

World News Roundup



Mourners pray at the graveside of Imam Hafiz Musa Patel, a victim of the March 15 mosque shootings in Christchurch at the Puhini Memorial Gardens in Auckland, New Zealand on March 21. (AP)

New Zealand bans 'military-style' guns after mosque attacks

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on Thursday announced a ban of "military-style" semi-automatic firearms and high-capacity magazines like those used in the shootings at Christchurch mosques last week.

Ardern said a sales ban was effective immediately to prevent stockpiling and

would be followed by a complete ban on the weapons after new laws were rushed through.

She said people could hand over their guns under an amnesty while officials develop a formal buyback scheme, which could cost up to 200 million New Zealand dollars (\$140 million).

The man charged in the mosque attacks had purchased his weapons legally using a standard firearms license and enhanced their capacity by using 30-round magazines "done easily through a simple online purchase," Ardern said.

"Every semi-automatic weapon used in the terrorist attack on Friday will be

banned," she said.

The ban includes any semi-automatic guns or shotguns that are capable of being used with a detachable magazine that holds more than five rounds. It also extends to accessories used to convert guns into what the government called "military-style" weapons. (AP)

Asia

ICC complaint filed against Xi:

Two former Philippine officials have taken the bold step of filing a complaint with the International Criminal Court accusing Chinese President Xi Jinping of crimes against humanity over his government's assertive actions in the disputed South China Sea, which they say deprived thousands of fishermen of their livelihood and destroyed the environment.

Former foreign secretary **Albert del Rosario** and chief anti-graft prosecutor Conchita Carpio Morales said Thursday that they filed the complaint with the tribunal last week, before the current Philippine president's move to withdraw the country from the tribunal took effect last weekend.

They accused Xi and other Chinese officials of turning seven disputed reefs into islands in a massive engineering feat, causing extensive environmental damage, and of blocking large numbers of fishermen, including about 320,000 Filipinos, from their fishing grounds.

"This has seriously undermined the food and energy security of the coastal states in the South China Sea, including the Philippines," del Rosario and Carpio Morales said in a statement.

China's island building, which started in 2013 in an effort to construct air and naval bases in the disputed waters, reportedly destroyed large expanses of coral reefs and endangered fisheries. "It presents one of the most massive, near permanent and devastating destruction of the environment in humanity's history," they said. (AP)



Del Rosario

Australia preps for cyclone: About 2,000 Australians were being moved inland Thursday from part of the northern coast ahead of a powerful cyclone expected to hit this weekend.

Evacuees were being moved by air and road from remote, mostly indigenous communities on the east coast of the Northern Territory, with most going to the provincial capital, Darwin.

Australia's Bureau of Meteorology said Cyclone Trevor, with sustained winds of 125 miles per hour (200 kph) and gusts of up to 160 mph (255 kph), was expected to bring heavy rainfall and a dangerous storm surge.

An emergency was declared in communities along the western Gulf of Carpentaria where Trevor is expected to make landfall on Saturday, Northern Territory Chief Minister Michael Gunner said.

At landfall, Trevor is forecast to be a Category 4 severe tropical cyclone, roughly similar to a Category 2 or 3 hurricane in the Saffir-Simpson scale used in the U.S. (AP)

Abe, Trump to meet in April:

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe may meet President Donald Trump in the United States in late April for talks on North Korea and Japan-U.S. trade, two government officials and Japanese media said on Thursday.

The meeting was requested by the Japanese side and arrangements were being made for the end of April, the Asahi Shimbun daily said, without giving a specific date.

Two government officials familiar with the matter told Reuters that planning for Abe's visit was underway.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said an overseas trip by Abe had not been decided.

The talks would likely focus on North Korea after Trump's failed meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in February, against a backdrop of Tokyo's concern that is being sidelined in those negotiations, the Asahi Shimbun said.

Japan's cabinet is expected to vote next month on extending unilateral sanctions against North Korea by two years, public broadcaster NHK said on Wednesday. (RTRS)

Subcontinent

US concerned about tensions:

The United States remains concerned about India-Pakistan tensions as the nuclear-armed countries' militaries remain on alert nearly three weeks after their most dangerous confrontation in decades, a senior US administration official said on Wednesday.

The official also indicated that the Trump administration does not think Pakistan has adequately cracked down on the Islamist extremists who claimed responsibility for a bomb attack on Indian security forces that triggered last month's crisis.

"If there is an additional terrorist attack without Pakistan having made a sustained sincere effort against these groups, it will be extremely problematic for Pakistan and it would cause a re-escalation in tensions," the official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity, (RTRS)

Pak convicts 2 over lynching:

A Pakistani anti-terrorism court sentenced two men, including a local government official, to life in prison on Thursday for their role in the brutal campus lynching two years ago of a university student accused of blasphemy.

Mashal Khan, 23, was attacked and killed by a mob on the campus of a university in Mardan, in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, following a dormitory debate about religion.

In February last year the court convicted 31 people, sentencing one person to death, while acquitting 26 others. (RTRS)

Kabul explosions kill 6: Several explosions in the Afghan capital of Kabul on Thursday killed six people and wounded 23 in an attack during celebrations to mark the Persian new year, government spokesmen said.

The attacks came on Nowruz, an ancient Persian festival to mark the start of spring that is widely celebrated in Afghanistan but has also faced opposition from some hardline Islamists, who say it is un-Islamic. (RTRS)

Britain

May in Brussels

EU leaders likely to grant Brexit 'delay'

BRUSSELS, March 21, (AP): European Union leaders meeting for a Brexit summit are likely to grant Britain a short extension, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Thursday, if the UK government can win parliamentary support next week for its divorce deal.

But the early signs of that happening were not good. British Prime Minister **Theresa May** angered many legislators with a televised speech late Wednesday blaming a divided Parliament for an impasse that has left Britain eight days away from crashing out of the bloc. One lawmaker slammed her remarks as "toxic."

May has a tough day ahead as she arrives in Brussels to lobby her European partners to extend the Brexit date from March 29 until June 30 to push through the agreement she reached with the EU in November.

Her deal has been roundly rejected twice by the UK Parliament, and EU leaders are being asked to take the risk that May can convince the lawmakers next week.

That looked more uncertain after her speech on the eve of the summit, in which May told a Brexit-weary public: "You want this stage of the Brexit process to be over and done with. I agree. I am on your side."

May accused lawmakers of "infighting," "political games" and "arcane procedural rows," but acknowledged no personal role in creating the impasse.

Many lawmakers, including from some in her own Conservative Party, condemned the tone of her speech.

Anna Soubry, of the breakaway Independent Group, described it in a tweet as the "most dishonest and divisive statement from any Prime Minister." David Lammy of the opposition Labour Party called the speech "sinister," while Conservative Sam Gyimah called May's comments "toxic" and a "low blow."

But Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said May was simply expressing frustration and tapping into the public's exasperated mood.

"In fairness, what she is actually saying is that we have to implement the results of a democratic referendum," he told the BBC. "That's the challenge."

May's opponents, and EU officials, say her refusal to budge on her rejected deal is pushing the country to the brink of a catastrophic no-deal scenario, with huge political and economic implications for Britain and the EU.

Merkel vowed to work "until the last hour" to try and ensure that Britain doesn't leave without a deal, even though her government has already put "the most important emergency measures" in place to deal with such a scenario just in case.

"We will, despite these measures we have taken, work until the last day - I will say until the last hour - to ensure that this emergency planning doesn't come into effect," she said. "We will do everything in the remaining, admittedly few, days to achieve an orderly, joint solution."

Merkel told German lawmakers Thursday that "we can comply in principle with this request if we were to have a positive vote next week on the withdrawal documents in the British Parliament."

But she warned that the EU wants to ensure the legitimacy of the May 23-26 elections to the European Parliament. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has said that the Britain should be out before May 23 or be obliged to take part in the Europe-wide vote.



Revelers throw colored powder on a woman during celebrations marking Holi, the Hindu festival of colors, in Mumbai, India on March 21. (AP)



Vestager



Verhofstadt

Europe

Vestager seeks top post: The EU's competition commissioner, **Margrethe Vestager**, and Belgium's **Guy Verhofstadt** are among the seven candidates from the European Parliament's liberal, pro-business ALDE faction running for top posts within the European Union this year.

Vestager, whose term ends in October, is a former Danish deputy prime minister and economy minister. As the EU's competition chief since 2014, she has made headlines by repeatedly slapping major tech companies - most recently Google - with big penalties and fines.

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe presented the list of its candidates in Brussels on Thursday.

It includes Italy's veteran politician and former foreign minister Emma Bonino; Nicola Beer, a senior member of Germany's opposition Free Democrats; and Verhofstadt, leader of the ALDE group and Brexit coordinator for the European parliament.

"I believe that it's long overdue to have a woman heading the commission and to have a gender-balanced commission in general," Vestager said in Brussels.

The top posts up for election in May include the presidencies of the European Commission, European Council, European Parliament and the European Central Bank, as well as the post of EU foreign affairs chief.

The prospects for 50-year-old Vestager, who holds no posts within her party at home, are uncertain.

Denmark must hold elections to renew the 179-seat national parliament before June 17, and polls show that the center-left opposition headed by the Social Democrats might beat the Radical Party, of which Vestager is part and is in power now under Prime Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen.

Mette Frederiksen, the Social Democratic leader, has said that should they win, the Radical Party will not be part of any governing coalition.

Being part of the ruling party of an EU country is helpful but not necessary to get a top EU job.

Denmark's Politiken newspaper noted

Immigration

US asylum policy deals setback

Migrants encounter snafus

SAN DIEGO, March 21, (AP): Scheduling glitches led an immigration judge to deny the Trump administration's request to order four Central American migrants deported because they failed to show for initial hearings Wednesday in the US while being forced to wait in Mexico.

The judge's refusal was a setback for the administration's highly touted initiative to make asylum seekers wait in Mexico while their cases wind through US immigration courts.

One migrant came to court with a notice to appear on Saturday, March 30 and said he later learned that he was supposed to show up Wednesday. He reported in the morning to US authorities at the main crossing between San Diego and Tijuana.

"I almost didn't make it because I had two dates," he said.

Similar snafus marred the first hearings last week when migrants who were initially told to show up Tuesday had their dates bumped up several days.

Judge Scott Simpson told administration lawyers to file a brief by April 10 that explains how it can assure migrants are properly notified of appointments. The judge postponed initial appearances for the four no-shows to April 22, which raised more questions about how they would learn about the new date.

Government documents had no street address for the four men in Tijuana and

indicated that correspondence was to be sent to US Customs and Border Protection. Simpson asked how the administration would alert them.

"I don't have a response to that," said Robert Wittes, an attorney for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

At least two others were given notices to appear Tuesday but, when they showed up at the border, were told by US authorities that they were not on the schedule that day. Their attorneys quickly got new dates for Wednesday but Mexico refused to take them back, forcing them to stay overnight in US custody.

Laura Sanchez, an attorney for one of the men, said she called a court toll-free number to confirm her client's initial hearing Tuesday but his name didn't appear anywhere in the system. Later, she learned that it was Wednesday.

Sanchez said after Wednesday's hearing that she didn't know if Mexico would take her client back. Mexican officials didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The snafus came two days before a federal judge in San Francisco hears oral arguments to halt enforcement of the "Migration Protection Protocols" policy in a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, Southern Poverty Law Center and Center for Gender & Refugee Studies.

that if Vestager is in line for a top job in Brussels, it would be difficult for any Danish government to ignore her candidature. (AP)

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Bus driver abducts 51 children: A bus driver in northern Italy abducted 51 children and their school chaperones Wednesday, threatening the hostages' lives for 40 minutes and setting the bus on fire at a Carabinieri blockade.

Officers from the national police force broke windows at the back of the bus to reach the passengers and got all of them out without serious injuries before flames destroyed the vehicle, authorities said.

The driver was apprehended and treated for burns. Prosecutors described him as a 47-year-old Italian citizen of Senegalese origin and said he told authorities he wanted to vindicate Europe-bound migrants who have died in the Mediterranean Sea but did not plan to hurt anyone.

However, prosecutors said the suspect, identified as Ousseynou Sy, made preparations that showed his actions were premeditated, such as buying a canister of gasoline and restraints on Tuesday.

He also sent a video to friends in Italy and Senegal indicating plans for a bold action and with the message, "Africa, Rise up," they said.

Sy was being investigated on suspicion of kidnapping, intention to commit a massacre, arson and resisting law enforcement, with terrorism as an aggravating circumstance since the event caused panic.

Prosecutors said they have found no evidence of Islamic radicalization or ties to extremists, saying it appeared the bus driver acted alone. (AP)



United States Ambassador in Germany Richard Grenell (center background), welcomes soldiers from the 1st Armored Division, based in Fort Bliss, Texas, at the airport Tegel in Berlin, Germany on March 21. Over three hundred soldiers have arrived in Germany from their base in Texas in the first test of a new American strategy to rapidly deploy troops based in the United States to Europe to bolster the NATO deterrent against possible Russian aggression. (AP)