



10 Hong Kong activists sentenced for up to three years in jail



Table with weather forecasts for various cities including Beijing, Colombo, Dhaka, Dubai, Houston, Istanbul, London, Los Angeles, Melbourne, Moscow, New York, Singapore, Toronto, and Washington.

BENGALURU

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Post-Brexit trade deal gets UK lawmakers' approval

House of Commons votes 521-73 in favour of the divorce agreement

LONDON

BRITAIN'S House of Commons voted resoundingly on Wednesday to approve a trade deal with the European Union...

With just one day to spare, lawmakers voted 521-73 in favor of the agreement sealed between the UK government and the EU last week.

The agreement will become British law once it passes through the unelected House of Lords later in the day and gets formal royal assent from Queen Elizabeth II.

The UK left the EU almost a year ago, but remained within the bloc's economic embrace during a transition period that ends at midnight Brussels time — 11 pm in London — on Thursday.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel signed the agreement during a brief ceremony in Brussels on Wednesday morning.

"The agreement that we signed today is the result of months of intense negotiations in which the European Union has displayed an unprecedented level of unity," Michel said.

The European Parliament also



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson gestures after signing the post-Brexit trade deal between the UK and EU on Wednesday | AFP

must sign off on the agreement, but is not expected to do so for several weeks. Just after the EU's top officials formally signed the hard-won agreement in Brussels, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged legislators in the House of Commons to back a deal that he said heralded "a new relationship between Britain and the EU as sovereign equals."

Some lawmakers grumbled about being given only five hours in Parliament to scrutinize a 1,200-page deal that will mean profound changes for

Britain's economy and society.

The party's powerful euroskeptic wing, which fought for years for the seemingly longshot goal of taking Britain out of the EU, has backed the deal. The strongly pro-EU Scottish National Party and Liberal Democrats voted against the bill. But the main opposition Labour Party, which had sought a closer relationship with the bloc, said it would vote for the agreement because even a thin deal was better than a chaotic no-deal rupture.

Agencies



First we stood aloof, then we became a half-hearted, sometimes obstructive member of the EU. Now, with this bill, we shall be a friendly neighbour — the best friend and ally the EU could have — working hand-in-glove whenever our values and interests coincide while fulfilling the sovereign wish of the British people to live under their own laws, made by their own elected Parliament. That is the historic resolution delivered by this Bill

Boris Johnson, UK Prime Minister

Pakistan to axe Sharif's passport on February 16

ISLAMABAD

THE Pakistan government on Wednesday said it will cancel the passport of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on February 16.

Sharif, 70, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) supremo, has been living in London since November last year after the Lahore High Court granted him permission to go abroad for four weeks for medical treatment. The three-time former prime minister, who was convicted in two corruption cases — Avenfield properties and Al-Azizia — was declared a proclaimed offender earlier this month by the Islamabad High Court.

"(We) will cancel Nawaz Sharif's passport on February 16," Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed told reporters. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Accountability and Interior, Mirza Shahzad Akbar, said Pakistan had asked the UK authorities to deport Sharif who was convicted by the courts.

PTI

Chinese Covid vaccine 79.3% effective

BEIJING

A Chinese drugmaker said on Wednesday its coronavirus vaccine was found to be 79.3 per cent effective at preventing infection in preliminary data from the final round of testing, moving Beijing closer to possibly being able to fill its pledge to supply other developing countries.

The announcement by a unit of state-owned Sinopharm gave the first official data from a Chinese vaccine's late-stage trial. Its reported effectiveness rate is behind Pfizer Inc's vaccine at 95 per cent and Moderna Inc's at 94 per cent.

Scientists have cautioned coronavirus vaccines may only be about as effective as flu vaccines, which generally are 50 per cent effective.

Sinopharm is one of at least five Chinese developers that are in a global race to create vaccines for the disease that has killed more than 1.7 million people.

More than 1 million health care workers and others in China have received vaccines being developed by Sinopharm and another supplier, Sinovac, under emergency approval while

testing was underway. The two-sentence statement by the Sinopharm unit that developed the vaccine, the Beijing Biological Products Institute Ltd., gave no additional details. Final proof of its effectiveness will depend on publication of more data.

"That's useful, and at least it is showing that it is probably effective," said Jin Dong-yan, a medical professor at University of Hong Kong. Jin said 'it would be helpful' to know how many people were vaccinated and how large the control group was.

"They should release more information," Jin said. Also Wednesday, another developer, Sinovac Biotech, signed an agreement to build a production facility in Beijing for a vaccine with a planned annual capacity of 1 billion doses, Beijing Youth News reported. Sinopharm has applied for approval of the Beijing Institute's vaccine following the third and final stage of testing, the company said.

It would be the second vaccine from a Sinopharm unit, following a separate candidate developed by the company's Wuhan Institute of Biological Products Ltd. AP

Powerful blast shakes Yemeni airport, 26 killed, dozens wounded

SANAA

At least 26 people were killed and dozens wounded Wednesday in blasts that struck Yemen's Aden airport after a plane carrying a new unity government landed.

A source said in Aden, the temporary capital of Yemen's internationally recognised government, that there were "at least 26 dead" in the explosions that took place at the airport, while more than 50 people were wounded.

The source of the explosion was not immediately clear and no group claimed responsibility for attacking the airport.

No one on the government plane was hurt.

Thick smoke rose into the air from near the terminal building. Officials at the scene said they saw bodies lying on the tarmac and



People run to safety following an explosion at Yemen's airport in Aden | AFP

elsewhere at the airport. Images shared on social media from the scene showed rubble and broken glass strewn about near the airport building and at least two lifeless bodies, one of them charred, lying on the ground. In another image, a man was trying to help another man whose clothes were torn to get up from the ground.

The ministers were returning to Aden from the Saudi capital, Riyadh, after

being sworn in last week as part of a reshuffle following a deal with rival southern separatists.

The reshuffle was seen as a major step toward closing a dangerous rift between Hadi's government and southern separatists backed by the United Arab Emirates. The Saudi-backed government is at war with Iran-allied Houthi rebels, who control most of northern Yemen as well as the country's capital.

US shuts fraud involving desi call centres

WASHINGTON

A US court has ordered the permanent shut down of a technical-support fraud scheme, masterminded by an American citizen and operated through call centres in India, that allegedly defrauded hundreds of elderly and vulnerable Americans.

The US Justice Department said on Tuesday the District Court entered the order of permanent injunction against Michael Brian Cotter, 59, of Glendale, California, and four companies — Global Digital Concierge, Sensei Ventures Incorporated and NE Labs Inc, and Kevisoft.

The complaint filed in October 2020 alleged that Cotter worked with co-conspirators in India from at least 2011 to 2020 to operate a fraud scheme. PTI

Olive branch? Qatar gets GCC invite

RIYADH

THE Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) said on Wednesday that Qatar's ruler is invited to the bloc's summit meeting next week amid efforts to heal rifts between Doha and a Saudi-led alliance.

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani received a "formal invitation" from Saudi King Salman to the January 5 meeting of the GCC

in Saudi Arabia's northwest Al-Ula province. Sheikh Tamim's participation would signal an easing of divisions. On Wednesday, Saudi's cabinet said that it "wished for a successful summit. AFP

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