

15 THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Ali Khamenei

IRAN

'Need to increase military might to prevent war'

Dubai: Iran should increase its military might to prevent a war, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told a gathering of air force commanders on Saturday, dismissing the US sanctions on the country as "criminal act". "We should be strong to prevent any war against the county. Being weak will encourage our enemies to attack Iran," Khamenei, Iran's top authority, said. "Since the revolution their (US's) aim was to stop us from having a strong military and a strong air force ... but look at us now. We even build planes. We have transformed their pressure to opportunity," Khamenei said.

PAKISTAN

Court defers verdict against Hafiz Saeed

Lahore: A Pakistani anti-terrorism court Saturday deferred its verdict against Mumbai attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed in two terror financing cases on his "request" and adjourned the hearing till Tuesday. Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Lahore judge Arshad Hussain Bhutta had last week reserved the verdict against Saeed in two terror financing cases for Saturday. "The ATC judge on Saturday took up the application of Hafiz Saeed requesting the court to club all four terror financing cases against him and announce the verdict after the trial is completed," a court official told PTI.

WEST BANK

Protester killed amid unrest over Mideast plan

Jerusalem: A Palestinian protester was shot dead in the West Bank on Friday as Palestinian and US leaders blamed each other for violence that erupted after President Donald Trump unveiled a Middle East Peace plan that Palestinians rejected as one sided. Protesters and Israeli security forces have repeatedly clashed since the peace proposals were unveiled by Trump, with Israel's prime minister at his side. Friday's killing raised the Palestinian death toll to four. More than a dozen Israelis have been wounded in car-rammings and shooting attacks since the Trump proposal.

U.S. WOMAN, JAPANESE MAN DEAD; CORONAVIRUS CASES AT 34,598

Virus outbreak claims first foreign casualties in China, toll rises to 723

Three more test positive on board quarantined ship off coast of Japan

AGENCIES BEIJING, FEBRUARY 8

AN AMERICAN woman and a Japanese man became the first foreigners to have died from the new coronavirus in China as the death toll jumped to 723 in the country with the confirmed cases soaring to 34,598, health officials said on Saturday.

The American citizen died in Wuhan, the US embassy here said on Saturday, the first confirmed foreign death from the outbreak. "We can confirm that a 60-year-old US citizen diagnosed with coronavirus died at Jinyintang hospital in Wuhan, China on February 6," a US embassy spokesman said.

"We offer sincerest condolences to the family for their loss," Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post quoted the spokesman as saying.

The New York Times reported that the person was a woman and had underlying health conditions, citing two people familiar with the matter.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said earlier that 19 foreign nationals in China have been confirmed to have contracted the virus and undergoing treatment

in hospitals. Two of them were discharged after recovery, the ministry said without disclosing details. Earlier reports said that four Pakistanis and two Australians contracted the virus.

Though the US woman is officially stated to be the first foreigner to have died due to the coronavirus, a Japanese man hospitalised in Wuhan with pneumonia has also died, the Japan's foreign ministry announced in Tokyo.

The Ministry citing Chinese medical authorities said on Saturday the man in his 60s, was possibly infected with the coronavirus but due to difficulties in diagnosing the disease his death had been attributed to viral pneumonia. His cause of death was given as viral pneumonia, it added. The man is potentially the first Japanese to have died from coronavirus, it said.

Meanwhile, a central government inspection group has arrived in Wuhan to thoroughly investigate issues related to Dr Li Wenliang, the whistleblower who was admonished by police last month when he flagged the coronavirus in his special media.

The inspection team would probe the issues related to Li, an ophthalmologist with the



Workers in protective suits ride on a truck carrying medical supplies to a hospital in Hubei province. AP

Central Hospital of Wuhan, who passed away early Friday after being infected with the novel coronavirus, official media reported.

Cruise ship testing

Three more people on a cruise ship off Japan have tested positive for the new coronavirus, bringing the number aboard to 64, the government said Saturday, with passengers facing a two-week quarantine.

The latest confirmation came

a day after an additional 41 passengers were found to have contracted the virus.

Japanese authorities have so far tested about 280 people on board the Diamond Princess, which was quarantined after a former passenger who disembarked in Hong Kong last month was diagnosed with the virus.

Test results from six more people were released on Saturday, with three of them confirmed infected, the health ministry said.

IN ITS FIGHT, CHINA TURNS TO AI, DATA

Beijing is turning to a familiar set of tools to find and prevent potential infections: data tracking and artificial intelligence

Several tech firms have developed apps to help people check if they have taken the same flight or train as confirmed patients, scraping data from lists published by the state media

Use big data tech to track, screen priority (cases), and effectively forecast development of the epidemic in real time, China's National Health Commission (NHC) said in a release

In Beijing, a system developed by Chinese search giant Baidu screens travellers at Qinghe railway station using infrared and face detection technology

If someone has a body temperature of 37.3 degrees Celsius or above, the system sets off an alarm — prompting a secondary check by station staff.

Definitely not prepared for outbreak: Africa scrambles to take precautions

ASSOCIATED PRESS LUSAKA, FEBRUARY 8

AT A Chinese-run hospital in Zambia, some employees watched as people who recently returned from China showed up with coughs but were not placed in isolation. A doctor tending to those patients has stopped coming to work, and health workers have been ordered not to speak publicly about the virus.

The virus that has spread through much of China has yet to be confirmed in Africa, but global health authorities are in-



In Kitwe, Zambia. AP

creasingly worried about the threat to the continent where an estimated 1 million Chinese now live, as some health work-

ers on the ground warn they are not ready to handle an outbreak.

Countries are racing to take precautions as hundreds of travellers arrive from China every day. Safeguards include stronger surveillance at ports of entry and improved quarantine and testing measures across Africa, home to 1.2 billion people and some of the world's weakest systems for detecting and treating disease.

But the effort has been complicated by a critical shortage of testing kits and numerous illnesses that display symptoms similar to the flu-like virus.

"The problem is, even if it's mild, it can paralyse the whole community," said Dr Michel Yao, emergency operations manager in Africa for the World Health Organization.

"We're definitely not prepared. If we had a couple of cases, it would spread very quickly," physiotherapist Fundi Sinkala said.

"We're doing the best we can with what resources we have." The Sino-Zambia Friendship Hospital has taken precautions, including checking temperatures with infrared thermometers and establishing isolation areas.

Pak court rules marriage with underage girl valid as she had 1st menstrual cycle

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA KARACHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE PARENTS of a 14-year-old Pakistani Christian girl, who was abducted, forcibly converted to Islam and married off to her abductor, will approach the Supreme Court after a lower court ruled that marriage with an underage girl is valid as per the Sharia law if she has had her first menstrual cycle.

Huma was 14 when she was abducted in October last year and forced to marry her abductor Abdul Jabbar after being converted to Islam, according to her parents Younis and Nagheena Masih.

Their counsel Tabassum Yousof on Friday said they would seek justice from the Supreme Court after the Sindh High Court, as per the Sharia law, said earlier this week that even if the girl, Huma, was found to be underage, the marriage between her and her alleged abductor, Jabbar, would be valid as she has already had her first menstrual cycle.

"The girl's parents were convinced that the police investigating officer was supporting Abdul Jabbar and his family. They also fear test results of Huma's age could be falsified and she might be sent with her husband," the lawyer said.

Trump begins post-acquittal purge by firing impeachment witnesses

NEW YORK TIMES WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 8

PRESIDENT TRUMP wasted little time on Friday opening a campaign of retribution against those he blames for his impeachment, firing two of the most prominent witnesses in the House inquiry against him barely 48 hours after being acquitted by the Senate.

Emboldened by his victory and determined to strike back, Trump ordered Gordon D Sondland, the founder of a hotel chain who donated \$1 million to the president's inaugural committee, recalled from his post as the ambassador to the European Union on the same day that Lt



President Donald Trump at the White House. AP

Col Alexander S Vindman, a decorated Iraq war veteran on the National Security Council staff, was marched out of the White House by security guards.

The ousters of Sondland and Colonel Vindman — along with Vindman's brother, Lt Col Yevgeny Vindman, an Army officer who also worked on the National Security Council staff — may only presage a broader effort

to even accounts with the president's perceived enemies. In the two days since his acquittal in the Senate, Trump has railed about those who stood against him, calling them "evil," "corrupt" and "crooked," while his press secretary declared that those who hurt the president "should pay for" it.

Trump attacked Vindman in a tweet on Saturday. "Fake News @CNN & MSDNC keep talking about Lt. Col. Vindman as though I should think only how wonderful he was," Trump wrote. "Actually, I don't know him, never spoke to him, or met him (I don't believe!) but, he was very insubordinate, reported contents of my 'perfect calls' incorrectly." "In other words, 'OUT'."

STANDOFF CONTINUES AT SHOPPING MALL

Thai soldier kills 17, takes hostages; broadcasts attack on Facebook

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA BANGKOK, FEBRUARY 8

A THAI soldier remained holed up in a shopping mall Saturday after gunning down at least 17 people, emergency services said, in an attack relayed through Facebook posts.

The attack in the northeastern city of Nakhon Ratchasima began late in the afternoon at an army barracks, police told AFP.

Three people were killed — among them at least one soldier — when Sergeant-Major Jakrapanth Thommas opened fire. "He stole an army vehicle and drove into the town centre," police Lieutenant-Colonel Mongkol Kuptasiri.

Local media reported the gunman seized weapons from the army arsenal before embarking on a shooting spree in the centre of the town. In a fast-moving incident, authorities could not confirm local media reports the gunman had taken up to 16 hostages.

There were "17 deaths, 14 wounded" late Saturday, said an unnamed spokesperson from Bangkok's Erawan Center — the dispatch centre for emergency services across the country.

Video and photos circulating online relayed panicked scenes on a main road in the city — which is better known as Korat. People fled while at least one fire roared and



A screenshot of a video shot outside the mall. Reuters

what appeared to be the sound of automatic gunfire filled the air.

The gunman also posted photos of himself and wrote several posts on his Facebook page including "should I surrender" and "no one can escape death".

In one Facebook video — since deleted — the assailant, wearing an army helmet, filmed from an open jeep saying, "I'm tired... I can't pull my finger anymore" and making a trigger symbol with his hand. There were also photos of a man in a ski mask holding up a pistol.

"The gunman used a machine gun and shot innocent victims resulting in many injured and dead," spokesman Krissana Pattanacharoen told AFP, adding that the standing toll was "more than 10." The defence ministry said forces have sealed off the Terminal 21 shopping centre but have yet to capture the suspect.

Sanders, Buttigieg face criticism in Democrat debate

JAMES OLIPHANT & MICHAEL MARTINA MANCHESTER, FEBRUARY 8

DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL contenders Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg, the top finishers in Iowa's first nominating contest, faced a barrage of criticism on Friday from rivals who said they did not have what it takes to beat Republican Donald Trump in November.

In a heated debate in New Hampshire just four days before the state's pivotal primary, their Democratic rivals questioned whether Sanders' democratic social views and Buttigieg's relative lack of experience and lack of support with African-Americans and Latinos made them too much of a risk for the November 3 election.

Sanders, 78, a US senator and leader of the party's progressive wing, and Buttigieg, the 38-year-old former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, finished in a virtual dead heat in Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucuses earlier this week.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, the one-time national front-runner who finished a disappointing fourth in Iowa, delivered his most aggressive performance yet. He said Trump would have an easy time ripping into Sanders in a general election campaign, and Sanders would drag down other Democratic candi-

EXPLAINED Pivotal ballot, more intensity

AFTER confusion around the Iowa primary, the debate in New Hampshire was a sign of increasing intensity. While some candidates such as Sanders and Buttigieg fended off attacks after emerging in the lead, Biden sought to recover his with renewed energy, while others sought to make their mark. While such intensity is normal in the primaries, some have voiced concern about ensuring that the Democrat voter base is consolidated against Trump, and not divided internally.

dates in federal and state races. Biden and candidate Amy Klobuchar also questioned whether Buttigieg had enough experience to face off with Trump. Buttigieg said the Washington insider experience of some rivals was no longer what was needed, and it was time to "turn the page" on Washington politics. REUTERS

'A BULLET IS RESERVED FOR YOU', READ ONE OF NUMEROUS THREATS

A onetime 'refugee child', now a justice minister, takes on Austria's far right

KATRIN BENNHOLD VIENNA, FEBRUARY 8

ALMA ZADIC is nervous about standing too close to the row of large windows in her office. Since becoming Austria's justice minister, the threats have been relentless. "A bullet is reserved for you," read a recent one. Hours after being sworn in last month, Zadic was given police protection.

A daughter of Bosnian refugees and member of the progressive Green Party, Zadic went into politics three years ago with a clear goal: to fight an ascendant far right.

Now, she is charged with defending policies that were codedesigned by the far right in previous years to effectively keep people like her parents out of the country.

That, in a nutshell, is the moral dilemma facing Austria's liberal pro-refugee Greens in joining forces with the conservatives of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. The Greens have replaced the far-right Freedom Party as junior partners in government and get to put climate change on the political agenda. But they are also becoming complicit in Kurz's hard-right immigration policy.

No one personifies this

Faustian pact more starkly than Zadic, Austria's first justice minister with a migrant background. ("A migrant foreground," she corrects me. "It is the first thing about me that people see.")

Her story is in many ways a modern day fairy tale: A refugee girl excels at school, rises fast in her career, is elected to Parliament and becomes a senior member of the Cabinet at 35. But what has made Zadic a hero to many has turned her into a target for others. "Now foreigners get ministerial posts. Austria's Downfall," scoffed one Twitter post.

"Why don't we just put a ter-



A Syrian refugee from Damascus, is welcomed with bubbles upon her arrival in Vienna. NYT/File

rorist in charge of Homeland Security?" another sneered.

The price of going into government was high, both personally and politically. Zadic admitted in an interview one recent evening. But the price of not going into government — of ceding the field to the far right again — would have been much higher, she insists. "It makes a difference who is in government," Zadic said.

Zadic knows this firsthand. She was a teenager in 2000, when the Freedom Party first joined a conservative government under the charismatic and anti-Semitic firebrand Jörg

Haider. Other European capitals froze diplomatic ties with Vienna, while her parents, both engineers, feared they might be deported. "I was still young, but I could feel it," she recalled. "I know my parents worried and had concrete fears about what would happen to us."

Critics warn that the Greens risk becoming a fig leaf for Kurz's hard right agenda. In the governing program, a modest carbon tax on airplane tickets and subsidies for public transport side by side with a headscarf ban for girls up to 14, deportation centers and a controversial new form of "security

detention" for asylum-seekers.

As for Zadic, even friends feel conflicted. "She has a mission impossible," said Stephanie Krisper, a lawmaker from centrist party Neos. For Zadic it is more complicated than that. "In opposition we could have written the most beautiful idealistic proposals, and they would have gone nowhere," she said.

Kurz won 37% of the votes, the Greens only 14, she noted. Between the ballots cast for Kurz's party and the Freedom Party, Austria still has a conservative majority. "We will do our best," she said. NYT