

Two-thirds of the continental United States was a frozen ice box Tuesday, as the so-called polar vortex of frigid arctic air spins across the US Midwest, clips the Great Lakes, the Ohio Valley and pushes on into New England. The hardest-hit area will be the Midwest, where wind chill could bring temperatures as low as -46°C in Chicago. The sub-zero cold and bitter winds will stick around for a couple of days, the National Weather Service reported.

TOP OF THE WORLD



USA Pelosi invites Trump to give State of Union speech on Feb 5

Washington: US President Donald Trump and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have agreed Trump will give the annual State of the Union address on Feb. 5, following her postponement of the event from Jan. 29 because of the government shutdown, a spokesman for Pelosi said Monday. In a letter to Trump posted by spokesman Drew Hammill on Twitter, Pelosi invited Trump to give the speech in the House of Representatives. Democrat Pelosi had spoken with the Republican president and they had agreed on the date for the nationally televised address, the spokesman said. The annual speech is given by the president to outline the administration's priorities for the coming year.

Top Pak court upholds blasphemy acquittal, frees Christian woman

Asia Bibi free to leave country, may fly to Canada; Supreme Court says initial conviction based on lies

ASIF SHAHZAD ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 29

PAKISTAN'S SUPREME Court on Tuesday upheld the acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who spent years on death row after being convicted of blasphemy, dismissing a petition filed by Islamists who have called for her execution.

The decision leaves Bibi, who has been staying at an undisclosed location under tight security, free to leave Pakistan and seek asylum abroad. "On merit, this petition is dismissed," Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa told the court, saying the petitioners, led by a village prayer leader, had failed to point out any mistake in the original judgment which he said had been based on false evidence.

In November, Canadian PM Justin Trudeau said his country was in talks with Pakistan about helping Bibi. But, there was no confirmation of her whereabouts or intentions following the verdict.

The case, which drew worldwide attention, shone a spotlight on Pakistan's strict blasphemy laws and the often difficult con-



Paramilitary soldiers stand guard outside the Supreme Court building in Islamabad on Tuesday. Radical religious parties had called for the killing of judges who acquitted Asia Bibi (right) in a blasphemy case. Reuters

ditions facing its Christian minority who make up 1.6 per cent of the largely Sunni Muslim country of over 200 million.

Bibi, a farm worker, was convicted in 2010 of making derogatory remarks about Islam after neighbours working in the fields with her objected to her drinking water from their glass because she was not Muslim.

Her conviction was overturned in October, prompting protests from religious hardliners calling for her death and demand-

ing that the government prevent her from leaving the country.

Under pressure from days of protests in the capital, Islamabad, and other cities, the government agreed to stop Bibi leaving the country until the Supreme Court considered the petition.

Bibi has been in hiding since the Supreme Court freed her in October, after eight years on death row. She has always denied committing blasphemy.

Hours before the Supreme Court decision, Shafeeq Ameen,



Suman Kumari becomes Pak's first Hindu woman judge

Islamabad: Suman Kumari has become the first Hindu woman in Pakistan to be appointed as a civil judge, according to a media report.

Kumari will serve in her native Qambar Shahdadkot district. Having completed her bachelor's degree in law from Hyderabad, she did her master's from Karachi's Szabist University, Dawn reported.

According to Pawan Kumar Bodan, her father, Kumari wants to provide free legal assistance to the poor in Qambar Shahdadkot.

"I have entered the field of law because I know that in the backward areas of Sindh, poor people need a lot of advice and assistance in legal matters," she told PTI over telephone.

"My father and my family supported me a lot as in our community it is not easy for women to enter such fields," she said. PTI

BRITISH MPs TO VOTE ON KEY PROPOSALS May seeks changes to Brexit deal as EU stands firm

JILL LAWLESS LONDON, JANUARY 29

SEEKING TO break Britain's Brexit deadlock, Prime Minister Theresa May said Tuesday she plans to ask the European Union to change its divorce deal with the UK by altering an Irish border guarantee that is opposed by many British lawmakers.

EU leaders have ruled out any renegotiation on the Brexit deal, but May urged Parliament to give her a mandate by backing a call for the border measure to be replaced by unspecified "alternative arrangements".

"Today, we have the chance to show the European Union what it will take to get a deal through this House of Commons; what it will take to move beyond the confusion and division and uncertainty that hangs over us," May told MPs.

The House of Commons was voting late Tuesday on competing Brexit proposals that have been submitted by both pro-Brexit and pro-EU legislators since Parliament rejected May's divorce deal two weeks ago, leaving Britain lurching toward a cliff-edge "no-deal" departure from the bloc on March 29.



Today, we have the chance to show the European Union what it will take to get a deal through this House of Commons.

Speaker of the House of Commons John Bercow selected seven proposals for debate and vote. But, amid political gridlock in London and with Brexit Day just two months away, the EU shows few, if any, signs of negotiating the divorce deal it struck with May late last year. May, who planned to call EU leaders on Tuesday, insisted that her agreement could still win Parliament's backing if it was tweaked to alleviate concerns about the Irish border measure, known as the backstop. AP

USA Indian-American stands trial for bribing doctors

Washington: An India-born onetime billionaire and founder of a drug company went on trial in the US along with four others on charges of paying doctors millions of dollars in bribes to lure them into prescribing a highly addictive opioid painkiller meant solely for cancer patients. John Kapoor, 75, plotted to bribe doctors across the country to prescribe a fentanyl spray in order to outshine competitors and line his own pockets, a federal prosecutor told jurors as the trial opened Monday in the District Court in Boston.



Palestine PM Rami Hamdallah

Palestinian govt submits its resignation to President Abbas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA RAMALLAH, JANUARY 29

THE PALESTINIAN government officially submitted its resignation to president Mahmud Abbas Tuesday, a statement said, though it will remain in place while a new administration is formed.

Analysts see the change in government as an attempt by Abbas to strengthen his position and further isolate his political rivals Hamas as a decade-long split in Palestinian politics deepens.

"The government of Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah submitted on Tuesday its resignation to President Mahmud Abbas," official news agency Wafa said following a Cabinet meeting.

The government "will continue to serve our people wherever they are and shoulder all its responsibilities until a new government is formed," it added.

Hamdallah had offered to resign Monday, after the central committee of Abbas's Fatah movement recommended the formation of a new government that would comprise members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The Islamist movement Hamas, which runs the Gaza Strip, is not part of the PLO.

US sanctions threaten Venezuela's economy as Maduro eyes next move

Caracas moves to stop Guaido from leaving country

AGENCIES CARACAS, JANUARY 29

VENEZUELAN BRACED for the deepening of a brutal economic crisis Tuesday after the US imposed sanctions sharply curbing the country's vital oil exports, while the socialist government responded by refusing to load crude cargoes without payment.

The Trump administration hopes the sanctions, which bar state-owned oil company Petroleos de Venezuela from collecting proceeds from crude sales to US refineries, pressure President Nicolas Maduro to step down and allow Opposition leader and self-proclaimed president Juan Guaido to call elections.

In a defiant national broadcast on Monday, Maduro said he would take legal action to challenge the sanctions and defend Citgo Petroleum Corp, PDVSA's US refining subsidiary, which he accused the US of trying to steal. He also pledged to retaliate.

"We will provide the reciprocal and convincing response needed to defend Venezuela's interests in due time," Maduro said.

Meanwhile, Venezuela's chief prosecutor on Tuesday asked the country's top court to ban Guaido from leaving the country, launching a criminal probe into his anti-government activities. Attorney General Tarek William Saab made his request to the government-stacked Supreme Court,



Nicolas Maduro jogs alongside his Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez (right) and soldiers as he visits Ft. Paramacay in Carabobo state, Venezuela. AP

and also asked it to block Guaido's financial accounts.

At the same time, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo certified that Guaido has authority to take control of bank accounts that Venezuela's government has in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York or any other US-insured banks. Pompeo said the certification will "help Venezuela's legitimate government safeguard those assets for the benefit of the Venezuelan people".

US considering sending troops to Colombia?

US Acting Defence Secretary Pat Shanahan would not rule out sending US military forces to Colombia in connection with the political upheaval in Venezuela. Shanahan told reporters Tuesday that he hasn't spoken to

After Prachanda backs Maduro, Nepal govt says it's internal matter

Kathmandu: Four days after former Prime Minister and co-chairman of the ruling Nepal Communist Party, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, also known as Prachanda, infuriated the US by pledging solidarity and support to Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro, the government on Tuesday made a feeble attempt towards damage control. A statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "In line with the principled po-

sition, Nepal believes that internal political problems of a country need to be resolved within its constitutional parameters in a democratic manner, free from external interferences." Prachanda had issued a statement last week on behalf of the ruling party strongly denouncing the "US intervention in Venezuela". He also expressed solidarity with the people of Venezuela and Maduro. YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

NSA John Bolton about sending troops to Colombia. Bolton had "5,000 troops to Colombia" writ-

ten on a notepad he held during a news conference announcing new sanctions on Venezuela.

EXPLAINED The backstop: A key sticking point in Brexit talks

THE ISLAND of Ireland is divided into Northern Ireland, which is a part of the UK, and the Republic of Ireland, which is an EU member. As of now, goods and services pass unhindered between the two regions because the UK is part of the EU single market and customs union. However, that will change after Brexit, creating a 'hard border' inside the island that neither side wants. The 'backstop' agreement is an emergency measure to prevent a hard border in case the UK and the EU are unable to agree to a broader trade deal after Brexit.

The backstop measure in the current Brexit deal keeps the whole of the UK in the EU customs union until the two sides agree to a trade deal. This has angered hardline Brexit supporters, because they feel the agreement keeps the UK closely aligned to the EU even after Brexit. In a bid to garner these MPs' support, PM Theresa May is trying to replace the current backstop agreement with unspecified "alternative arrangements".

Mueller probe close to completion: Official

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA WASHINGTON, JANUARY 29

SPECIAL COUNSEL Robert Mueller's investigation into possible collusion between Donald Trump's campaign and Russia in the 2016 US presidential election is close to being wrapped up, Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker said. "The Mueller investigation is close to being completed," he said.

"I've been fully briefed on the investigation and I look forward to Director Mueller delivering the final report," he said. "I hope we can get the report from Director Mueller as soon as possible."

Mueller's team has indicted a total of 34 people — but so far, no charges of outright collusion between the Trump campaign and Moscow have been filed.

Trump ally Stone pleads not guilty

Washington: US President Donald Trump's longtime political ally Roger Stone pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to making false statements to Congress and other charges brought in the investigation into Russia's role in the 2016 presidential election.

Stone, a self-proclaimed "dirty trickster" and Republican political operative for decades, also pleaded not guilty in a federal court in Washington DC to obstructing an official proceeding and witness tampering.

He is the latest member of Trump's inner circle charged in Special Counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation and was arrested on Friday in an early-morning raid on his home. REUTERS

NETANYAHU SAYS INVESTMENT IN CYBER SECURITY ALLOWED 'SMALL' ISRAEL TO BECOME A 'BIG COUNTRY'

Israel spends big on digital security, PM says 'cyber diplomacy' is the future

RAHUL TRIPATHI TEL AVIV, JANUARY 29

CRITICISING IRAN for cyber security attacks on Israel's critical infrastructure, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "Iran attacks Israel on a daily basis. We monitor these attacks. We see these attacks and we foil these attacks all the time. Iran threatens us in many other ways. They have issued, in the last 24 hours, threats that say they'll destroy us, they'll target our cities with missiles. We're not oblivious to these threats. They don't impress us, because we know what our power is both in defence and in offence."

"The important thing is that any country can be attacked today with cyber attacks and every country needs the combination of a national cyber defence effort and a robust cyber security industry. And I think Israel has that and has that in ways that are unmatched," he added.

According to the Israel Cyber Directorate, private investments in Israel's cyber security is over \$1 billion. This has "allowed a small country like Israel to become a big country," Netanyahu said. He said he believes that "cyber diplomacy" will be the next area of cooperation among big economies.

India is among the countries with which Israel has a cyber security agreement, according to the Cyber Directorate at Tel Aviv. Israel also boasts of having 20 per cent of global private invest-

ments in cyber security, second only to the United States. "Israel is one-tenth of one per cent of the world's population and we are receiving 20 per cent of the global share in private cyber-security investments. That's 200 times our weight in the world," Netanyahu said.

"What this revolution is doing — big data, AI and connectivity — is allowing small countries to be big countries. It depends on if you have the brains and the system to create conceptual products at an accelerated rate — conceptual products that are at the cutting edge and give you a competitive advantage. If you do this conceptual mousetrap, the world definitely beats a path to your door. There's no question about it, it's happening," he added.

According to Israel's cyber division, their share in global pri-



Benjamin Netanyahu speaks at the Cybertech 2019 conference in Tel Aviv on Tuesday. Reuters

ate investments in cyber security was only 10 per cent in 2014. It was only in 2015 that Netanyahu had announced the

setting up of the National Cyber Defence Authority, which was converted into a National Cyber Defence Directorate last year by

merging another government body called the Cyber Bureau, reporting directly to the PM.

During his address at the conference, the prime minister also drew a parallel with the time when there were a spate of airline hijacks all over the world and how Israel was among the first countries to counter those attacks. "A few decades ago, the world was plagued with airline hijacks, Israel built a hi-tech metallic door. It was amazingly effective, but then no country paid heed. After the 9/11 attacks, every single American aircraft had this metallic door," the PM said, adding that the world was now being attacked in various different ways, which can't be protected by mechanical doors, but by virtual ones.

"Our airlines can be attacked a hundred ways. They can be attacked by ground control inter-

ference, they can be attacked by the systems within the plane and the communications and many other things. It is, in many ways, the most vulnerable system that we have right now. But, as you know, everything today is vulnerable and everything is under attack," he said.

Speaking about Fortune 500 companies, Netanyahu displayed a list of the world's largest companies by their market capitalisation in 2007 and 2017, and pointed out that the top 10 companies in 2007 are no more there. They have been replaced by IT companies. "Here's the old world (2017). That's all of ten years ago. Here are the ten leading companies in the world. They include five energy companies... and one IT company. Now, shift forward ten years, which is nothing, it's a blink of an eye. And you see this

most amazing change. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven IT based companies. No energy left," the PM added.

"All of these new companies have major research centres in Israel. Some of them are most advanced. It has happened because Israel leads the world in investment in R&D as a percentage of GDP. It happens because we have the highest percentage of R&D personnel per one thousand employees, by far. It happens because we have a defence industry that we use to leverage the civilian industry," he said, citing the 2015 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development statistics that claimed the total business enterprise personnel per 100 employees in Israel is 28.3.

The correspondent was at Tel Aviv on the invitation of the Government of Israel