

TOP OF THE WORLD

PAKISTAN
Pak to ask UK to deport Sharif

Lahore: Pakistan will request the British government to deport Nawaz Sharif, a senior official said while alleging that the "absconding" former prime minister was playing a "fixed match" regarding his illness while in London. Casting doubts on the illness of the 70-year-old three-time former prime minister, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information, Firdous Ashiq Awan, said Sharif has neither undergone any heart surgery nor was he admitted to hospital for any emergency during the last three months. Sharif left for London in November for treatment after the Lahore High Court allowed him to go abroad on medical grounds for four weeks.

PAKISTAN
Doctor who helped nab Bin Laden launches hunger strike

Islamabad: The Pakistani doctor who helped the CIA track and kill Osama bin Laden has launched a hunger strike from his prison cell, his lawyer and family said Monday. Shakeel Afridi has been languishing behind bars for years since his fake vaccination programme helped US agents track and kill the Al Qaeda leader in 2011. "It is to protest the injustices and inhumane attitudes being committed against him and his family," his brother Jamil Afridi said after meeting with Afridi in a prison in central Punjab province. His attorney Qamar Nadeem also confirmed the hunger strike.

KOREAN PENINSULA
N Korea fires two missiles

Seoul: North Korea fired two short-range missiles off the east coast into the sea on Monday, resuming testing after a three-month pause, South Korea's military said. The missiles were launched from the eastern coastal city of Wonsan and flew 240 km (149 miles) and reached 35 km in altitude, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said. North Korea has launched a series of missiles from the area in the past. The North appears to be continuing a firing drill that leader Kim Jong Un oversaw last Friday, the JCS said.

CORONAVIRUS: WUHAN SHUTS SPECIAL HOSPITAL AFTER ALL PATIENTS DISCHARGED

Death toll tops 3,000; South Korea seeks murder charges over outbreak

HYONHEE SHIN & SE YOUNG LEE
SEOUL, BEIJING, MARCH 2

SOUTH KOREA sought murder charges against leaders of a secretive church at the heart of its ballooning coronavirus outbreak on Monday as the global death toll rose above 3,000 and the Chinese province at the epicentre reported a fall in new cases.

The global death toll was up to 3,044, according to a Reuters tally. In the largest outbreak outside China, South Korea has had 26 deaths and reported another 599 infections on Monday, taking its tally to 4,335 following Saturday's biggest daily jump.

Of the new cases in South Korea, 377 were from the city of Daegu, home to a branch of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, to which most of South Korea's cases have been traced after some members visited China's Wuhan city where the disease emerged.

The Seoul government asked prosecutors to launch a murder investigation into leaders of the church, a movement that reveres founder Lee Man-hee. Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon said that if Lee and other heads of the church had cooperated, preventive measures could have stopped fatalities.

Wuhan, at the centre of the epidemic in Hubei province, closed the first of 16 specially built hospitals, hurriedly put up



The line outside the Louvre museum in Paris is empty on Monday after it was closed as the coronavirus spreads in Europe. AP

Iran: Council member close to Supreme Leader dies from virus

Tehran: Iranian state radio says a member of a council that advises Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has died after falling ill from the new coronavirus.

The report Monday said Expediency Council member Mohammad Mirmohammadi had died. He was 71.

The council advises Khamenei, as well as settles disputes between the supreme leader and parliament.

His death comes as other top officials have contracted the virus in Iran, which has the highest death toll — 66 — in the world after China. Iran has reported 1,501 confirmed cases. AP

to treat people with the virus, after it discharged its last recovered patients, state broadcaster

CCTV said on Monday. News of the closure coincided with a steep fall in new

PHILIPPINES: DAY-LONG STANDOFF COMES TO AN END

Sacked guard frees dozens after holding them hostage at mall

JIM GOMEZ & AARON FAVILA
MANILA, MARCH 2

A RECENTLY dismissed security guard freed dozens of hostages and was subdued by police after walking out of a shopping mall in the Philippine capital on Monday, ending a day-long hostage crisis in an upscale commercial district near the police and military headquarters, officials said.

The former guard at the Greenhills shopping centre, identified by police as Archie Paray, left the mall in San Juan City in metropolitan Manila with the remaining hostages, who were then secured by police. Several others had managed to escape earlier, police said.

Instead of being immediately arrested, the suspect was allowed to speak for several min-



Archie Paray (centre) comes out of the mall in Manila. AP

utes to journalists and authorities to describe his grievances against his former bosses, whom he accused of corruption and abuse, before police approached and subdued him.

There were between 60 to 70 hostages and people who were

trapped in the mall. The gunman shot and wounded a security officer at the V-Mall, before he rushed to the second floor and took the hostages, authorities said. The mall officer was in stable condition at a nearby hospital. AP

Israelis vote in third election in less than a year

ARON HELLER
JERUSALEM, MARCH 2

ISRAELIS VOTED Monday in an unprecedented third election in less than a year as a divided country has weathered two inconclusive votes and prolonged political paralysis. With opinion polls forecasting another dead-

lock, Netanyahu is seeking a late surge in support to score a parliamentary majority along with other nationalist parties that will give him a fourth consecutive term in office and fifth overall.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara cast their votes. AP

lock, Netanyahu is seeking a late surge in support to score a parliamentary majority along with other nationalist parties that will give him a fourth consecutive term in office and fifth overall.

He faces a stiff challenge once again from retired military chief Benny Gantz, whose centrist Blue and White party is running even with Netanyahu's Likud on a campaign message that the Prime

Minister is unfit to lead because of the serious charges against him.

Both parties appear unable to form a coalition with their traditional allies. With the prospect of a unity government between them seemingly off the table after a particularly nasty campaign, the vote may well turn into merely a preamble to another election.

"I hope that today marks the start of a healing process, where we can begin living together again," Gantz said upon casting his ballot in his hometown of Rosh Ha'ayin in central Israel, warning voters not to "get drawn in by the lies or by the violence" after the acrimonious campaign. AP

Seven Rohingya shot dead near Bangladesh refugee camp

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COX'S BAZAR, MARCH 2

BANGLADESHI ELITE police on Monday shot dead seven suspected Rohingya gangsters involved in drug and people smuggling, a spokesman for the force said.

Tensions are rising in south-east Bangladesh two and a half years after hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees fled a military offensive in Myanmar. The latest gunfight came after a recent spike in human smuggling as gangs lure refugees onto rickety fishing boats for often dangerous sea journeys to Malaysia.

The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) said it was involved in a three-hour shootout with members of a bandit group led by notorious Rohingya gang leader known as Zokir.

RUSSIA

PUTIN: ENSHRINE MARRIAGE IN CONSTITUTION

Russian President Vladimir Putin has submitted to Parliament a number of constitutional changes, including amendments that mention God and stipulate that marriage is a union of a man and woman. Putin in January unleashed a political storm by proposing an overhaul of the constitution, the first changes to the basic law since 1993.



2 DAYS AFTER SIGNING PEACE DEAL WITH U.S.

Taliban say they will resume offensive against Afghan forces

Period of calm ends with blast at football ground in Khost

AGENCIES
KABUL, MARCH 2

A DEADLY blast shattered a period of relative calm in Afghanistan on Monday and the Taliban ordered fighters to resume operations against Afghan forces just two days after signing a deal with Washington aimed at ushering in peace.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack at a football ground in Khost in eastern Afghanistan, where three brothers were killed, officials said.

The blast occurred around the same time the Taliban ordered fighters to recommence attacks against Afghan Army and police forces, apparently ending an official "reduction in violence" that had seen a dramatic drop in bloodshed and given Afghans a welcome taste of peace.

The partial truce between the US, the insurgents and Afghan forces lasted for the week running up to the signing of the US-Taliban accord in Doha on Saturday, and was extended over the weekend.

"The reduction in violence... has ended now and our operations will continue as normal," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said.

"As per the (US-Taliban)



Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar (right), leader of the Taliban delegation, and Zalmay Khalilzad, US envoy, after signing an agreement in Doha on Saturday. Reuters

Ghani warned the insurgents on Monday that he was not committed to a key clause in the Doha deal involving the release of thousands of Taliban prisoners

agreement, our mujahideen will not attack foreign forces but our operations will continue against the Kabul administration forces."

The Taliban's military com-

mission circulated instructions for fighters to resume operations. Soon after, an Afghan Army commander said the Taliban were attacking Army positions in the northwest province of Badghis. At least one soldier was killed.

President Ashraf Ghani on Sunday said he would continue the partial truce at least until talks between Afghan officials and the Taliban kick off, supposedly on March 10, though he angered the militants by rejecting a prisoner swap component in the deal.

Fawad Aman, a defence ministry spokesman, said Monday the government was "checking to see if (the truce) had ended".

Pete Buttigieg exits US Democratic presidential race

REID JEPSTEIN & TRIP GABRIEL
SOUTH BEND, MARCH 2

PETE BUTTIGIEG, a former small-city Indiana mayor and first openly gay major presidential candidate, said Sunday night he was dropping out of the Democratic race, following a crushing loss in the South Carolina primary where his poor performance with black Democrats signalled an inability to build a broad coalition of voters.

The decision comes just 48 hours before the biggest voting day of the primary, Super Tuesday, when 15 states and territories will allot a third of the delegates overall. The results were widely expected to show him finishing far behind Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders.

Buttigieg cancelled plans for a Sunday night rally in Dallas and a Monday morning fundraiser in Austin, Texas, to return to South Bend. "Sometimes the longest way around really is the shortest way home," he told supporters to loud cheers.

"The truth is that the path has narrowed to a close, for our candidacy if not for our cause," he said, adding, "Tonight I am making the difficult decision to suspend my campaign for the presidency." NYT



Pete Buttigieg

EXPLAINED
Super Tuesday boost for Biden

IN THE first two of the four states that have voted in the Democratic primaries so far, Buttigieg won more votes than Biden, who was seen as one of the front-runners for the nomination. However, disappointing performances in the last two states have resulted in Buttigieg quitting the race. This comes as a boost to Biden, who is likely to get a big share of Buttigieg supporters on his side as moderate Democrats seek to stop a Sanders win. Sanders, however, still remains ahead in polls ahead of Super Tuesday, the day on which 15 states hold primaries.



GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA
Sri Lankan President

Snap polls in Sri Lanka on April 25 after Parliament is dissolved

SRI LANKAN President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Monday dissolved Parliament six months ahead of schedule and called a snap election on April 25.

He signed the Gazette notification dissolving Parliament, the Government Printers Department said. The current Parliament was appointed on September 1, 2015.

Gotabaya sacked Parliament after the minimum term of four-and-a-half years necessary to dissolve it was completed on midnight Sunday.

According to the notification, elections will be held on April 25 and the new Parliament will have its first session on May 14.

Gotabaya, who named his elder brother and former strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister of the caretaker Cabinet in December, earlier said he wanted two-thirds seats in the 225-member assembly.

'CHRIST LED ME TO MARX... FOR ME, THE FOUR GOSPELS ARE ALL EQUALLY COMMUNIST'

Ernesto Cardenal, Nicaraguan priest, poet and revolutionary, dies at 95

ELIAS E LOPEZ
MARCH 2

THE REV Ernesto Cardenal, one of Latin America's most admired poets and priests, who defied the Roman Catholic Church in the 1980s by serving in the revolutionary Sandinista government of Nicaragua, died Sunday in Managua, Nicaragua. He was 95.

His personal assistant, Luz Marina Acosta, confirmed his death to The Associated Press. Born to a wealthy Nicaraguan family, Cardenal became a prominent intellectual voice of the

Nicaraguan revolution and an ardent proponent of liberation theology, a Christian movement rooted in Marxist principles and committed to social justice and uplifting the poor. He was appointed Nicaragua's first minister of culture after the Sandinistas overthrew dictator Gen. Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979.

As the Vatican's opposition to liberation theology intensified in the 1980s under Pope John Paul II, Cardenal became a focal point. Before a scheduled visit to Nicaragua in 1983, the pope publicly demanded that Cardenal and four other priests who had actively

supported the revolution resign their government positions. The Sandinista government refused the demand to replace them.

After months of public arguing, the pope accepted the invitation and landed in Managua, Nicaragua's capital. As he walked along a receiving line on the tarmac shaking hands, the pope seemed taken aback to see Cardenal among the dignitaries.

While other priests were in clerical garb, Cardenal had shown up wearing a collarless white shirt, slacks and his signature black beret over his thick white hair. When he knelt to kiss the pope's ring, the



In the 1980s, he served as a minister in the revolutionary government of Nicaragua

pope withheld his hand and wagged his finger at him as he spoke to him, apparently sternly.

Videotape of the scolding, though not audible, was broadcast around the world. "Christ led me to Marx,"

describes how Monroe was found on her deathbed in 1962, "like someone wounded by gangsters/stretching out his hand to a disconnected telephone."

Fascinated by evolution and its lessons for politics, Cardenal began to incorporate science into his poetry in the 1980s. He developed the theme until the end of his life, marveling at the origins of the universe and the mysteries of DNA — sources of awe that in his vision brought people closer to God.

Ernesto Cardenal Martínez was born Jan 20, 1925, to an upper-class family in Granada, a city on Lake Nicaragua. He studied lit-

erature in Managua and at Columbia University in New York. He returned to Nicaragua in the 1950s, but after a failed coup against the Somoza family, he fled and joined the Trappist monastery Gethsemani, in Kentucky.

Cardenal was an early supporter of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, which was founded in the early 1960s. He furthered the cause after settling on an island in the Solentiname archipelago, in vast Lake Nicaragua near the southern border, in the 1960s. He built a chapel, founded an artists colony, and taught literature and painting to local residents. NYT