

# NEWSIN brief

## Rakhine leader gets 20 yrs for treason

AFP, Sittwe  
A Myanmar court yesterday sentenced a prominent ethnic Rakhine leader to 20 years in jail for treason, a verdict likely to intensify anger amid fighting between the ethnic group and the army. Aye Maung, the former chairman of the Arakan National Party -- which is renowned for hardline views against the Rohingya Muslim minority -- was sentenced for treason and defamation over an allegedly inflammatory speech in January 2018, a day before deadly riots.

## Kazakh president to resign after 29 yrs

AFP, Astana  
Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev announced his shock resignation yesterday, 29 years after taking office. The move comes on the back of growing social discontent and an economy still recovering from an oil price plunge in 2014. Nazarbayev will enjoy significant policy-making powers following his resignation thanks to his constitutional status as "Leader of the Nation". He also became lifelong head of the country's security council last year.

## IS defeat 'very soon'

REUTERS, Deir Al-zor Province  
U S-backed Syrian forces said they were close to defeating Islamic State in its final scrap of territory at Baghouz after seizing an encampment from the jihadists yesterday, though the battle was not over yet. The SDF captured hundreds of wounded militants. It also captured 157 mostly foreign fighters.

## BITS OF HISTORY (MARCH 19)

**1920:** US refused to ratify the Versailles Treaty, and so join the League of Nations, for fear of being drawn into war if another member country was invaded.  
**1930:** Arthur Balfour, British Conservative PM, dies. He is known for the Balfour Declaration he made as foreign secretary in 1917, which promised Jewish people a homeland in Palestine.  
**1932:** Australia's Sydney Harbour Bridge opens.



A woman sits quietly across the road from the Masjid Al Noor mosque yesterday in Christchurch, New Zealand, where worshippers were gunned down three days ago. Inset, A poster hangs at a memorial site for victims of Friday's shooting.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

## TRAM ATTACK IN NETHERLANDS

# Terror motive being probed

REUTERS, Amsterdam

Dutch prosecutors yesterday said they were investigating a possible terrorist motive behind the shooting on a tram in the city of Utrecht in which three people were killed and five wounded. A Turkish-born man, 37-year-old Gokmen Tanis, was arrested after a seven-hour manhunt on Monday by security forces and remained in custody.

Prosecutors said he is suspected of three fatal shootings, possibly with terrorist intent. Two other suspects were also in custody, police said, but their role was unclear.

"Up to this point, a terrorist motive is seriously being considered," prosecutors said in a statement, citing "the nature of the shooting and a letter found in the getaway car."

But it remained unclear whether Tanis, who has a history of run-ins with law enforcement, was acting on political beliefs or a personal vendetta. "Other motives are not being ruled out," the statement said.



Under Dutch law Tanis must be brought before a judge by Thursday but does not yet have to be charged.

The three Dutch victims were identified as a 19-year-old woman and two men aged 28 and 49. Three others, ranging from 20 to 74 years old, were critically injured in the shooting.

Prosecutors said they had so far not been able to establish a connection between the victims and the suspected

gunman.

Mahmut Tanis, an uncle of Tanis who lives in the Netherlands, told Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency that he doubted radical motives. Tanis had previously been arrested, prosecutors said, but have declined to provide details.

There was no immediate comment from Tanis or any lawyer representing him.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte convened crisis talks immediately after the incident, which came three days after a lone gunman killed 50 people in mass shootings at two mosques in the city of Christchurch, New Zealand.

Utrecht went into lockdown in the aftermath of Monday's shooting on a tram just after the morning rush hour.

London, Paris and several other European cities have suffered militant attacks over the past years which have killed hundreds of people and authorities are on high alert.

Flags flew at half mast on government buildings across the Netherlands yesterday in tribute to the victims.

# Tackle internet extremism

## Australian PM pushes G20

AFP, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has called on world leaders to press technology firms to tackle the "ungoverned" space of extremist internet content in the wake of the Christchurch terror attack.

In a letter published yesterday, the Australian leader asked the G20 summit host, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, that the issue be raised when leaders gather in Osaka this June.

He has also taken aim at tech companies for their seeming inability to stop the propagation of extremist content, such as live footage shot by the gunman as he rampaged through the Al Noor mosque.

"They've created these capabilities, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, they're available for peaceful and happy purposes, but we do know that they can be used and weaponised by terrorists of any description," he told the press.

"If you can write an algorithm to make sure that the ads they want you to see can appear on your mobile phone, then I'm quite confident they can write an algorithm to screen out hate content on social media platforms."

"I'm sure we can work together to make sure they protect our citizens by ensuring that their tools that they have developed are not used by terrorists as weapons to advance their agendas of hate," he said.

Opposition leader Bill Shorten backed that call, telling social media platforms: "If you help create the swamp, you can't go missing when evil things start crawling out of it."

# Paris ties S'pore, HK as world's priciest cities

## Caracas named as the cheapest

AFP, Singapore

Paris has climbed to the top of the world's priciest city for expatriates, tied first with Singapore and Hong Kong according to a survey yesterday that named the capital of strife-torn Venezuela as the cheapest.

The French capital was the only eurozone city in the top 10, rising from second most expensive last year and from seventh position two years ago.

Paris is "extremely expensive to live in", with an average two-piece business suit for men setting buyers back around \$2,000 and a typical women's haircut costing \$120, it found.

Only "alcohol, transport and tobacco" offer value for money compared with other European cities, the survey said.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) said it was the first time in the more than three decades of the survey that three cities were equally ranked top, after Singapore led the chart outright a year earlier.

The top ten list was dominated by Asian and European cities, with Osaka and Seoul in joint fifth and joint seventh places respectively, and Zurich (4th), Geneva (joint 5th) and Copenhagen (joint 7th) also in the elite club.

North America was represented by the US cities of New York, seventh, and Los Angeles, tied 10th with Israel's Tel Aviv.

Currency appreciation, inflation and devaluation as well as political upheaval played a part in this year's rankings, said EIU, which surveyed 133 cities worldwide.

It compared 400 individual prices across 160 products and services, including food and drink, clothing, home rental, transport, schooling and recreation.

The survey is aimed at helping companies calculate compensation packages and allowances for expatriate staff and business travellers.

Venezuela's capital Caracas dethroned Syria's capital Damascus as the world's cheapest city, said EIU.



People wave hands at a chopper on Monday as they remain stranded on a roof surrounded by flooding in an area affected by Cyclone Idai, which hit the area on March 14, in Beira, Mozambique. The cyclone that ripped across Mozambique and Zimbabwe has killed at least 162 people. Rescue workers in Mozambique were racing against time to pluck people off trees and rooftops yesterday as fear grows for more than 1,000 missing.

PHOTO: AFP

## NZ MOSQUE MASSACRE

### Kiwis give up guns

New Zealanders have begun handing in weapons in response to government appeals following the Christchurch massacre. John Hart, a farmer in the North Island district of Masterton, decided to give his semi-automatic rifle to police after Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced on Monday plans to tighten gun laws in light of the slaughter Friday of 50 Muslim worshippers. Hart said it was an easy decision for him to hand in his semi-automatic and tweeted that "on the farm they are a useful tool in some circumstances, but my convenience doesn't outweigh the risk of misuse. We don't need these in our country". Police said they did not have data available on the number of weapons handed in since Friday. Ardern has said that details of the government's proposed law changes on gun ownership will be announced by next week, but she indicated that gun buybacks and a ban on some semi-automatic rifles were under consideration.

### European spies view ultra-right as growing threat

The ultra-right, which was responsible for large outbreaks of violence in the 1980s, is now firmly back on the radar screens for security services. European intelligence services have for years been increasing surveillance of ultra-right groups which are seen capable of carrying out attacks similar to those that left 50 dead at two mosques in New Zealand. Security services in France, Britain, Germany and Italy have repeatedly warned of the risks associated with growing tensions within Western societies over immigration and Islamist attacks. According to analysts at Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre (JTIC), counter-terrorism operations linked to far-right extremism or hate crimes increased by 88 percent between 2016 and 2017. British Security Minister Ben Wallace told BBC radio on Monday that nearly 50 percent of people in a government-backed programme to fight radicalisation were involved in "far-right extremism." The government is now looking to increase the budget for the programme, known as Prevent, from its current level of 45 million pounds in response to the New Zealand attack, Wallace said. In Germany, intelligence agencies will devote 50 percent more staff in 2019 to fighting right-wing groups, domestic intelligence chief Thomas Haldenwang said last year.

SOURCE: AFP

# India may not have polls if Modi returns

## Says Rajasthan CM

PTI, New Delhi

India may not see another election if Narendra Modi is re-elected as Prime Minister, Rajasthan chief minister and senior Congress leader Ashok Gehlot has claimed, suggesting that the country may go the way of China and Russia.

Gehlot also said both democracy and the country were in danger under Modi who he said would "do anything" to get back to power. People felt he could even go to war with Pakistan to achieve this goal, the Congress leader said.

Dubbing Modi a "good actor", Gehlot said he could



# Constitutional chaos

## Speaker deals blow to May's bid to revive Brexit deal; Merkel vows to 'fight to last hour' for orderly exit

AGENCIES

UK Prime Minister Theresa May's government has been plunged into constitutional chaos after the Speaker blocked the prime minister from asking MPs to vote on her Brexit deal for a third time unless it had fundamentally changed.

May held crisis talks with her ministers yesterday after the Speaker threatened to derail her EU withdrawal plan just 10 days before Brexit day, leaving her strategy in tatters.

May is still hoping she can get the divorce agreement she struck with the European Union through parliament before March 29, despite MPs having rejected it twice.

But in a dramatic ruling that prompted fury in government and warnings of a constitutional crisis, House of Commons speaker John Bercow said on Monday night he could not put it to another vote in its current form.

Weeks of chaotic political deadlock in parliament have already forced May to concede that Brexit must be delayed. But she had been hoping to ask EU leaders for only a short delay when they meet at a Brussels summit on Thursday,

warning that without a deal, any extension would be lengthy.

The BBC's political editor, Laura Kuenssberg, said May would ask for an extension until June 30 - which could give her another chance to get parliament to bless her deal - with the option of a delay of up to two years.

Pro-Brexit newspapers in Britain condemned Bercow as the "Brexit Destroyer".

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said yesterday she would struggle until the last possible moment to achieve an orderly Brexit, saying the interests of Germany, Britain and the EU were at stake.

The Speaker's ruling adds further complexity to an already chaotic Brexit process that has exposed deep rifts in parliament. Several suggested that Bercow's ruling means May must now return to the negotiating table, even at this late stage. Constitutional experts suggested that if the EU agrees to an extension, that might also constitute enough of a change to have a vote after the summit, next week.

If a majority of MPs swing behind May's deal, they could pass a motion to force Bercow to allow another vote.

May must change deal for another Brexit vote: Speaker

May to seek Brexit delay of 3 months to two years: BBC



John Bercow

## BUILDING COLLAPSE

### 1 killed, 40 trapped in Karnataka

NDTV ONLINE

At least one person has died and dozens are feared trapped under rubble after a building site collapsed yesterday in India's southern Karnataka state, officials told AFP.

Rescue teams and ambulances were scrambling to Dharwad district, roughly 700 kilometres (430 miles) northwest of the state capital Bangalore, where the five-floor under-construction apartment block crumbled.

NDTV said as many as 40 people were believed trapped beneath the rubble.

Hospitals in the district have been placed on alert and 20 ambulances sent to the accident site, said Dharwad's top medical officer Giridhar Kokinad.

## FOREST DAMAGE BY INDIAN STRIKE

# Pak lodges formal complaint to UN

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, Nairobi

Pakistan has lodged an official complaint with the United Nations over damage caused to a protected forest reserve during an air strike by India last month, Pakistan's climate change minister Malik Amin Aslam Khan said on Monday.

The air strike in the Massar Jabba Forest Reserve had damaged a forest ecosystem which "could take up to a century to recover", said Khan, Prime Minister Imran Khan's adviser for climate change.

Khan said he handed over a dossier detailing the damage at the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) in Nairobi, calling on the global body to condemn India and seek compensation. "We think what happened was a strike on nature - it was a strike on the Massar Jabba Forest Reserve which is a protected ecosystem and a globally important carbon sink," Khan told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview.

"We are speaking for the voiceless trees of the Massar Jabba forest reserve which became a target of this operation."

A report by Pakistan after the air strike found damage to an area of 1.2 acres which included 19 pine trees valued at 2.7 million Pakistani rupees (\$20,000) and soil erosion.

Indian warplanes on February 26 bombed the hilly forest area near the northern Pakistani town of Balakot, about 40 km from India's border in the Himalayan region of Kashmir.

do much better in Bollywood and would have left his indelible mark in acting. He also alleged that he was a "master in marketing false promises".

"If people re-elect Modi, then there is no surety on whether elections will be held in the country or not," Gehlot said during an interaction with PTI yesterday.

He was suggesting that polls will be held on the lines of those in China and Russia, where only one party rules and who becomes the president or the prime minister is decided beforehand.

His remarks come in the wake of a fierce battle emerging between the opposition Congress and the ruling BJP ahead of Lok Sabha elections starting April 11. The Congress and the BJP are locked in a war of words while trying to win this crucial election.