

KANYE WEST WELCOMES NEW YEAR WITH TWEETS
REAFFIRMING SUPPORT FOR US PRESIDENT TRUMP

POST-ILLNESS, SINGER-ACTRESS SELENA GOMEZ'S
GO-TO WORKOUT CLASS COSTS \$300 AN HOUR

AND NOW WE WELCOME
THE NEW YEAR.
FULL OF THINGS THAT
HAVE NEVER BEEN
— RAINER MARIA RILKE



Unification is the goal, force an option, Xi warns Taiwan

China Prez Says
Independence
For The Island
A Dead-End

Chris Buckley & Chris Horton

Beijing: China's president, Xi Jinping, warned Taiwan that unification must be the ultimate goal of any talks over its future and that efforts to assert full independence could be met by armed force, laying out an unyielding position on Wednesday in his first major speech about the contested island democracy.

Xi outlined his stance one day after Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, urged China to peacefully settle disputes over the island, whose 23 million people, she said, want to preserve their self-rule. But Beijing treats Taiwan as an illegitimate breakaway from Chinese rule, and Xi said unification was unstoppable as China rose. "The country is growing strong, the nation is rejuvenating, and unification between the two sides of the strait is the great trend of history," Xi told officials, military officers and guests in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

China would respect the Taiwanese people's religious and legal freedoms in a unified "one country, two systems" framework, Xi said. But he warned that the profound political differences between Taiwan, a vibrant democracy, and China, a highly authoritarian government, were no



A woman walks past a TV in New Taipei City showing China's leader Xi Jinping speech in which he warned Taiwan independence advocates

Defiant Taiwan prez rejects Beijing's proposal of 'one country, two systems'



Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen on Wednesday rejected the Chinese President Xi Jinping's call for unification under a "one country, two systems" approach. Tsai said her island of 23 million people would never accept the approach proposed by Beijing. "China must face the fact of the existence of Taiwan, Republic of China, and not deny the system of a democratic country that has been commonly built up by the Taiwanese people," she said in a statement hours after President Xi said in a policy speech on Taiwan that no one can stop the trend toward unification. One country, two systems refers to a framework similar to Hong Kong in which the territory became part of China but retained a degree of autonomy. Taiwan and China split in a civil war that brought the Communist Party to power in China in 1949. The rival nationalists set up their own government on Taiwan, an island 160km off the Chinese mainland. AP

excuse to reject unification.

"Different systems are not an obstacle to unification, and even less are they an excuse for separatism. The private property, religious beliefs and legitimate rights and interests of Taiwanese compatriots will be fully assured," Xi said, calling independence for the self-governing island a dead end.

Xi also accompanied his offer of talks with a warning

— one implicitly also aimed at the US, which provides Taiwan with military equipment and the possibility of support in a crisis. "We make no promise to abandon the use of force and retain the option of taking all necessary measures," Xi said in a section of the speech that drew rousing applause. Those options, he said, could be used against "intervention by external forces."

Taiwan's leader rejected his call just hours later. President Tsai said her island of 23 million people would never accept the "one country, two systems" approach proposed by Beijing. The diverging positions staked out by Xi and Tsai have brought into focus how the disputed future of Taiwan remains a volatile question that could erupt into crisis, especially if either side misjudges the intentions of the other—or of the US, a key ally that has strengthened support for Taiwan. Since coming to power in late 2012, Xi has warned Taiwan against any shift toward independence.

Xi's speech commemorated the 40 years since China laid out a new approach to Taiwan soon after the US switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing at the start of 1979. But the US has remained Taiwan's most important partner, and the Trump administration has bolstered some support, to the consternation of Chinese officials. In March, President Trump signed the Taiwan Travel Act, which encourages official government exchanges between the US and Taiwan. And in June, the US dedicated a new \$250 million unofficial embassy in Taipei.

On the last day of 2018, Trump signed into law the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, which tries to counter China's growing military influence. The section of the law on Taiwan reiterates US commitment "to counter efforts to change the status quo and to support peaceful resolution acceptable to both sides of the Taiwan Strait." NYT NEWS SERVICE

China building most advanced naval warships for Pak: Report

Beijing: China is building the first of four "most advanced" naval warships for its "all-weather ally" Pakistan as part of a major bilateral arms deal to ensure among "balance of power" in the strategic Indian Ocean, state media reported. Equipped with modern detection and weapon systems, it will be capable of anti-ship, anti-submarine and air-defence operations, China Daily quoted state-owned defence contractor China State Shipbuilding Corporation as saying.

The ship, under construction at Hudong-Zhonghua shipyard in Shanghai, is a version of the Chinese Navy's most advanced guided missile frigate, it said. The ship's class is Type 054AP, which means it is based on the Type 054A of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, the report quoted the Pakistani Navy as saying.

Once constructed, the warship "will be one of the largest and technologically advanced platforms of the Pakistani Navy and strengthen the country's capability to respond to future challenges, maintain peace and stability and the balance of power in the Indian Ocean region," the report said.

The mention of the Indian Ocean is regarded as significant as China, which has already taken over Pakistan's strategic Gwadar port under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, looks to assist the Pakistani navy to restore the balance of power in India's backyard. China is the largest supplier of weapon system to Pakistan. Both the nations also jointly manufacture JF-17 Thunder as a single engine multi-role combat aircraft. PTI

Cathay Pacific sells \$16k seats for \$675 in error

Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd. made a mistake selling first and business-class tickets at a steep discount. Now, the lucky few who made the bookings will travel in style after all.

The Hong Kong-based airline said on its Twitter and Facebook pages Wednesday that it would still welcome passengers that bought the business-class tickets from Vietnam to Canada and the US at economy prices earlier this week. The online ticketing foul-up meant return fares of as low as \$675 from Da Nang in Vietnam to New York at the front end of the plane, or a small fraction of its original price of \$16,000.

"We do not want to go back on our promise..." Cathay said on its Twitter account. "We made a mistake but we look forward to welcoming you on board with your ticket issued." The mistake adds to the embarrassments for the carrier that's struggling to turn its fortunes around while competition intensifies from budget airlines. BLOOMBERG

Nikki Haley says Unesco 'most corrupt' UN body

Washington: The outgoing US ambassador to United Nations Nikki Haley has slammed Unesco and termed it one of the most "corrupt" UN agencies. This comes a day after US and Israel officially quit the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

"Unesco is among the most corrupt and politically biased UN agencies. Today the US withdrawal from this cesspool became official," Haley tweeted. According to Fox News, US had filed its notice to withdraw from the Unesco in October 2017 under Trump administration. ANI

Bangladesh set for an opposition-less House

Oppn, Which Won Only 7 Seats, Says It Won't Take Oath; Hasina's Party Says Will Hold Bypolls For Those Seats

Dhaka: While Sheikh Hasina is set to begin her third consecutive term as Bangladesh's prime minister following a landslide election victory, critics say having such an overwhelming majority in parliament could create space for her to become even more authoritarian. The Hasina-led coalition won 288 seats in the 300-seat parliament in Sunday's election, amid allegations by the opposition that the voting was rigged. Hasina rejected the accusations.

The new Cabinet is expected to be sworn in by January 10, but members of the opposition alliance, which won only seven seats, said they would not take the oath. According to legal and parliament experts, a party needs to win at least 10% of the total seats to formally get the status of an opposition party. In response, the ruling party's general secretary said by-elections would be held for those seats.

Over her last 10 years as PM, Hasina took up many de-



MORE 'IRON-HANDED'? With virtually no opposition, critics say Hasina's new government could be even more iron-handed and aggressive

velopment projects, from power generation to the building of a seaport, but her record of maintaining human rights was widely criticised by rights groups. Some of those critics now say her new government could be even more iron-handed and aggressive.

More than a dozen people were killed in election-related violence on Sunday, and the election campaign was dogged by allegations of the arrests and jailing of thousands of Hasina's opponents. Do-

zens of activists took to the streets of Dhaka on Tuesday to protest the alleged gang rape by Hasina supporters of a mother of four who had voted for the opposition.

"Sheikh Hasina's government during its previous term displayed an increasingly authoritarian streak," Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director for Human Rights Watch, adding that she doubted that the next government would be more tolerant. AGENCIES

UK making forced marriage victims pay repatriation costs

London: The British government came under fire on Wednesday after it emerged that the foreign and commonwealth office (FCO) is charging victims of forced marriages to return home to the UK after their rescue overseas.

According to statistics from the UK's Forced Marriage Unit, India ranks fourth among countries where victims are taken to be forced into marriage after Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia — among nations where victims are taken to be forced into marriage

A Freedom of Information request by The Times newspaper found that any such victims must cover the cost of their plane ticket, food and shelter on being assisted by the government unit. If they are over 18, they can take out emergency government loans.

A spokeswoman for Britain's foreign office said the government had an "obligation to recover the money" as it came from public funds. But campaigners said the charges, which sometimes ran into hundreds of pounds, were indefensible. "This charge is completely against the principles of helping the most vulnerable," Aneeta Prem, found-

der of the Freedom charity which works against forced marriage, said. Foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt said he would "get to the bottom" of the issue to ensure his department was acting with "compassion and humanity".

The Times probe found that many of the 82 victims repatriated by the government between 2016 to 2017 were asked to pay for their own flights, food and shelter. Since 2014, forced marriage has been a crime in UK carrying a maximum seven-year prison sentence. In the past two years, the foreign office has lent £7,765 to at least eight victims who could not pay for their repatriation. Around £3,000 has been repaid, although debts of over £4,500 are outstanding. A 10% surcharge is added if an emergency loan is not repaid within six months. AGENCIES

Netflix blocks comedy show in Saudi Arabia

Netflix has blocked an episode of its show "Patriot Act With

Hasan Minhaj" from streaming in Saudi Arabia after the Saudi government complained the episode — which is critical of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman — violated its cybercrime laws. In the episode, the American-born Muslim comedian lashed out at the kingdom after the October killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

After receiving a takedown request last month from the Saudi government's Communications and Information Technology Commission, Netflix removed the episode from viewing in Saudi Arabia last week. In a statement, Netflix defended its decision: "We strongly support artistic freedom worldwide and only removed this episode in Saudi Arabia after we had received a valid legal request — and to comply with local law."

In an interview published in The Atlantic last month, Minhaj spoke of the fear he felt after creating the episode. "...I've just come to personal and spiritual terms with what the repercussions are." NYT AND AGENCIES

US tells Russia to release detained former marine

The United States is demanding the immediate return of retired US Marine detained by Russia on spying charges, and wants an explanation of why he was arrested, US secretary of state Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday.

Russia's FSB state security service detained Paul Whelan, who was visiting Moscow for the wedding of a former fellow Marine, on Friday and opened a criminal case against him. "We've made clear to the Russians our expectation that we will learn more about the charges, come to understand what it is he's been accused of and if the detention is not appropriate, we will demand his immediate return," Pompeo said. In Moscow, RIA news agency cited a foreign ministry spokesman as saying Russia has allowed consular access to Whelan. The state department did not immediately confirm that Moscow had provided consular access. REUTERS

UK attacker held under mental health law: Cops

London: A 25-year-old knife-wielding man arrested during a New Year's Eve terror attack in Manchester is being detained under the Mental Health Act after an assessment by medical experts, police said on Wednesday. The man stabbed three people at Manchester Victoria station before being arrested on Monday.

Police said the counter-terrorism investigation launched in the wake of the attack on Monday night remains ongoing, including a search of a property associated with the suspect in north Manchester. PTI

Romney says Trump 'has not risen to the mantle of the office'

Washington: US President Donald Trump on Wednesday cautioned fellow Republican Mitt Romney to be a "team player" after the former presidential candidate and incoming US senator sharply criticised the president's actions and questioned his character. In a Washington Post essay published late on Tuesday, Romney suggested the US leader had "caused dismay around the world" and said his presidency had "made a deep descent in December."

"On balance, his conduct over the past two years... is evidence that the president has not risen to the mantle of the office," said Romney, who starts his new role representing Utah on Thursday. "The appointment of senior persons of lesser experience, the abandonment of allies who fight beside us, and the president's thoughtless claim that America has long been a 'sucker' in world affairs all defined his presidency down," he wrote.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment, but Trump fired back in a tweet on Wednesday taking aim at Romney's failed 2012 White House bid.

"Here we go with Mitt Romney, but so fast! Question will be, is he a Flake? I hope not. Would much prefer that Mitt focus on Border Security and so many other things where he can be helpful. I won big, and he didn't. He should



INFIGHTING: Donald Trump and Mitt Romney

be happy for all Republicans. Be a TEAM player & WIN!" Trump wrote on Twitter, appearing to reference outgoing US Senator Jeff Flake, one of the few Republican lawmakers who publicly spoke out against Trump, at the cost of drawing the president's wrath.

It is unclear whether any other Republican lawmakers will feel emboldened to criticise Trump ahead of his presumed 2020 re-election bid or whether Trump will face any serious challengers for the Republican Party's presidential nomination. Romney's move to stake out a more independent position highlights divisions within the party, since Trump upended many conservatives' long-held positions on foreign policy and deficits, among others.

Republican National Committee Chair Ronna McDaniel also criticized Romney on Twitter, calling his essay an "attack" on Trump that was "disappointing and unproductive." REUTERS

'Ending country cap in Green Cards may benefit India, China'

Washington: Eliminating the country quota from the most sought-after Green Cards will end the current discrimination in the US labour market, but would allow countries like India and China to dominate the path to US citizenship, according to the latest Congressional report.

Indian-Americans, most of whom are highly skilled and come to the US mainly on the H-1B work visas, are the worst sufferers of the current immigration system which imposes a 7% per country quota on allotment of Green

Cards or the Legal Permanent Residency (LPR).

The bipartisan Congressional Research Services said if the per-country cap for employment-based immigrants was removed, many expect that Indian and Chinese nationals would dominate the flow of new employment-based LPRs for as many years as needed to clear out the accumulated queue of prospective immigrants from those countries.

As of April 2018, a total of 3,06,601 Indian nationals were waiting in line for Green Cards, according to the USCIS.

Indians constitute 78% of the 3,95,025 foreign nationals waiting for Green Cards in just one category of employment-based LPR applications.

Due to the cap, the current wait period for the majority of Indians to get a Green Card is nine and half years, the CRS said. India is followed by China with 67,031 in line for Green Cards. Lawmakers favouring eliminating the per-country cap contend that such circumstances would encourage employers to sponsor employment-based immigrants primarily from India. PTI

was nearly hit by one of the vehicles while he was playing in a nearby cul-de-sac. "They said they need real-world examples, but I don't want to be their real-world mistake," said Erik. At least 21 such attacks have been leveled at Waymo vans in Chandler. The emergency drivers told police that the company preferred not to pursue prosecution of the assailants.

A Waymo manager said the company emphasised that

it was worried about disruptions of its testing in Chandler. "Safety is the core of everything we do, which means that keeping our drivers, our riders, and the public safe is our top priority," said Alexis Georgeson, a Waymo spokeswoman. He said the company took the safety of its emergency drivers seriously and disputed claims that Waymo was trying to avoid bad publicity by opting against pursuing criminal charges. NYT NEWS SERVICE

Wielding rocks & knives, Arizonans attack self-driving cars

Simon Romero

Chandler (US): The assailant slipped out of a park and wifely slashed one of the tyres of a self-driving van operated by Waymo, the driverless-car company spun out of Google. The slashing was one of nearly two dozen attacks on driverless vehicles over the past two years in Chandler, Arizona, where Waymo started testing its vans in 2017. The city has had an early look at public misgivings

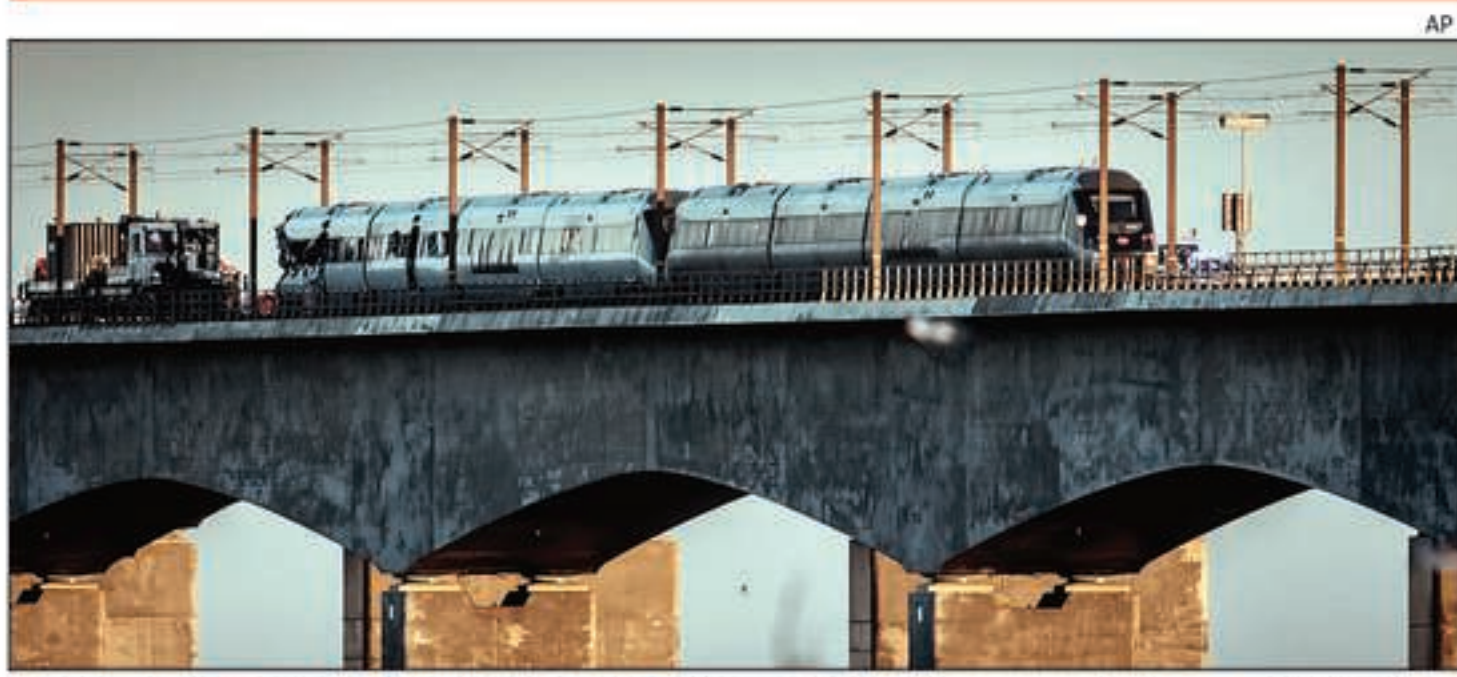
over the rise of AI, with city officials hearing complaints about everything from safety to possible job losses.

Some people have pelted Waymo vans with rocks, according to police reports. Others have tried to run the vehicles off the road. In one episode, a man waved a revolver at a Waymo vehicle and the emergency backup driver. He told the police that he "despises" driverless cars, referring to the killing of a female pe-

destrian in March in Tempe by a self-driving Uber car.

"There are other places they can test," said Erik O'Polka, 37, who was issued a warning by police after multiple reports that his Jeep Wrangler had tried to run Waymo vans off the road. His wife, Elizabeth, 35, admitted that she herself "may have forced them to pull over" so she could yell at them. The trouble started, the couple said, when their 10-year-old son

AROUND THE WORLD



SIX KILLED IN TRAIN CRASH ON BRIDGE IN DENMARK: A Danish passenger train apparently hit falling cargo from a passing freight train on Wednesday, an accident that killed six people and injured 16 others as it crossed a bridge linking the country's islands, authorities said. The accident was the worst in Denmark in more than 30 years. Authorities said the trains were going past each other in opposite directions. TV footage showed a severely damaged freight trailer adorned with the logo of Danish beer maker Carlsberg

Man trying to kill spider sparks police response

Police rushed to a home where a toddler was heard crying as a man repeatedly screamed, "Why don't you die?" — only to find the pair trying to kill a spider. Officers in Australia attended the address in Perth after a passer-by called emergency services. On their arrival, the man at home explained he had a fear of spiders and apologised for the inconvenience caused. It is not the first time a spider has resulted in police in Australia needlessly rushing to a suspected crime scene. In 2015, officers in Sydney attended a home

where reports of loud banging had worried neighbours. They found a man throwing his furniture at an arachnid.

Cops couldn't find body for years due to Google Maps Police were unable to find a missing body for 18 months because they used incorrect Google Maps data, an inquiry has found. Darrell Simon went missing in Brisbane, Australia, in November 2014. Authorities were notified that the 46-year-old was missing and searched his property in Laidley Creek West. They printed out an image from Google Maps to determine the boundaries but the map in question was incorrect. The error meant that those searching for Simon

only covered half of his property as the boundaries online were wrong. Simon's remains were found on the property in May 2016 and it was ruled that he had taken his own life. The delay in finding him resulted in speculation that he had been the victim of a murder.

Germany must give painting stolen by Nazis back: Gallery The director of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence is urging Germany to return a Dutch masterpiece stolen by Nazi troops during World War II. Elke Schmidt said in a New Year's appeal on Tuesday that the still-life "Vase of Flowers" by Dutch artist Jan van Huysum is in the hands of a German family who hasn't returned it despite numerous appeals.