

News in brief

Syria to hold presidential elections on May 26 - parliament

◆ **Syria will hold its presidential election on May 26, the country's parliament said yesterday.** The door for nominations will be open as of Monday for 10 days. Syrians abroad will vote on May 20.



◆ **The United States has ordered its non-essential staff in Chad to leave the African country** as rebel fighters approached the capital on Sunday after early election results showed President Idriss Deby on course to extend his three-decade rule. Deby, who seized power in 1990 at the head of an armed rebellion, is a staunch ally of France and the United States in the fight against Islamist militants in the arid Sahel region. "Due to their growing proximity to N'Djamena and the possibility for violence in the city, non-essential US government employees have been ordered to leave Chad by commercial

US embassy to withdraw staff as Chad rebels advance



airline," the US state department said in a statement. The British government on Saturday urged its citizens to leave because, it said, two

armed convoys from the rebel Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) were advancing towards the capital.

◆ **Russia said yesterday Czech accusations that Russian spy services were behind an explosion in an ammunition depot were unfounded and absurd and it would retaliate for Prague's expulsion of 18 Russian embassy staff.** The Czech Republic said it had informed NATO and European Union allies about suspected Russian involvement in the blast, which killed two people, and the matter would be addressed at an EU foreign ministers' meeting today.

Russia says it will retaliate hard against Czechs over diplomat expulsions



Germany will not let down its Afghan staff as the international military mission in the country winds down

◆ **Germany will not let down its Afghan staff as the international military mission in the country winds down** after nearly two decades of war, Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer pledged yesterday. "I feel it is Germany's sincere duty to not leave these people without protection now that we will permanently withdraw," the defence ministry in Berlin said on Twitter, quoting extracts from an interview with German news agency DPA. US President Joe Biden and NATO on Wednesday announced that they would withdraw the roughly 10,000 foreign troops still in Afghanistan by Sept. 11. Germany is the second-largest contingent with about 1,100 troops. The withdrawals have raised concerns that Afghanistan could erupt into full-scale civil war, providing al Qaeda space in which to rebuild and plan new attacks on US and other targets. The German forces currently employ about 300 Afghans as interpreters and in other jobs, according to the defence ministry in Berlin.



Germany will not abandon Afghan staff, minister says

Reuters

Raul Castro, who is retiring from high public office, for most of his life toiled in the shadow of his older brother, Fidel Castro. Yet he also played a key role in Cuba's 1959 leftist revolution and the preservation of Cuban socialism.

While Fidel was the charismatic leader who rallied Cubans to defend the revolution and defy the United States, Raul, 89, built the military into a formidable fighting force that saw off enemies including a US-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs.

Later, after the fall of former benefactor the Soviet Union sent Cuba into an economic tailspin and left it politically isolated, he launched market-style reforms to its centralized economy and sought to normalize relations with Western powers.

But he leaves office amid an economic crisis that has caused shortages of even basic goods and is threatening the universal access to quality health-care and education hailed by supporters of Cuban socialism as among the most important achievements of the revolution.

Former US President Donald Trump unraveled a detente Castro reached with his predecessor Barack Obama and tightened the decades-old US trade embargo. The rollout of internet has fueled internal dissent.

Still, some thirty years after the end of the Cold War, Cuba remains one of the last Communist-run countries in the world.

"Always preferring the supportive role to his brother and carrying out that role brilliantly, Raul eventually had to take on Fidel's leadership himself



Raul backed Fidel in his revolution against the US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista since the beginning in 1953, when they led a failed assault on the Moncada military barracks. Later he demonstrated his leadership in the guerilla uprising in the Sierra Maestra mountains that finally overthrew Batista.

at a time when the revolution showed every sign of faltering," said Hal Klepak, a Canadian historian living in Havana who wrote a book on Raul's military life.

"That it is still there, wounded and shaken but still there, in the face of massively powerful forces out to destroy it, is no small part a result of his leadership."

In the early years of Cuba's one party system, he was known as an iron-fisted ideologue who was involved in the summary trials and executions of Batista supporters, and later the imprisonment of thousands of political prisoners.

He also built a rag-tag bunch of guerillas into a feared army that fought "anti-imperialist" wars abroad, most notably in Angola where Cuban soldiers helped defeat South African troops.

An early admirer of communism, it was Raul and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the Argentine-born doctor turned Marxist revolutionary, who persuaded Fidel to seek sup-

port from the Soviet Union.

But he was also quick to launch reforms to move Cuba away from a Soviet-style command economy after the fall of the Berlin Wall plunged the Caribbean island nation into economic crisis.

First he established thriving enterprises within the armed forces - which now control much of the economy.

Then he pushed for broader reforms upon becoming president in 2008, expanding the private sector, seeking to decentralize state institutions and opening the economy to greater foreign investment.

"He deserves merit for having opened this door although later it ran into many problems with implementation and achieved fairly modest results," said Ricardo Torres, a professor of economics with the Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy at the University of Havana.

In addition to his historic detente with Obama, Castro improved relations with the European Union.

"Raul's 12 years in power will be remembered for the transformative policies he attempted to carry out despite concerted opposition from regime hardliners," said Brian Latell, a former CIA analyst who has written books on both brothers.

Latell noted that the US rapprochement in 2014 happened despite opposition from his brother, who died two years later.

Castro also sought to strengthen the institutions of a system originally focused on a single leader and the so-called historic generation of guerrilla fighters, to ensure a smooth handover of power to a younger generation of party cadres.

He introduced age and term limits on leaders and oversaw the approval of a new constitution in 2019 that contributed to decentralizing power. In 2018 he had handed the presidency to a protege, Miguel Diaz-Canel, and reduced his public appearances.

His retirement from the even more powerful position of Cuban Communist Party first secretary, expected to be made official on Monday, will end six decades of rule by the Castro brothers.

Addressing party members last week, he said he will remain a "soldier of the revolution until the end of my days".

Nava a doc daug

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny

● **Prison authorities say they have offered Navalny proper medical care but that the 44-year-old opposition politician has refused it**

Reuters

The daughter of hunger-striking Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny called on Russian authorities yesterday to allow a doctor to treat her father in prison, a day after a group of medical professionals warned he is at risk of kidney failure.

Navalny, a fierce opponent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, started refusing food on March 31 in protest at what he said was the refusal of prison authorities to provide him with proper medical care for acute back and leg pain.

Prison authorities say they have offered Navalny proper medical care but that the 44-year-old opposition politician has refused it

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1 USA	32,365,687	580,808	141,727,940
2 India	15,040,130	178,557	
3 Brazil	13,900,134	371,889	Deaths
4 France	5,260,182	100,593	
5 Russia	4,702,101	105,582	3,028,511
6 UK	4,387,820	127,270	
7 Turkey	4,212,645	35,608	Recovered:
8 Italy	3,870,131	116,927	
9 Spain	3,407,283	76,981	120,282,574
10 Germany	3,144,855	80,563	
11 Poland	2,688,025	62,032	New cases
12 Argentina	2,677,747	59,164	
13 Colombia	2,636,076	67,931	+441,002
14 Mexico	2,304,096	212,228	
			New deaths
			+5,194

Figures as of closing

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	215,484		12,694		162,714	
Saudi Arabia	404,970	+916	6,823	+13	388,702	
UAE	497,154	+1,930	1,554	+4	479,566	
Kuwait	255,860		1,440		239,027	
Oman	176,668		1,821		156,845	18,002
Qatar	195,757		376		173,257	22,124

Cuba's Raul Castro leaves the political stage, his legacy yet to be written



Pakistan PM says should be same



The group Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TL

AFP News

Western governments should treat people who insult the Prophet Mohammed the same as those who deny the Holocaust, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said Saturday.

Speaking after a week of violent protests in Pakistan by a radical Islamist party outraged by French government support for magazines publishing cartoons of Mohammed, Khan said insulting the prophet hurt Muslims around the world.

"We Muslims have the greatest love & respect for our Prophet," he tweeted. "We cannot tolerate any such disrespect & abuse."