

12 THE WORLD

TOPOF THE WORLD



BANGLADESH

PM Hasina's 47-member Cabinet named

Dhaka: Bangladesh on Sunday named a council of ministers with several new faces in the 47-member Cabinet of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina whose Awami League returned to power for a third consecutive term after its landslide victory in the December 30 election. Several veterans were dropped from the council of ministers amid speculation about the inductions as major portfolios like defence were retained by Hasina herself. Academic-turned-diplomat Abdul Momen, a new face in politics, was appointed the new foreign minister. He previously served as Bangladesh's permanent envoy at the UN. Former planning minister and businessman AHM Mustafa Kamal became the finance minister.

USA

Woman in coma for decade gives birth, cops begin investigation

PHOENIX POLICE on Saturday were investigating reports of a sexual assault after a woman who has been hospitalised in a vegetative state for the past decade gave birth. The woman, who was incapacitated in a drowning incident, was a patient at Hacienda Healthcare when she went into labour on December 29 and delivered a baby boy, according to local media. No one knew she was pregnant and healthcare staff were initially unsure why she was moaning, reports said.

VATICAN

Pope urges EU to show solidarity with migrants

Vatican City: Pope Francis urged EU leaders to show "concrete solidarity" with 49 migrants stranded on NGO ships off the coast of Malta who have been refused permission to land. "Forty nine migrants rescued in the Mediterranean by two NGO ships have been onboard for several days now, waiting to be able to disembark," Francis told thousands of people gathered in Saint Peter's square in Rome.

DEADLOCK ENTERS THIRD WEEK

White House, Democrats trade blame as shutdown talks fail

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, JANUARY 6

A FIRST round of talks between White House officials and congressional aides has made little progress toward ending the government shutdown, which entered its third week, with each side accusing the other of giving no ground.

More discussions were planned for Sunday, while US President Donald Trump, who did not attend the negotiating session, was scheduled to be at Camp David for a retreat with White House staff on border security and other topics.

With the talks stalled, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the leader of House Democrats, said they intend to start passing individual bills to reopen agencies. The first would be the Treasury Department, to ensure people receive their tax refunds.

"Not much headway made today," Trump tweeted on Saturday after receiving a briefing from the team led by Vice



White House Adviser Jared Kushner, US Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen and Vice President Mike Pence at the White House on Saturday. Reuters

President Mike Pence.

Democrats said the White House did not budge on the President's key demand, \$5.6 billion to build a wall along the US-Mexico border.

Acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney, in an interview with CNN's "State of the Union", accused Democrats of being there to "stall". Democrats familiar with the meeting said the White

House position was "untenable".

Mulvaney said Trump was willing to forgo a concrete wall for steel or other materials. "If he has to give up a concrete wall, replace it with a steel fence in order to do that so that Democrats can say, 'See? He's not building a wall anymore,' that should help us move in the right direction," Mulvaney told NBC's "Meet the Press."

Key plotter in USS Cole attack killed: Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, JANUARY 6

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump confirmed on Sunday that the US military has killed one of the architects of the 2000 bombing of the *USS Cole* that left 17 American servicemen dead.

The military said on Friday that Al-Qaeda operative Jamal al-Badawi was believed to have been killed in a precision strike in Yemen.

"Our GREAT MILITARY has delivered justice for the heroes lost and wounded in the cowardly attack on the *USS Cole*," Trump tweeted.

"We have just killed the leader of that attack, Jamal al-Badawi," he added. "We will never stop in our fight against radical Islamic terrorism!"

At least 30 killed in gold mine collapse in Afghanistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KUNDUZ, JANUARY 6

AT LEAST 30 people were killed when a gold mine collapsed in northeastern Afghanistan on Sunday, officials said, in the latest tragedy to strike the war-torn country.

Another seven were injured in the incident in Kohistan district of Badakhshan province, district governor Mohammad Rustam Raghi said.

Villagers had dug a 60-metre (200-feet) deep shaft in a river bed to search for gold. They were inside when the walls fell in.

"The people were using an excavator to dig a big hole in the river when it collapsed, trapping dozens of workers," Raghi said.

"At least 30 people have been killed and seven wounded." It was not clear why the shaft collapsed, but the provincial governor's spokesman Nik Mohammad Nazari said the miners were not professionals.

"The villagers have been involved in this business for decades with no government control over them," Nazari said.

"We have sent a rescue team to the area, but villagers have already started removing bodies from the site."

Badakhshan is a remote, mountainous province in northeast Afghanistan bordering Tajikistan, China and Pakistan.

The impoverished region is prone to landslides, particularly in the colder months when heavy snow blankets the province.

Illegal mining is common in resource-rich Afghanistan, with the Taliban relying on the sector for much of its revenue.

USA

FORMER DEFENCE SECY DIES AT 91

Harold Brown, who as US defence secretary in the Carter administration championed cutting-edge fighting technology during a tenure that included the failed rescue of hostages in Iran, has died at age 91. Brown was a nuclear physicist who led the Pentagon to modernise its defence systems with weapons that included precision-guided cruise missiles, stealth aircraft, advanced satellite surveillance and improved communications and intelligence systems.

New target in China's campaign against Uighurs: Their thinkers

AUSTIN RAMZY
NEW YORK, JANUARY 6

AS A writer and magazine editor, Qurban Mamut promoted the culture and history of his people, the Uighurs, and that of other Turkic minority groups who live in far western China. He did so within the strict confines of censorship imposed by the Chinese authorities, who are ever wary of ethnic separatism and Islamic extremism among the predominantly Muslim peoples of the region.

It was a line that Mamut navigated successfully for 26 years, eventually rising to become editor-in-chief of the Communist Party-controlled magazine *Xinjiang Civilization* before retiring in 2011.

"My father is very smart; he knows what is the red line, and if you cross it you are taken to jail," said his son, Bahram Sintash, who now lives in Virginia.

Then last year, the red line moved. Suddenly, Mamut and more than a hundred other Uighur intellectuals who had successfully navigated the worlds of academia, art and journalism became the latest targets of a sweeping crackdown in the region of Xinjiang that has ensnared as many as one million Muslims in indoctrination camps.

The mass detention of some of China's most accomplished Uighurs has become an alarming symbol of the Communist Party's most intense social-engineering drive in decades, according to scholars, human rights advocates and exiled Uighurs.

As the guardians of Uighur traditions, chroniclers of their history and creators of their art, the intellectuals were building the Central Asian, Turkic-speaking society's reservoir of collective memory within the narrow limits of authoritarian rule.

The removal of high-profile Uighur scholars familiar with the Chinese government, and the



Many trace the assault on intellectuals to the imprisonment of Ilham Tohti, an Uighur economist, in 2014. AP

EXPLAINED

In indoctrination camps, China tries to 'transform' Uighurs

CHINA'S VAST northwestern province of Xinjiang houses a number of ethnic minorities, including Uighur Muslims. Media reports have surfaced in recent months that the Chinese authorities have launched a crackdown on minorities in the region, targeting mainly Muslims, and have detained thousands in indoctrination camps that Beijing calls centres for "transformation through education".

The *New York Times*, in multiple reports, have revealed that those detained in these centres are forced to listen to lectures that warn them against supporting Uighur independence and defying the Chinese Communist Party. They are also made to sing songs praising the party.

People are sent to such centres, an *NYT* report said, for anything from possessing books about religion and Uighur culture, to wearing a T-shirt with a Muslim crescent.

country's education and legal systems, is aimed at erasing not only the group's unique ethnic identity but also its ability to defend such traditions, said a Uighur professor now living in Istanbul.

Many scholars trace the assault on intellectuals to the imprisonment of Ilham Tohti, a Uighur economist, in 2014. Tohti, who was an outspoken critic of the discrimination Uighurs face in China, was sentenced to life in prison after being found guilty of separatism. More detentions came in 2017.

Many of those targeted worked on preserving Uighur culture.

Rahile Dawut, one of the most well-known of the disappeared Uighur academics, is an anthropologist at Xinjiang University. Dawut was detained in December 2017 and hasn't been heard from since.

Before the crackdown, the Uighur intellectual elite worked to try to improve the lot of a group that complained of widespread discrimination and draconian restrictions on religious activity. **NYT**

In historic first, king of Malaysia abdicates

On leave since November, he reportedly married a former Russian beauty queen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KUALA LUMPUR, JANUARY 6

MALAYSIA'S KING has abdicated, royal officials said Sunday, in a historic first for the country that ended weeks of speculation about his future after he took medical leave.

Sultan Muhammad V's decision marks the first time a king has abdicated in the Muslim-majority country since it gained independence from Britain in 1957.

It came after the king took leave at the start of November for two months, during which time unconfirmed reports circulated that he had married a Russian former beauty queen.

A statement from the national palace confirmed the resignation of the relatively youthful monarch, known for his fondness for four-wheel driving and other extreme sports.

"His majesty tells the people of Malaysia to continue to be united



Sultan Muhammad V

to maintain unity, tolerance, and work together," said the statement, signed by the Comptroller of the Royal Household, Wan Ahmad Dahlan Abdul Aziz. It gave no reason for the 49-year-old's move.

But there had been a question mark over the reign of the king since he took a leave of absence for medical treatment in November. Reports then circulated online that he had married a former Miss Moscow in Russia.

Royal officials in Malaysia have so far not commented on the rumoured marriage, or given any details about his health condition.

Nepal: No need for neighbours to worry, no strategic interest in Indo-Pacific

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, JANUARY 6

NEPAL'S ASSOCIATION with the Indo-Pacific region does not have any strategic significance, and should not raise any alarm bells within the neighbourhood, Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali said.

"Nepal understands the strategic interests of countries in the Indo-Pacific initiative, but Nepal's interest is limited to enhancing economic opportunities. Therefore, it should not alarm its neighbours," Gyawali said.

He was responding to media speculation in the wake of his visit to the United States last month at the invitation of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and the subsequent official statement that Nepal would be playing a central role in the Indo-Pacific region. Some leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist Party had criticised Gyawali, saying that this amounted to a "shift" that would irk China substantially.

Gyawali also said that Nepal was optimistic that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi would receive the report of the Indo-Nepal Eminent Persons Group well before general elections in India. The report prepared by the EPG was ready by the first week of July, but is yet to be formally handed over to the two Prime Ministers.

Meanwhile, Nepal Prime Minister K P Oli, who was expected to apprise the Parliament about the corruption allegations related to the purchase of two wide-body aircraft for the national carrier, kept silent on the issue, infuriating the opposition.

Oli, during his hour-long speech, did not mention the nearly \$4.5 billion allegedly misappropriated in the purchase of the aircraft. After Speaker K B Mahara refused permission to the opposition Nepali Congress to pose questions to the PM regarding the allegations, opposition MPs descended into the well of the House and raised slogans against the government.

FUNDING CRUNCH EXPECTED AFTER BREXIT

UK universities to recruit more Indian, Chinese students: Report

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, JANUARY 6

SOME OF Britain's leading universities struggling with a funding crunch in the face of Brexit are expected to increasingly turn to recruiting more overseas students, who pay much higher fees than locals.

China and India are expected to be at the forefront of this overseas student influx, with university chiefs expecting their figures to surpass that of British students across UK campuses.

Anton Muscatelli, vice-chancellor of Glasgow University and chairman of the Russell Group, which represents the UK's 24 leading institutions, told *The Sunday Times* that leading universities were now likely to try to recruit many more overseas students — particularly from China and India — to offset a series of financial challenges.

Muscatelli, who is considering increasing the proportion of Glasgow's European Union (EU) and overseas students to up to half the total, said, "Many universities will try to do this because it

will be the only way to respond to a sudden fall in income."

According to the report, the UK's higher education sector faces "a triple whammy", because if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, university leaders say it would be "catastrophic", with the UK cut out of 1.3 billion pounds of EU research funding and a collapse in EU student numbers.

In addition, an imminent government review is expected to recommend lowering the fees universities can charge undergraduates from the UK to 6,500 pounds a year. **PTI**



Judge Alkali Laouali Ismael shows Zalika Amadou where to sign her divorce papers at a street-side court in Maradi, Niger. NYT

a quiet revolution is playing out.

Many women like Amadou come to this sidewalk court every month to push for a divorce, frustrated not only by their husbands' inability to earn a living during a time of eco-

nomie hardship, but also because their basic views on relationships have changed.

They want to choose whom and when to marry, not be pushed into marriages like so many generations of women be-

fore them. They demand respect and, better yet, love, speaking openly of wanting a healthy sex life. And when their husbands fall short, women are the ones driving this new culture of breakups.

"Young women now go into marriages with certain expectations," said Alou Hama Maiga, the secretary general of the Islamic Association of Niger. "If these expectations are not met at some point, then divorce is inevitable."

The Islamic judge who presides over the street-side religious court in Maradi, Niger's third-largest city, said that divorces initiated by women had doubled in the past three years, with nearly 50 women a month coming to end their marriages.

"These young women don't want to suffer any more," said the judge, Alkali Laouali Ismael.

"There is a solution to their problems, and they know they can find it here."

Lawyers, women's associations, local officials and academics who study the region say the increase is happening across West Africa — in urban and rural, as well as Muslim and Christian, areas — as women assert more control over their relationships.

The total divorce rate is relatively stable or even declining slightly in some parts of West Africa, they note, but underneath that are huge changes in divorce patterns and society at large.

Women are more educated now and in some areas marry later in life, factors that academics say lead to more stable marriages. At the same time, more women are moving into cities and joining the work force, empowering more of them to dis-

card bad marriages.

In Ghana, 73 per cent of divorce cases handled by the Legal Aid Scheme of Greater Accra were filed by women in 2016-2017, a big shift from the past. Divorce, once considered taboo for conservative Christians, is being presented in some church sermons as a better option than ending up with domestic violence or adultery.

Across West Africa, people are pouring into cities from the countryside, leaving behind parents and local traditions. The push for women's rights has expanded, with more nations signing on to international commitments to gender equality. Governments have passed laws against domestic abuse and discrimination against women, and many nations now have ministries of women's affairs. **NYT**

SIDEWALK COURTS OFFER LEGAL ACCESS

Quiet revolt in orthodox West Africa: More women seek divorce

DIONNE SEARCEY
MARADI (NIGER), JANUARY 6

HE DIDN'T hit her. He didn't yell. He didn't cheat, as far as she knows. It was just that, less than two years into their marriage, Zalika Amadou's husband had changed. He'd become far too neglectful and indifferent for a young woman who expected, well, more.

Her mother, who had gotten married at 14 to a stranger twice her age, couldn't understand the fuss. She'd stuck with her husband for five decades until he died, and was appalled that young women these days didn't do the same.

But for Amadou, who married at 16, simply having a husband was not enough. She never wanted to depend on a man in the first place. So, on a busy

morning in Maradi, Niger, she sat in front of a judge at a crowded Islamic court on the sidewalk and asked for what young women across the region are seeking like never before: a divorce.

For centuries, women have been expected to endure bad marriages in many conservative pockets of West Africa. Divorce happened, but most often the husbands were the ones casting off their partners. Tradition has bound women so tightly that spouses are sometimes chosen for babies in the womb.

"It's the end of the world when a husband and wife don't stay together," said Amadou's mother, Halima Amadou.

But here in Niger, a place where women have less education, lower living standards and less equality with men than just about anywhere else in the world,