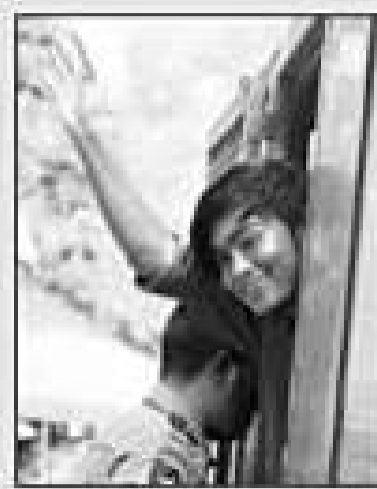


15 THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Pai Phyo Min, a member of the satirical poetry troupe, in a police van. Reuters

MYANMAR
Satirists given 2nd jail term for insulting military

Yangon: A group of Myanmar satirists on Monday racked up a second prison sentence for a performance that criticised the military, a decision the artists said showed the judges were "puppets" of the military. The group of seven, known as the Peacock Generation, were arrested after performing "Thangyat", a Myanmar art similar to slam poetry, in April. Wearing military uniforms, they mocked the army through their fusion of poetry, comedy and music. Already having been in prison for months, six of the seven were on Monday jailed under a law against causing officers to mutiny.

SOUTH CHINA SEA
China urges US to 'stop flexing muscles'

Bangkok: China on Monday urged the US military to "stop flexing muscles" in the disputed South China Sea, a point of persistent friction in a relationship both sides said was generally improving. A spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Defence, Col. Wu Qian, told reporters in Bangkok that the South China Sea was among numerous issues discussed earlier in the day when US Defence Secretary Mark Esper held his first face-to-face meeting with the Chinese defence minister, Gen. Wei Fenghe. They met for more than half an hour on the margins of a broader Asia defence officials' conference.

NIGERIA
Camel-riding gunmen kill six

Kano: Gunmen riding camels and horses killed six people in a village in north-east Nigeria, a region beset by Islamist attacks, police said on Sunday. "Armed bandits" launched a pre-dawn attack on Thursday on Aljannaru, a village in Adamawa state, before encountering a local self-defence group, police spokesman Suleiman Nguroje said. They "clashed with some hunters, which led to the killing of six (people)", Nguroje said. Bandit attacks in northern Nigeria have risen in recent years, targeting remote areas and livestock.

Gotabaya sworn in as Sri Lanka President at Buddhist temple

Says did not receive minorities' support, but will be President for everyone; vows focus on security

REUTERS, PTI
ANURADHAPURA, COLOMBO, NOVEMBER 18

THE WINNER of Sri Lanka's presidential election, Gotabaya Rajapaksa made national security his top priority after being sworn in on Monday at an ancient temple in the north-central city of Anuradhapura where he received blessings from Buddhist monks.

Nicknamed "The Terminator" within his own powerful political family, the 70-year-old former defence chief had made security his top campaign issue for a nation traumatised by the Easter bomb attacks by Islamist militants earlier this year.

Seen as a champion of the Indian Ocean island's Buddhist Sinhalese majority, Rajapaksa oversaw the military defeat of Tamil separatists under his brother and then President Mahinda Rajapaksa 10 years ago.

"I consider the foremost responsibility of my government is to ensure the national security of my country," Rajapaksa said in a televised speech at his swearing in ceremony attended



Gotabaya Rajapaksa after his swearing in ceremony in Anuradhapura on Tuesday. Reuters

by thousands of supporters.

"We will rebuild the state security machineries to secure the country from terrorism, underworld activities, robbers, extortionists."

He also thanked the Sinhala community for electing him.

"I knew I would win the presidency with support coming only from the Sinhala majority. I told the minorities to join me. I did not receive their support. But I will make sure that I will be President for everyone," he said.

Rajapaksa also promised to

protect Sinhala culture and heritage and provide state sponsorship to safeguard the morals, and traditional ways.

Rajapaksa was declared winner in the presidential polls on Sunday after he defeated Sajith Premadasa, a housing minister

"I knew I would win the presidency with support coming only from the Sinhala majority. I told the minorities to join me. I did not receive their support. But I will make sure that I will be President for everyone."

— GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA
SRI LANKA'S PRESIDENT

in the current government.

Millions voted to elect a new president to lead the country out of its deepest economic slump in over 15 years, dragged down by its tourism sector following the April attacks on hotels and churches in which more than 250 people were killed. Islamic State claimed responsibility.

The previous government was heavily criticised over the failure of its intelligence agencies to act on information that attacks were being planned.

Some 70 per cent of Sri Lanka's 22 million people are Buddhist Sinhalese, 14 per cent are Tamil Hindus, Muslims make up 10 per cent, while the rest are Catholics and other religions.

IMPEACHMENT INQUIRY

Democrats invite Trump to testify, he says will consider

JILL COLVIN
WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 18

DEMOCRATIC HOUSE Speaker Nancy Pelosi invited President Donald Trump to testify in front of investigators in the House impeachment inquiry ahead of a week that will see several key witnesses appear publicly.

Pushing back against accusations from the Republican President that the process has been stacked against him, Pelosi said Trump is welcome to appear or answer questions in writing, if he chooses. "If he has information that is exculpatory... then we look forward to seeing it," she said in an interview that aired Sunday on CBS's *Face the Nation*. Trump "could come right before the committee and talk, speak all the truth that he wants if he wants," she said.

On Monday, Trump tweeted he might be willing to offer written testimony: "She also said I could do it in writing. Even though I did nothing wrong, and don't like giving credibility to this No Due Process Hoax, I like the idea & will, in order to get Congress focused again, strongly consider it!"

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said Trump should come to the committee and testify under oath. And he should allow all those around him



Trump tweeted that he may be willing to offer written testimony

to come to the committee and testify under oath," Schumer told reporters. He said the White House's insistence on blocking witnesses from cooperating begs the question: "What is he hiding?"

The comments come as the House Intelligence Committee prepares for a second week of public hearings as part of its inquiry, including with the man who is arguably the most important witness. Gordon Sondland, Trump's ambassador to the European Union, is among the only people interviewed to date who had direct conversations with the President about the situation because the White House has blocked others from cooperating with what it dismisses as a sham investigation. AP

Pak successfully tests nuke-capable missile

Surface-to-surface ballistic missile can strike targets up to 650 km away

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, NOVEMBER 18

PAKISTAN ON Monday successfully test-fired a nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile which can strike targets up to 650 kilometres, bringing many Indian cities under its range.

The test-firing of the Shaheen-I missile by the Pakistani military took place amidst Indo-Pak tensions over New Delhi revoking Jammu and Kashmir's special status.

According to a press release issued by the media wing of the Pakistani military, the launch of Shaheen-I missile was held as part of a training exercise "aimed at testing the operational readiness of Army Strategic Forces Command".

The Shaheen-1 missile is capable of delivering all types of warheads up to range of 650 km, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) tweeted.

"The launch was aimed at testing operational readiness of Army

Strategic Forces Command (ASFC) ensuring Pakistan's credible minimum deterrence," it said.

The Director General Strategic Plans Division, Commander Army Strategic Forces Command, senior officers from Strategic Plans Division, Army Strategic Forces Command, scientists and engineers witnessed the test launch, according to media reports.

Pakistan had successfully test-fired nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile 'Ghaznavi' with a range of up to 290 km on August 29, days after India revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status on August 5.

The Indian Air Force carried out the successful firing of BrahMos surface-to-surface missiles from a mobile platform in October to check the IAF's capability to hit targets with "pinpoint" accuracy at targets close to 300 km. The Pakistani missile test also came days after India conducted the first night trial of 'Agni-II', its versatile surface-to-surface medium range nuclear-capable missile.

Court reverses ban on masks as Hong Kong police battle protesters in university siege

KEN MORITSUGU
HONG KONG, NOVEMBER 18

AS NIGHT fell in Hong Kong, police tightened a siege Monday at a university campus as hundreds of anti-government protesters trapped inside sought to escape.

Protesters advanced on the police from outside the cordon, while others emerged from the campus, their trademark umbrellas at the fore. Police in some places swooped in to subdue protesters and make arrests.

It wasn't clear if any of those inside Hong Kong Polytechnic University escaped.

Meanwhile, Protesters won on a legal front when the high court struck down a mask ban imposed by the government last month. The court said it did not consider anti-mask laws unconstitutional in general, but in this case, the law infringed on fundamental rights further than was reasonably necessary.

Many protesters wear masks to shield their identities from



Protesters are escorted by police out of the campus of Hong Kong Polytechnic University during clashes with police. Reuters

surveillance cameras that could be used to arrest and prosecute them. The ban has been widely ignored, and police have charged protesters with wearing masks.

Hong Kong's work week started with multiple protests that disrupted traffic, and schools remained closed because of safety concerns. There was a temporary lull in the pitched battles for control of the Polytechnic campus as the em-

phasis shifted from battering the protesters with tear gas and water cannons to waiting for them to come out.

For days, protesters have fortified the campus to keep police from getting in. Cornered by authorities, they were trying to get out.

Officers repelled one attempt Monday morning with teargas, driving a few hundred protesters back onto the campus. AP

Number of Indians studying in US crosses 2-lakh mark

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 18

IN 2019, the number of Indians studying in the United States crossed the 2,00,000-mark for the first time. With China in the lead, India has the second highest number of international students in the US, followed by Korea.

The number of Indians studying in the US increased by 2.9 per cent, from 1,96,271 students last year to 2,02,014, according to the



The number of Indian students in the US has gone up by 2.9% this year. Reuters file

2019 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange, released on Monday.

Of these students, 17.79 per cent are in the age group of 15 to 24 years. New York, California, Texas, Massachusetts and Illinois are the top five states that receive Indian students.

However, at the same time, the number of US students choosing India for 'Study Abroad' programmes has reduced from 4,704 in 2017 to 3,986 in 2018.

The online survey is carried out

annually by the not-for-profit organisation, Institute of International Education (IIE), in collaboration with other institutes.

"This marks the sixth consecutive year that the total number of Indians pursuing higher education in the US has grown," read a statement by the American Consulate.

According to the report, Indians make up over 18 per cent of all international students in the US. India provided the second highest number of graduate

students (90,333) and jumped up to third place in undergraduates (24,813 students).

Speaking at the United States India Educational Foundation (USIEF), US Embassy's Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs Charisse Phillips said, "Student exchanges between our two countries help strengthen the foundation upon which our strategic partnership is built. Indian students are looking for a great education and the US offers the best return on this investment."

Leaked Iranian intelligence cables show it developed vast influence in Iraq

TIM ARANGO, JAMES RISEN, FARNAZ FASSIHI, RONEN BERGMAN & MURTAZA HUSSAIN
NOVEMBER 18

IN MID-OCTOBER, with unrest swirling in Baghdad, a familiar visitor slipped quietly into the Iraqi capital. The city had been under siege for weeks, as protesters marched in the streets, demanding an end to corruption and calling for the ouster of the Prime Minister, Adil Abdul Mahdi. In particular, they denounced the outsized influence of their neighbour Iran in Iraqi politics, burning Iranian flags and

attacking an Iranian consulate.

The visitor was there to restore order, but his presence highlighted the protesters' biggest grievance: he was Major General Qasim Suleimani, head of Iran's powerful Quds Force, and he had come to persuade an ally in the Iraqi Parliament to help the Prime Minister hold onto his job.

It was not the first time General Suleimani had been dispatched to Baghdad to do damage control. Tehran's efforts to prop up Mahdi are part of its long campaign to maintain Iraq as a pliable client state.

Now leaked Iranian documents offer a detailed portrait of just how aggressively Tehran has

worked to embed itself into Iraqi affairs, and of the unique role of General Suleimani. The documents are contained in an archive of secret Iranian intelligence cables obtained by *The Intercept* and shared with *The New York Times* for this article, which is being published simultaneously by both news organisations.

The unprecedented leak exposes Tehran's vast influence in Iraq, detailing years of painstaking work by Iranian spies to co-opt the country's leaders, pay Iraqi agents working for the Americans to switch sides and infiltrate every aspect of Iraq's political, economic and religious life.

Many of the cables describe

EXPLAINED Regional stability, US presence make Iraq vital for Iran

ACCORDING to the leaked cables, Iran sent some of its most capable intelligence officials to Iraq soon after the US toppled the regime of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. With then US president George W Bush naming Iran as part of an "axis of evil", Tehran was keen to keep an eye on what Washington was doing in Iraq. Iranian officials have acknowledged, according to reports, that keeping tabs on American activities in Iraq is crucial for Iran's national security. Iran also considers it crucial to keep its war-torn neighbour from falling apart and stop the emergence of Sunni militias from springing up near Shia-majority Iran's border.

real-life espionage capers that feel torn from the pages of a spy thriller. Meetings are arranged in dark alleyways and shopping malls or under the cover of a hunting excursion or a birthday party. Informants lurk at the Baghdad airport, snapping pictures of American soldiers and keeping tabs on coalition military flights. Agents drive meandering routes to meetings to evade surveillance. Sources are plied with gifts of pistachios, cologne and saffron. Iraqi officials, if necessary, are offered bribes. The archive even contains expense reports from intelligence ministry officers in Iraq, including one totalling 87.5 euros spent on gifts for a Kurdish commander.

According to one of the leaked Iranian intelligence cables, Mahdi, who in exile worked closely with Iran while Saddam Hussein was in power in Iraq, had a "special relationship with the IRI" — the Islamic Republic of Iran — when he was Iraq's oil minister in 2014. The exact nature of that relationship is not detailed in the cable, and, as one former senior US official cautioned, a "special relationship could mean a lot of things — it doesn't mean he is an agent of the Iranian government." But no Iraqi politician can become PM without Iran's blessing, and Mahdi, when he secured the premiership in 2018, was seen as

a compromise candidate acceptable to both Iran and the US.

The trove of leaked Iranian intelligence reports largely confirms what was already known about Iran's firm grip on Iraqi politics. But the reports reveal far more than was previously understood about the extent to which Iran and the United States have used Iraq as a staging area for their spy games. They also shed new light on the complex internal politics of the Iranian government, where competing factions are grappling with many of the same challenges faced by American occupying forces as they struggled to stabilise Iraq after the US invasion. NYT