

## NEWS IN brief

### Brazil in Nato?

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump heaped praise Tuesday on visiting right-wing Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro -- and received plenty back -- in announcing a special relationship that he said could even see the Latin American country join Nato. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization already has 29 countries. None are from Latin America and none, like Brazil, are located in the South Atlantic.

### Pompeo in ME tour

AFP, Kuwait City

Top US diplomat Mike Pompeo yesterday sought to bolster a united front against Iran during a Middle East tour that will include talks with key ally Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of Israeli elections. The US secretary of state kicked off his regional tour in Kuwait where he met Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on the first stop of a trip that will also take him to Israel and Lebanon.

### Israeli army kills two in West Bank

AFP, Nablus

Two Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces in clashes near a flashpoint religious site in the occupied West Bank overnight yesterday, the Palestinian health ministry said. The health ministry said Raid Hamdan, 21, and Zaid Nouri, 20, died after being shot late Tuesday by Israeli troops near the Joseph Tomb's religious site close to the Palestinian city of Nablus.

### Myanmar temple town violence injures eight

AFP, Yangon

Fighting between Myanmar's military and ethnic Rakhine rebels in Mrauk U, the ancient capital of the Rakhine kingdom, has left at least eight locals injured. After forcing out some 740,000 Rohingyas in a brutal crackdown in 2017, the army now is waging war against the Arakan Army (AA), which claims to represent ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and has killed 22 officers since early January.

### 'All options' open on Venezuela: Trump

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday reaffirmed that "all options" are being considered in his drive to bring down Venezuela's socialist President Nicolas Maduro. US and more than 50 other countries, including Brazil, recognize opposition leader Juan Guaido, the head of the National Assembly, as Venezuela's rightful president.

### BITS OF HISTORY (MARCH 20)

**1995:** Twelve people died and over 6,000 were injured in a nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway carried out by the Aum Shinri Kyo religious sect.

**2003:** US began its war on Saddam Hussein's Iraq with overnight air strikes on Baghdad. Hours later, US and British troops began invading Iraq from Kuwait.



Residents gather stranded on the stands of a stadium in a flooded area of Buzi, central Mozambique, on March 20, 2019, after the passage of cyclone Idai.

PHOTO: AFP

### CYCLONE IN MOZAMBIQUE, ZIMBABWE

## Death toll exceeds 300; scores missing

REUTERS, Maputo/harare

Aid workers scrambled to save hundreds trapped by floods around the Mozambican port city of Beira yesterday, after a powerful cyclone killed hundreds of people and left a trail of destruction across swathes of southeast Africa.

Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique's port city of Beira with winds of up to 170 kph last Thursday, then moved inland to Zimbabwe and Malawi, flattening buildings and putting the lives of millions at risk.

At least 200 people have died in Mozambique and 98 in Zimbabwe, but the death toll is likely to rise as rescuers are still finding bodies.

Hundreds were clinging onto trees or roofs, waiting for rescue teams. Roads in and around Beira were swamped and heavy rain was continuing to fall, complicating rescue efforts and meaning that aid had to be flown in by helicopter or plane.

Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi has declared three days of national mourning starting from yesterday and has said the eventual death toll from the cyclone and ensuing floods could rise to more than 1,000.

In the eastern Zimbabwe, grieving families rushed to bury their dead because the cyclone had knocked out power supplies and put mortuaries out of action.

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa said on a visit to the town of Chimanimani that his government would ensure houses were built with stronger materials in future. In rural Zimbabwe, many people cannot afford cement to build their houses, leaving them vulnerable to torrential rain and wind.

Malawi has not released details of casualties from the storm, which weakened as it moved further inland. More than 50 people had already died in floods the week before the cyclone hit.

## Brexit delayed?

May requests three-month extension as Juncker warns EU will not move on deal

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday requested a three-month delay to Brexit after her failure to get a deal ratified by parliament left the United Kingdom's divorce from the European Union in turmoil.

Nearly three years the UK voted to leave the EU and nine days before the formal exit deadline, British politicians are still arguing over how, when or even if the world's fifth largest economy should leave the bloc it first joined 1973.

When May set the March 29 exit date two years ago by serving the formal Article 50 divorce papers, she declared there would be "no turning back" but parliament's refusal to ratify the withdrawal deal she agreed with the EU has thrust her government into crisis.

Now, May has written to European Council President Donald Tusk to ask for a delay until June 30.

"As prime minister I am not prepared to delay Brexit any further than the 30th of June," May told a rowdy session of parliament.

She said she planned to ask parliament to vote a third time

on her departure deal, which lawmakers have already voted down twice. She didn't say when the vote would happen.

The opposition Labour Party said that by choosing a short delay May was forcing British lawmakers to decide between accepting a deal they have already rejected twice or crashing out of the European Union without a deal.

Pro-Brexit members of May's Conservative Party are opposed to a longer delay because they fear this could mean that Brexit might never happen.

For its part, the EU said any extension should either be until May 23 or "significantly longer" and require Britain to take part in European elections in May. The prime minister said it was not Britain's interests to take part in European elections.

An EU Commission document seen by Reuters said the EU should offer Britain just one extension as multiple delays would leave the bloc in limbo.

EU leaders are expected to discuss May's request for a Brexit delay at a two-day summit in Brussels starting from today. Jean-Claude Juncker said the EU had done much to accommodate Britain and can go no further.

Either delay to May 23 or much longer: EU

Pro-Brexit members of May's party are opposed to a longer delay



## 'We are not afraid'

Priyanka Gandhi hits back after Modi targets Congress, 'dynastic politics' in a blog

NDTV ONLINE

Soon after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi targeted the Congress and "dynastic politics" in a blog yesterday, Priyanka Gandhi Vadera shot off a stinging rebuttal, saying "PM should stop thinking people are fools".

In his blog, Modi said in 2014, people of the country voted decisively for "honesty over dynasty". Whenever dynastic politics has been powerful, institutions have taken a severe beating, PM Modi wrote.

"When a Government works with the spirit of 'India First' instead of 'Family First', it shows in its working," he said.

"The biggest casualty of dynastic politics are institutions," he wrote, accusing the opposition party of denigrating parliament, press, constitution, courts, government bodies and the armed forces.

Asked for her response, Priyanka Gandhi, on a three-day boat campaign in Uttar

Pradesh, told reporters: "BJP has systematically attacked every institution in last 5 years including the media. PM should stop thinking people are fools and understand that they see through this."

She alleged "those obsessed with power" believe they can bully critics into silence.

"When power goes to their head, they have two misconceptions. One, that it is easy to mislead people. Two, that those who speak against them are afraid. We are not afraid, no matter what they do. They can harass us as much as they want to, we will keep fighting," said Priyanka Gandhi.

PM Modi, in the blog replete with attacks of the Gandhis, accused all Congress governments of defence scams. He also alleged that the party didn't believe in internal democracy. "If a leader dares to dream to head that party, he or she is shunted out of the Congress," he said.



## Kazakhstan renames capital after ex-leader

AFP, Almaty

Kazakhstan's new interim president was sworn in yesterday following the shock resignation of the country's long-time ruler and in his first official act renamed the capital after his predecessor.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev took office in a pomp-filled ceremony less than 24 hours after Nursultan Nazarbayev, the only leader an independent Kazakhstan had ever known, suddenly announced he was stepping down.

Tokayev immediately proposed changing the name of the Central Asian nation's capital from Astana to Nursultan, or "Sultan of Light" in Kazakh, and parliament approved the change within hours.

The senate also appointed Nazarbayev's eldest daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva as speaker, setting her up as a potential contender to succeed her father. Tokayev, 65, will serve out the rest of Nazarbayev's mandate until elections due in April next year.

Nazarbayev changed the capital from Kazakhstan's largest city Almaty to Astana in 1997, transforming it from a minor provincial town into a futuristic city of skyscrapers rising from the steppes.

Nazarbayev, 78, ruled Kazakhstan since before it gained independence with the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

Nazarbayev will continue to enjoy significant powers thanks to his constitutional status as "Leader of the Nation", life-time position as chief of the security council and head of the ruling Nur Otan party.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Hindu devotees are sprayed with coloured water yesterday as they celebrate the Holi festival at the Kalupur Swaminarayan Temple in Ahmedabad. Holi, the popular Hindu spring festival of colours is observed in India at the end of the winter season on the last full moon of the lunar month.

### WORLD HAPPINESS RANKINGS

## Finland tops list: UN

AFP, Helsinki

Finland ranked as the world's happiest country for the second year running while war-torn South Sudan sank to the least contented in a United Nations report released yesterday.

The Nordic nation of 5.5 million

people, known for their love of forests, lakes and saunas, topped the study which used survey data asking citizens in 156 countries how happy they perceive themselves to be, as well as measures such as life expectancy, income and social support.

The other Nordic countries, as well as the Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada, New Zealand and Austria also made the top ten.

As well as performing well on all the indicators, the most content countries

all tended to have very stable societies, with happiness levels changing comparatively little since 2005.

Despite the political turmoil brought by Brexit, Britain rose four places in the rankings to 15th. The United States, meanwhile, continued its slide of recent years, dropping one spot to 19th place.

The unhappiest nation was South Sudan, where the UN recently said 60 percent of people face food insecurity. Other conflict-ridden countries, such as Yemen, Afghanistan and the Central African Republic, also featured at the bottom of the table.

Released on the International Day of Happiness on March 20, the report warned that world happiness has declined in recent years, driven by a sustained fall in India, which this year ranked in 140th place.



## Don't reintroduce citizenship bill

Mizoram assembly to Centre

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Mizoram state assembly yesterday unanimously adopted a resolution asking the Indian government not to reintroduce the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, which aims at giving citizenship to religious minorities from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan, in any form in future.

The civil societies, churches, political parties and the people of the state are against the bill, Mizoram Home Minister Lalchamliana said after moving the resolution.

The people of the north eastern region are also against the bill, Lalchamliana said, adding that Mizoram cabinet had on January 10 also opposed the bill.

Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga had informed Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh that the people of Mizoram and the state government opposed the bill, Lalchamliana said.

Zoramthanga also attended a meeting of political parties of the Northeastern region on January 29 in which chief ministers of the regional states and other leaders opposed the bill, he said.

Leader of Opposition Zodintluanga of the Congress supported the resolution and said ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) should sever ties with the BJP.

## Early celebrations as war on IS holdout wraps up

AFP, Baghuz

Their battle against the last jihadists holding out in the besieged Syrian village of Baghuz hasn't quite ended but Kurdish-led fighters have already started celebrating.

When they returned from the front on Tuesday, they put the lamb skewers on the grill and broke into dance as the radio of their battered trucks sputtered a Kurdish tune.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) delivered the killer blow to the last vestige of the Islamic State group's "caliphate" this week and the end of the bruising six-month-old operation is now within touching distance.

With backing from the US-led coalition's warplanes, they forced holdout jihadists from their main encampment and into a few hectares (couple of acres) of farmland by the Euphrates River.

The prospect of an imminent victory announcement combined with early leave for the Kurds' Nowruz New Year holiday drew dozens of smiling fighters to a base on the edge of Baghuz.

The front porch of a plush villa the SDF turned into a temporary military headquarters is littered with the duffle bags, ammo belts and body armour the fighters discarded to join the impromptu party.

One fighter remained on the roof, on barbecue duty, while the others formed a circle to start a "dabke" folk dance.

"It's a day of celebration, the nightmare is over," said Majid Hejjo, a 23-year-old SDF fighter still wearing his fatigues and a khaki cap.

An unknown number of diehard jihadists are still refusing to surrender and dodging SDF fire in their hideouts along the reedy banks of the Euphrates.

Syria and Iraqi government forces and their allies are deployed on the other side of the river and the border, making any escape impossible.

Although IS has already started regrouping in some of its desert and mountain hideouts in the region, the fall of Baghuz will mark the end of the group's territorial control.