

Several thousand "yellow vest" protesters marched through Paris and other French cities on Saturday on the 12th weekend of action against the government, despite opinion polls pointing to a recovery in President Emmanuel Macron's popularity.

TOP OF THE WORLD

Russia exits nuclear arms treaty in 'symmetrical' response to US move

VLADIMIR SOLDATKIN
MOSCOW, FEBRUARY 2

RUSSIA HAS suspended the Cold War-era Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, President Vladimir Putin said on Saturday, after the United States said it would withdraw from the arms control pact, accusing Moscow of violations.

Moscow's relations with the West are strained over issues including Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, allegations of meddling in the US presidential election and being behind a nerve agent attack in Britain.

The United States announced on Friday it will withdraw from the INF treaty in six months unless Moscow ends what it says are violations of the 1987 pact.

It would reconsider its withdrawal if Russia came into compliance with the agreement, which bans both nations from stationing short- and intermediate-range land-based missiles in Europe. Russia denies violating the treaty. "The American partners have declared that they suspend their participation in



Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin on Saturday. Reuters

the deal, we suspend it as well," Putin said during a televised meeting with foreign and defence ministers. Putin said Russia will start work on creating new missiles, including hy-

personics ones, and told ministers not to initiate disarmament talks with Washington, accusing the United States of being slow to respond to such moves. "We have repeatedly, during

a number of years, raised a question about substantive talks on the disarmament issue," Putin said. "We see that in the past few years the partners have not supported our initiatives." REUTERS

EXPLAINED

Arms race fear between US, Russia, China

THE DECISION by the US and Russia to suspend the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty holds the potential to initiate a new arms race, not only with Russia, but also China, which was never a signatory to the treaty. Signalling that the broader architecture of nuclear disarmament has started to unravel, President Vladimir Putin also said that he would build weapons banned under the treaty.

PAKISTAN
Sharif shifted to hospital from jail

Lahore: Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who is serving a seven-year jail term over graft charges, was on Saturday shifted to a hospital here, officials said, days after a special medical board concluded that he has developed cardiac complications. Sharif, 69, who is lodged in Lahore's Kot Lakhpat jail in the Al-Azizia Steel Mills corruption case, was admitted to the Services Hospital. "Nawaz Sharif has been moved to hospital from jail," officials said. Sharif was served tea and snacks by the hospital administration before proceeding with any examination.

CHINA
Crackdown on officials in Tibet with Dalai links

Beijing: China's ruling Communist Party is cracking down on its officials who are taking part in religious activities violating party's ideology of adhering to atheism and secretly maintaining contacts with Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. A video produced by the Tibetan provincial government has revealed cases in the region where local Communist Party of China members violated the CPC regulations on religion, anti-separatism and anti-corruption, *Global Times* reported Saturday. So far three officials have been expelled from the party and 10 others received warning, the report said.

BOSNIA
Two Indians among 11 held after mass fight

Sarajevo: Police arrested 11 migrants, including two Indians, after a mass fight at their reception centre in Bosnia that left eight people seriously injured, a spokesman said Saturday. The fighting, involving several hundred migrants accommodated at the centre in the northwestern town of Bihac, began late Friday. "Eight Afghan nationals, two Indians and one Pakistani were arrested," a police spokesman said. The cause of the fighting was not immediately known.

USA
Governor sorry for racist photo taken in 1984

New York: Virginia Governor Ralph Northam apologised on Friday for a photograph in his 1984 medical school yearbook showing him and another person in racist garb at a party, but said he would serve out his term even as pressure piled on from fellow Democrats for him to step down. Northam indicated in a statement from his office he was one of the people shown in the photo, which depicted one person in blackface standing next to another in a Ku Klux Klan costume. He did not identify which one was him.



40 MUMMIES FOUND

Over 40 mummies dating to the Ptolemaic era were discovered at a burial site in Minya, Egypt on Saturday. AP

Washington seeks explanation after Nepal leader slams US intervention in Venezuela

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 2

THE UNITED States on Friday sought an explanation from Nepal after former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal last week criticised US interference in Venezuela and expressed support for its president Nicolas Maduro.

Nepal's Ambassador in Washington DC Arjun Karki was reportedly told that Dahal's statement was neither acceptable nor expected by the US.

The US Ambassador in Kathmandu, Randy Berry, on Friday did not attend a meeting that Nepal Prime Minister KP Oli and Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali had hosted for the head

of the mission, and instead sent his deputy. Dahal's statement comes as a setback to America's hope to rope in Nepal in the Indo-Pacific Initiative, which US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo proposed when he invited Nepal's Foreign Minister to a bilateral visit to Washington for the first time in history last month.

Dahal is one of the two chairpersons of the ruling Nepal Communist Party, which formed after the merger of the erstwhile Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists, of which he was a leader, and the Communist party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML).

Given Dahal's political background, his earlier statements calling the US an "imperialist force",

and his lionising of Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez and now Maduro, and the fact that most NGOs in the erstwhile CPN-UML had been the biggest financial beneficiaries of the US and its funding agencies in Nepal, the US believes that the two erstwhile parties in the government had different ideas about Nepal-US ties. The ruling party comprises the CPN-UML and the Maoist Party in 70:30 ratio in Parliament, and, the US believes, can have a more cordial relationship with it.

Dahal's Maoist Party was in the US terrorist watchlist during the decade-long insurgency between 1996 and 2006, and for the first four years after it joined the peace and democratic process.

After Dahal's remarks, the

Nepal government had issued a statement on January 29, saying, "In line with its principled position, Nepal believes that the internal political problems of a country need to be resolved within its constitutional parameters in a democratic manner, free from external interference. The people of Venezuela have the ultimate authority to take a decision on the country's political and constitutional course. We stand for peace, stability and unity of Venezuela and call for resolution of differences through peaceful means."

But a party source said when Foreign Minister Gyawali asked Dahal to dilute his statement, Dahal's secretariat sent a message that what Dahal had said reflected his belief.

China to give Pak \$2.5 billion

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 2

CHINA WILL provide \$2.5 billion in loans to Pakistan to boost the foreign exchange reserves of its "all-weather ally", *The Express Tribune* reported Saturday.

Pakistan is nearly broke with the drying up of foreign cash reserves and mounting external debt. The country's \$8.12 billion reserves, which are below the minimum level that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) prescribe, are sufficient to cover only seven weeks of imports.

Due to this, the WB and the Asian Development Bank are not providing loans for budget financing.

"Beijing will place the \$2.5 billion in deposits with the central bank," said a top Finance Ministry official. With the anticipated \$2.5 billion deposits, China's contribution in this fiscal year alone would surge to \$4.5 billion, the paper said. PTI

Taliban to meet Afghan leaders, but not Ghani, in Moscow

MUJIB MASHAL
KABUL, FEBRUARY 2

THE TALIBAN are expected to meet with Afghan opposition leaders in Moscow in the coming days, a development that could further undermine the government of President Ashraf Ghani, which has found itself excluded from the talks seeking an end to the 17-year war.

Even as the insurgents say they are close to a deal on core issues with American diplomats, they have refused to meet with the Afghan government. Mr. Ghani has repeatedly expressed concern that if the Americans rush to make a deal

INDIAN STUDENT VISA SCAM



A webpage from the fake university in Farmington Hills. University of Farmington

Outcry over 'illegal' entrapment of 129 Indian students

LALIT K JHA
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 2

EMINENT INDIAN-AMERICANS and some media outlets have questioned the modus operandi of the US government in the detention of 129 Indians in the "pay-and-stay" university visa scam, saying "trapping of innocent students" is a "crime, illegal and immoral". As many as 130 foreign students, including 129 Indians, have been arrested by the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for enrolling at a fake university allegedly to remain in America.

The "fake" University of Farmington was set up by the DHS's investigating unit in Greater Detroit area to bust the "pay-and-stay" racket.

Dr Raghava Reddy Ghosala, a psychiatrist and president of North American Telugu Association (NATA), said that "trapping of innocent students like this is a crime. This is illegal and immoral".

He has been in touch with several of these students detained by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as part of its nationwide crackdown on the "pay-and-stay" racket.

The university, in the last two years, enrolled some 600 students, mostly Indians. It held no classes and collected a nominal fee from the students and gave them Curricular Practical Training on day one of the enrollment, which gave students temporary authorisation for practical training directly related to their study or to work.

"As per our inquiry, it looks like they (the US government) set up the trap. I heard from victims," Ghosala said, adding one of the victims even went to India and

came back without any problem.

"He did not get arrested then. Now he is leaving the US for good on Monday. Such a modus operandi is illegal and is a wrong thing to do," he said.

Amer Zahr, a Professor of Law at the University of Detroit Mercy, told the WXYZ Detroit news: "It seems the government was really involved in tricking students into violating the terms of their visas".

He is the family spokesperson for Najilaa Musarsa, one of the students from Dearborn Heights now locked in federal detention in Calhoun county. Her family says she honestly wanted to go to college, the news channel said.

The channel questioned the ICE's assertion that the students were not interested in studying and they illegally paid to the university to stay in the US.

It interviewed some people who worked in the same building where the university was based.

"They were asking about what time they open, what time they close," Nada Abdulmeseh, who works in the building, told the news channel. Many a times, students were trying to find out information about the school and they were struggling to get a hold of people, she said.

Satish Manduva, global advisor for Andhra Pradesh State Non-Resident Telugu Society, said it is really unfortunate to see what has happened to the Indian students.

On Friday, he visited one of the detention centres near Dallas, Texas along with Indian-American attorney Geeta Dammanna and officials from the Indian Consulate in Houston. The detention centre has seven male and one female Indian.

"They were shocked. They felt much more comfortable with the (Indian) government getting involved," Dammanna said. PTI

ON BRITISH SHORES

Tiny plastic particles discovered in dolphins, whales: study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, FEBRUARY 2

MICROPLASTICS HAVE been found in the guts of every marine mammal examined in a study of animals washed up on Britain's shores, scientists say.

Researchers from the University of Exeter and Plymouth Marine Laboratory (PML) in the UK examined 50 animals from 10 species of dolphins, seals and whales — and found microplastics in them all.

Most of the particles (84 per cent) were synthetic fibres — which can come from sources

including clothes, fishing nets and toothbrushes — while the rest were fragments, whose possible sources include food packaging and plastic bottles.

"It's shocking — but not surprising — that every animal had ingested microplastics," said Sarah Nelms, of the University of Exeter and PML.

"The number of particles in each animal was relatively low (average of 5.5 particles per animal), suggesting they eventually pass through the digestive system, or are regurgitated," Nelms.

"We don't yet know what effects the microplastics, or the chemicals on and in them,



An orca calf part of a group of orcas known as the Southern Residents. NYT

might have on marine mammals," she said. "More research is needed to better understand the potential impacts on animal health," she added. Though the animals in the study died of a variety of causes, those that died due to infectious diseases had a slightly higher number of particles than those that died of injuries or other causes.

"We can't draw any firm conclusions on the potential biological significance of this observation," said Brendan Godley, who is from the University of Exeter.

"We are at the very early stages of understanding this

ubiquitous pollutant. We now have a benchmark that future studies can be compared with," Godley said.

"Marine mammals are ideal sentinels of our impacts on the marine environment, as they are generally long lived and many feed high up in the food chain. Our findings are not good news," he said. "It is disconcerting that we have found microplastic in the gut of every single animal we have investigated in this study," said Penelope Lindeque, from PML.

In total, 26 species of marine mammal are known to inhabit or pass through British waters.