

News in brief

◆ **A female doctor was killed in a bomb blast in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad in what appeared to be another targeted hit, officials said, just days after three women media workers were gunned down in the area.** Journalists, religious scholars, activists and judges have all been victims of a recent wave of political assassinations across Afghanistan, forcing many into hiding -- with some fleeing the country.

Female doctor killed in Afghanistan after murder of media workers



◆ **North Korea's Kim stresses roles of city, county leaders**

◆ North Korean leader Kim Jong Un stressed the significance of the role that city and county chief secretaries have in improving the lives of the people and carrying out his five-year economic policies, state news media KCNA said. North Korea's drastic measures to contain COVID-19 have exacerbated human rights abuses and economic hardship, including reports of starvation, for its citizens, already battered by international sanctions, a United Nations investigator said.



◆ **Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny is sharing a quarantine cell in central Russia, allies said, revealing his location for the first time since he was moved from jail in Moscow last week to serve a 2-1/2 year sentence in a penal colony.** The whereabouts of Navalny, 44, had been a mystery since he left jail in Moscow. His lawyer Vadim Kobzev told Reuters he had met Navalny at the Kolchugino jail in the Vladimir region northeast of Moscow. Navalny was feeling good despite hardship, Kobzev said.

Navalny emerges in jail in Russia's Vladimir region, meets lawyers



◆ **Australia's prime minister threw his support behind a senior minister accused of rape, and rejected mounting calls for an independent investigation into the allegations.** Attorney-General Christian Porter -- the government's top legal officer and a former state prosecutor -- tearfully denied raping a 16-year-old fellow student in 1988.



◆ **Anger as South Korean transgender soldier found dead**

◆ **A transgender South Korean soldier who was forcibly discharged from the army after gender-reassignment surgery has been found dead, police said, prompting anger and calls for legal reforms.** Firefighters found Byun Hee-soo in her home in Cheongju after a mental health counsellor called emergency services to report that she had not been heard from for several days. Reports said no note was found but the death was being treated as suicide.



Meghan accuses royal family of 'perpetuating falsehoods'

The Duchess of Sussex refers to the royals as 'The Firm' in an interview airing Sunday

● **Meghan criticises Buckingham Palace in latest excerpt ahead of broadcast of full Oprah Winfrey interview**

Reuters | London

Prince Harry's wife Meghan has accused Buckingham Palace of "perpetuating falsehoods" about her and her spouse, saying the royal couple would not be silent in telling their story.



Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, left, in conversation with Oprah Winfrey

Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, made the comments to American talk show host Oprah Winfrey in an interview about why they quit their royal roles that is due to be broadcast on US television on Sunday.

An advance excerpt of the interview was released on Wednesday, hours after Buckingham Palace said it was "very concerned" about reports in the Times newspaper that assistants working for Meghan two years ago had been bullied by her.

Harry and Meghan issued a statement denying that she had bullied anyone.

"How do you feel about the Palace hearing you speak your truth today?" Winfrey asks Meghan in the excerpt.

Meghan responded: "I don't know how they could expect that after all of this time we would still just be silent, if there is an active

role that The Firm is playing in perpetuating falsehoods about us." The Firm is the name that the British royal family sometimes uses to describe itself.

"And if that comes with risk of losing things, I mean, there's a lot that's been lost already," Meghan added.

The interview was recorded before The Times newspaper ran a report citing unnamed sources as saying an aide to Harry and Meghan had raised a complaint in October 2018 alleging that Meghan had reduced some of her assistants to tears and treated others so badly that they had quit.

The paper said Harry had urged the aide, who has now left their staff, to drop the complaint, and it never progressed.

The Times said it had been contacted by former staff members

who wanted the public to gain insight before the Winfrey interview aired - and that lawyers for the couple had labelled the allegations a smear orchestrated by the Palace.

"We are clearly very concerned about allegations in The Times following claims made by former staff of The Duke and Duchess of Sussex," Buckingham Palace said in a statement.

The Royal Household "does not and will not tolerate bullying or harassment in the workplace", it added.

It said its HR team would look into the allegations, and that members of staff involved at the time would be invited to participate.

"Saddened by attack"

A spokeswoman for Meghan

"I don't know how they could expect that after all of this time we would still just be silent, if there is an active role that The Firm is playing in perpetuating falsehoods about us"

MEGHAN

said earlier that she was "saddened by this latest attack on her character, particularly as someone who has been the target of bullying herself and is deeply committed to supporting those who have experienced pain and trauma".

Meghan and Harry, who married in May 2018, stepped back from their official duties in March last year to forge new careers and a financially independent life in California.

That decision was confirmed last month, when they also handed over all their royal patronages. They said their move was fuelled in part by intense press intrusion.

However, Meghan had also previously indicated that she felt she did not have the full support of the royal family.

In court documents submitted as part of her successful privacy action against the mass-circulation Mail on Sunday, her lawyers said she had felt "unprotected" while she was pregnant with their son Archie.

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

| Country | Total cases | Total deaths |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1 USA | 29,475,199 | 532,068 |
| 2 India | 11,173,567 | 157,584 |
| 3 Brazil | 10,722,221 | 259,402 |
| 4 Russia | 4,290,135 | 87,823 |
| 5 UK | 4,201,358 | 124,025 |
| 6 France | 3,835,595 | 87,835 |
| 7 Spain | 3,142,358 | 69,801 |
| 8 Italy | 2,999,119 | 98,288 |
| 9 Turkey | 2,746,158 | 28,706 |
| 10 Germany | 2,477,868 | 71,325 |
| 11 Colombia | 2,262,646 | 59,972 |
| 12 Argentina | 2,126,531 | 52,192 |
| 13 Mexico | 2,104,987 | 188,044 |
| 14 Poland | 1,750,659 | 44,649 |

Global tally

116,042,904

Deaths

2,576,369

Recovered:

91,727,927

New cases

+283,542

New deaths

+5,522

Figures as of closing

Middle East

| Country | Total cases | new cases | Total deaths | New Deaths | Total recovered | Active cases |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Egypt | 184,168 | | 10,822 | | 142,155 | 31,191 |
| Saudi Arabia | 378,708 | +375 | 6,514 | +4 | 369,613 | 2,581 |
| UAE | 402,205 | +2,742 | 1,286 | +17 | 387,278 | 13,641 |
| Kuwait | 193,372 | | 1,092 | | 181,119 | 11,161 |
| Oman | 142,896 | +369 | 1,583 | | 133,491 | 7,822 |
| Qatar | 165,546 | +475 | 260 | | 155,070 | 10,216 |

Strong quake shakes New Zealand, but no damage reported and tsunami threat eases

Reuters | Wellington

A strong 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck off the east of New Zealand's North Island on Friday, prompting a tsunami warning that was later withdrawn, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre (PTWC) said, although residents were asked to stay alert.

"There is no longer a tsunami threat from this earthquake," PTWC said in a statement.

There were no immediate reports of damage, but the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) advised people in some coastal areas to move immediately to high ground.

Local civil defence authorities said the tsunami threat would continue for several hours.

"Coastal inundation (flooding of land areas) is expected in areas under Land and Marine threat," NEMA said in a tweet.

The closest major city to the epicentre is Gisborne with a population of about 35,500. People near the coast from Cape Runaway to Tolaga Bay were told to evacuate.

Pope says he will visit Iraq as 'pilgrim of peace'

AFP | Rome

On the eve of his historic trip to Iraq, Pope Francis paid tribute yesterday to those who have suffered from years of violence, saying he came as a "pilgrim of peace".

In a video message, the 84-year-old offered his hand to "brothers and sisters of other religions", but also highlighted the heavy toll paid by Iraq's Christian communities, saying there had been "too many martyrs".

"I long to meet you, to see your faces, to visit your land, ancient and extraordinary cradle of civilisation," the pope said.

"I come as a pilgrim, a penitent pilgrim to implore forgiveness and reconciliation from the Lord after years of war and terrorism."

"I come as a pilgrim of peace in search of fraternity, animated by the desire to pray together and to walk together, also with the brothers and sisters of other religions," he added.

The pope, making his first foreign trip since the coronavirus pandemic swept Europe a year ago, will arrive in Iraq on Friday before embarking on a packed schedule of events through to Sunday.

From central Baghdad to the Shiite shrine city of Najaf, welcome banners featuring his image and Arabic title "Baba al-Vat-



Members of the Iraqi special forces stand guard in front of a billboard welcoming Pope Francis



Pope Francis is fulfilling the dream of a predecessor, John Paul II, by visiting Iraq -- despite a rampaging coronavirus epidemic and an upsurge in violence

ern desert, to ravaged Christian towns in the north, roads are being paved and churches rehabilitated. Among the most extraordinary moments of the trip will be his one-on-one meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the highly reclusive cleric, who is a top religious authority for many of the world's Shiite Muslims.

Francis is fulfilling the dream of a predecessor, John Paul II, by visiting Iraq -- despite a rampaging coronavirus epidemic and an upsurge in violence.

The security challenges were highlighted Wednesday when a rocket attack hit a base hosting US-led coalition troops, which came after several weeks of escalating US-Iran tensions on Iraqi soil.

ican" already dot the streets. From Ur, the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham in the south-