarre correlation: When the surface of the sun was pocked

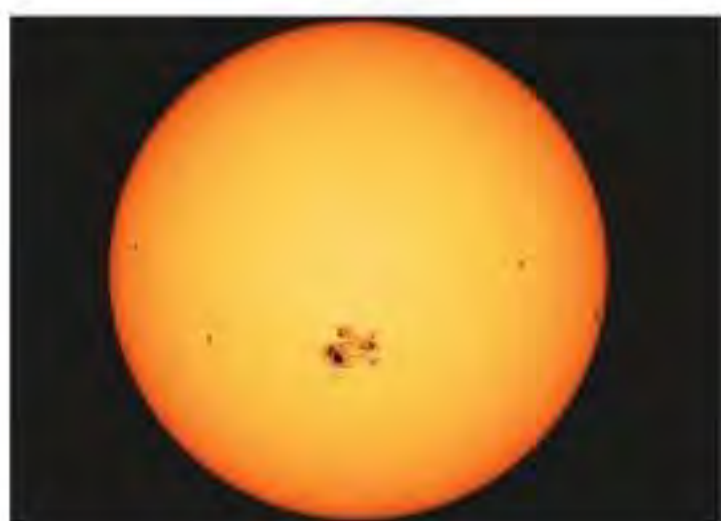
with dark sunspots, an indicator of solar storms, gray whales and other cetacean species seemed more likely to strand themselves on beaches. The team just needed an astronomer's help wrangling the data. "This was like a dream request," Walkowicz said. "And I finally got to do something in marine biology, even though I didn't study it."

With that assistance, there is some evidence of this peculiar correlation, the researchers said in a paper published Monday in Current Biology.

"The study convinced me

there is a relationship between solar activity and whale strandings," said Kenneth Lohmann, a biologist at the University of North Carolina who did not participate in the research.

This coincidence across 93 million miles of space is more plausible than it might seem. Sunspots are a harbinger of heightened solar weather, marking times when the tangled plasma of the sun's atmosphere coughs out more photons and charged particles than usual. These disturbances sail outward and smash into our planet's magnetic field, creating colorful



Sunspots are an indication of solar storms. NASA via NYT

light shows like the aurora borealis and sometimes disrupting communications.

Biologists have already demonstrated that many animals can navigate by somehow

sensing Earth's magnetic field lines. Gray whales, which migrate over 10,000 miles a year through a featureless expanse of blue, might be relying on a similar hidden sense. But unlike a migrating bird, a whale is not easily placed in a magnetised box for controlled experiments.

Instead, Jesse Granger, a Duke University graduate student, looked at whale strandings, which previous studies had suggested seemed to track with sunspot activity.

Sunspot activity waxes and wanes, oscillating over an 11-year

period. These strandings followed the same pattern. "They showed the exact same cycle as the sunspots," Granger said.

Granger noted that the research won't help stop whale strandings. "I'm really trying to make sure that I don't get someone who hears this story and is like, 'Oh, I can start blasting sonar wherever I want, because it's only the sunspots,'" Granger said.

Instead, she hopes to unlock the secrets of magnetic navigation. Aside from sunspot counts, the team also compared strandings with two other markers that

also accompany solar squalls. One measure, of how much Earth's magnetic field was distorted on a given day as it was buffeted by particles from the sun, didn't seem to matter. But whales appeared to be most sensitive to solar radio frequency noise that intensified during solar storms.

That correlation, if confirmed, suggests that the radio noise is jamming the gray whales' hypothesized magnetic sensors. Alternatively, Lohmann said, solar activity might also be affecting some other part of whale physiology. NYT