

TOP OF THE WORLD



Protesters remove their tents from a major highway north of Beirut, Lebanon. *AP*

LEBANON

Main roads reopen after PM resigns

Beirut: Some major highways in Lebanon reopened on Wednesday, after the Army urged protesters to lift roadblocks so that activities could return to normal following 13 days of demonstrations that paralysed the country and forced the Prime Minister to resign. Tuesday's resignation toppled the coalition government of Saad al-Hariri, who said he had hit a "dead end" in trying to resolve the crisis unleashed by the huge protests against the ruling elite. Early on Wednesday, troops cleared one major route north of Beirut after briefly scuffling with demonstrators.

PAKISTAN

Court bars regulator from taking action against anchors

Lahore: The Lahore High Court on Wednesday stopped Pakistan's electronic media regulator from taking any adverse action against TV anchors who challenged a directive, which barred them from giving their opinions during talk shows, until further orders, according to a report. Around 11 anchors filed a petition in the high court against Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority's (PEMRA) notification, saying the directive violated Article 19 of the country's Constitution, which grants every Pakistani citizen freedom of speech, *Dawn* reported.

BRAZIL

Bolsonaro denies links to murder

Brasilia: President Jair Bolsonaro angrily denied links to last year's assassination of a prominent Brazilian politician on Wednesday, after reports that a suspect in the murder investigation visited his residence before the killing. Marielle Franco, a popular leftist city councillor in Rio de Janeiro, was gunned down alongside her driver in March 2018 — a drive-by shooting that investigators described as a "summary execution." One of the two suspects in the murder apparently published a photograph of himself alongside Bolsonaro on his Facebook account, since deleted.

FIRST DECEMBER ELECTION IN BRITAIN SINCE 1923

Election to decide Brexit fate as Boris wins backing for Dec 12 poll

ALISTAIR SMOUT & WILLIAM JAMES
LONDON, OCTOBER 30

THE FATE of Britain's departure from the European Union could be decided in a December 12 election after Prime Minister Boris Johnson finally won parliamentary approval for a gamble that he hopes will break the deadlock over Brexit.

Johnson, who has failed to deliver on his "do or die" promise that Britain would leave the bloc on Oct 31, secured the election agreement just hours after the EU granted a third delay to Brexit.

The first Christmas election in Britain since 1923 will be one of the hardest to call in years. Brexit has variously fatigued, enthused and enraged swathes of voters while eroding loyalties to the two major parties.

When Johnson's predecessor, Theresa May, bet on an early election in 2017, she lost her slender majority in Parliament — a failure that ultimately prevented her from ratifying her Brexit deal in Parliament and sank her political career.

More voters switched between the two main parties at the 2017 election than in any ballot dating back to 1966, research by the British Election



PM Boris Johnson's call for a December 12 election was backed by Opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn. *AP*



“It’s time to unite the country and get Brexit done.”

— BORIS JOHNSON
BRITAIN’S PRIME MINISTER

“This is our chance to build a country for the many not the few.”

— JEREMY CORBYN
LABOUR PARTY LEADER

Study showed.

"It's time to unite the country and get Brexit done," Johnson told a meeting of Conservative lawmakers on Tuesday night shortly after securing the election to cheers from a Parliament he has accused of stopping him

from delivering the divorce.

The election result, due to be announced in the early hours of Friday the 13th, could decide the ultimate fate of Brexit after almost four years of almost continuous political commotion in London that has shocked both

EXPLAINED

How an election could change Brexit

WITH THE EU having extended the Brexit deadline to Jan 1, and an election set to take place in the UK on Dec 12, the nature of Britain's exit from the bloc, and the question of whether an exit would take place at all, hang in the balance. This is because the two major UK parties have very different approaches to Brexit.

IF THE CONSERVATIVES WIN: The ruling Conservative Party is led by Boris Johnson, who has been a vocal supporter of Brexit. If his party wins, Britain is likely to leave the EU with the deal he has already negotiated with the bloc.

IF LABOUR WINS: The Opposition Labour Party has declared that it supports a second Brexit referendum. So, if Labour wins, it is likely to call for another vote on whether the people of the UK want to leave the EU. If that results in another nod for Brexit, then it is likely that the UK will try to negotiate a different withdrawal deal with the EU.

IF NEITHER GET MAJORITY: If either of the major parties forms a government with the support of smaller parties, then the Brexit saga could go on for a while longer. The other parties have views ranging from wanting a much greater separation from the EU to not wanting Brexit at all.

investors and allies.

A five-year flurry of two historic referendums — on Scottish independence in 2014 and Brexit in 2016 — and two national elections in 2015 and 2017 delivered often unexpected results that ushered in political crises.

AUSTRALIA

HUNDREDS OF KOALAS FEARED DEAD IN FIRES

Conservationists fear hundreds of koalas perished in wildfires that have razed prime habitat on Australia's east coast. Port Macquarie Koala Hospital President Sue Ashton said she hoped wildlife carers would be allowed to begin their search of the fire zone for survivors on Thursday. Even if 50% of the koalas in the area of the fire survived, it would mean 350 had died, she said.



Transcript of Trump Ukraine call omitted key details: official

White House adviser testifies he tried to include those words in transcript

JULIAN E BARNES, NICHOLAS FANDOS & DANNY HAKIM
WASHINGTON, OCTOBER 30

LIEUTENANT COLONEL Alexander Vindman, the top Ukraine expert on the US National Security Council, told House impeachment investigators Tuesday that the White House transcript of a July call between President Donald Trump and Ukraine's president omitted crucial words and phrases, and that his attempts to include them failed, according to three people familiar with the testimony.

The omissions, Vindman said, included Trump's assertion that there were recordings of former Vice President Joe Biden discussing Ukraine corruption, and an explicit mention by Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, of Burisma Holdings, the energy company whose board employed Biden's son Hunter.

Vindman, who appeared on Capitol Hill wearing his dark blue Army dress uniform and military medals, told House impeachment investigators that he tried to change the reconstructed transcript made by the White House staff to reflect the omissions. But while some of his edits appeared to have been successful, he said, those two corrections were not made.

Vindman did not testify to a motive behind the editing process. But his testimony is likely to drive investigators to ask further questions about how officials handled the call, including changes to the transcript and the decision to put it into the White House's most classified computer system — and whether those moves were meant to conceal the conversation's most controversial aspects.

The phrases do not fundamentally change lawmakers' un-



Alexander Vindman had also testified that he expressed concern over the US President's call to his Ukrainian counterpart. *AP*

TESTIMONY DETAILS LOBBYIST BID TO OUST ENVOY TO UKRAINE

A REPUBLICAN former congressman turned lobbyist, Robert Livingston, repeatedly pushed for the dismissal of US ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch, an action later taken by President Donald Trump after he was urged to do so by his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, a US diplomat said in testimony on Wednesday. Catherine Croft said she got multiple calls from the lobbyist on this matter when she was a member of the National Security Council staff at the White House. **REUTERS**

derstanding of the call, which was first reported by the CIA whistleblower whose complaint set off the impeachment inquiry. There are plenty of other examples of Trump referring to Ukraine-related conspiracy theories and asking for investigations of the Biden family. But Vindman's account offered a hint to solving a mystery surrounding the conversation: what Trump's aides left out of the transcript in places where ellipses indicated dropped words. **NYT**

DEATH WAS OFFICIALLY RULED SUICIDE

Epstein's injuries point to murder, says pathologist hired by his brother

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW YORK, OCTOBER 30

A FORENSIC pathologist hired by Jeffrey Epstein's brother said Wednesday that evidence suggested the disgraced financier had not died by suicide in his jail cell but had been murdered.

Michael Baden contradicted the official verdict of suicide by hanging given by officials in August, saying Epstein's injuries were "more indicative of homicidal strangulation".

"I think that the evidence points toward homicide rather than suicide," Baden, a former New York City medical examiner who was present at the autopsy, told Fox News. He said multiple fractures found in Epstein's neck — specifically the hyoid bone and thyroid cartilage — were "very unusual for suicide".

Epstein was found dead in New York's high-security Metropolitan Correctional Center on August 10 as he awaited trial on allegations that he trafficked



The wealthy financier was accused of sex trafficking

girls as young as 14 for sex.

New York's chief medical examiner Barbara Sampson ruled that he had killed himself, a verdict that has been disputed by Epstein's lawyers and his brother Mark.

Her office did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Epstein, 66, was a multi-millionaire hedge fund manager who hobnobbed with countless celebrities over the years, including Britain's Prince Andrew and US President Donald Trump.



HK BRACES FOR HALLOWEEN HAVOC

Students wear Guy Fawkes masks at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. *Reuters*

■ Hong Kong is bracing for a possibly dangerous Halloween Thursday, when protesters, many wearing banned masks, plan to combine with fancy-dress clubbers in the party district of Lan Kwai Fong.

■ The protesters say they will march, without police permission, from a park in the Causeway Bay district through the heaving bar streets of Wan Chai to the steep foothills of the Peak above Central.

■ Every weekend, the bars in Lan Kwai Fong spill on to the streets even without the activists who have thrown petrol bombs at police, set fires and trashed buildings during five months of unrest.

Citing unrest, Chile says can't host climate meet

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, OCTOBER 30

THE HIGH-PROFILE annual climate change conference has landed in trouble after hosts Chile said it would not be able to organise the meeting in view of the ongoing civil unrest in the country.

Chile was supposed to host COP25 (the 25th edition of the annual Conference of Parties to the

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) from December 2 to 13 in its capital Santiago. It also cancelled the meetings of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation that were scheduled in November.

The UN Climate Change body said it was looking for alternative options to host the meeting.

"Earlier today, I was informed of the decision by the Government of Chile not to host COP25 in view of the difficult sit-

uation that the country is undergoing. We are currently exploring alternative hosting options," UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa said in a statement.

Chile has been witnessing largescale demonstrations that started with protests against a suburban train fare hike two weeks ago. It quickly developed into a mass movement demanding greater equality and better

public services.

The annual climate conference takes decisions related to global response to climate change. COP21 in Paris in 2015 delivered the Paris Agreement, a new international arrangement to fight climate change. In the following years, countries were negotiating to finalise the rules that would govern the implementation of the Paris Agreement that will come into effect next year.



Firefighters burned fuel around a home in Windsor, California, in an effort to save it from the Kincadee fire. *NYT*

life upside down, she split up with her boyfriend and returned to her home state of Georgia, where she is struggling to make ends meet as a home health aide. "I'm a refugee," Wilcox said. "I'm broke."

On Tuesday, firefighters in Northern California braced for the return of strong winds, hoping to avoid the further spread of the Kincadee fire, which has burned 75,000 acres in Sonoma County and was 15% contained. In Southern California, the Getty fire still burned while residents braced for extreme winds expected to reach 80 mph. Thousands of structures are threatened.

Karen Orlando, a real estate agent in the Sonoma Valley, has seen the rebuilding process in Sonoma County play out in distinct ways between "the really wealthy and then those who are just getting by".

Orlando said that for those with insurance and the means, rebuilding has been a kind of therapy after the trauma of losing a home; reclaiming those spaces is a way to soldier through grief, she said.

"Some people have decided to buy a lot maybe with a better view than what they had," she said. "Some people want to rebuild on the lot but now they get the

chance to build the home of their dreams. They get to pick out all the finishes and fixtures and imagine all the landscaping."

Fires this week in Southern California forced evacuations of celebrities like LeBron James and Arnold Schwarzenegger. James tweeted that he was driving around trying to find a hotel room after he fled his home.

Less visible has been the fate of those hard hit in towns like Paradise in the Sierra foothills, razed by fire last year, and Lake County, where 2,000 homes have burned over the past four years. In both places, incomes were strained even before the fires. **NYT**

RECURRING BLAZES HIGHLIGHT VAST RICH-POOR DIVIDE IN STATE

Despair for many and silver linings for some in California wildfires

THOMAS FULLER, JULIE TURKEWITZ & JOSE A DEL REAL
SANTA ROSA, OCTOBER 30

AFTER A wildfire razed his spacious suburban home in the Sonoma hills two years ago, Pete Parkinson set out to rebuild. This time it was not an even better one. He reoriented the house toward vistas of a nearby mountain and designed a large kitchen with hickory floors and 16-foot windows under vaulted ceilings.

"We are now living the silver lining," said Parkinson, a retired civil servant who moved into his

new home 10 days ago. "It is a beautiful, brand-new home."

California's catastrophic wildfires have not discriminated between rich and poor. In recent years, tens of thousands of people lost their homes, from trailer parks to mansions. But the aftermath of the fires has produced a spectrum of misery and recovery, ranging from the wealthy, who with insurance money rebuilt houses sometimes worth more than the ones that burned, to those who lost everything and years later still have nothing.

Like access to quality education and clean water, natural disasters are another prism through

which California's vast income inequalities can be viewed.

A lawyerly knowledge of the peculiarities of the insurance industry, a pool of savings to fall back on and the time and grit to deal with the state's labyrinthine regulations have helped some in California bounce back from the infernos. Others have not been so lucky.

Jenn Wilcox worked at a residential care facility in the town of Paradise until Nov 8, 2018, when the town was incinerated by fire. After she narrowly escaped, the uninsured cabin where she was living was destroyed; she also lost her job. Her