

TOP OF THE WORLD



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei

IRAN

Very dangerous plot foiled, says Khamenei

Tehran: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday said his sanctions-hit country had foiled a "very dangerous" plot after violent demonstrations triggered by a fuel price hike. New York-based Human Rights Watch, meanwhile, accused Tehran of "deliberately covering up" more than 100 deaths and thousands of arrests during the crackdown. Iran has blamed the unrest on "thugs" backed by its foreign enemies, including the United States, Israel and the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, an exiled armed opposition group it considers a "terrorist" cult.

USA

Indian-American UNDP expert killed in Kabul attack: Pompeo

Washington: An Indian-American expert working for the UNDP in Afghanistan has been killed in a terrorist attack on a UN vehicle in Kabul, according to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. "I want to confirm with a heavy heart that a United States citizen, Anil Raj of California, was killed in a terrorist attack on a UN vehicle in Kabul on November 24. There were five other civilians who were injured, including staff," Pompeo said on Tuesday. Raj was working for the United Nations Development Programme in Afghanistan.

PAKISTAN

HC stops special court from giving verdict in Musharraf case

Islamabad: A Pakistani court on Wednesday stopped a special court from announcing its judgement in the high treason case against former military dictator General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf, according to a media report. The special court on November 19 concluded the trial proceedings in the case against Musharraf for declaring a state of emergency on November 3, 2007, and had said that a verdict would be announced on November 28.

HOUSE JUDICIARY PANEL TO TAKE OVER TRUMP PROBE, HEARINGS BEGIN DEC 4

## Two officials raised concern over Ukraine aid freeze and resigned, investigators told

'President was briefed on whistleblower complaint before releasing aid package'

MICHAEL D SHEAR & NICHOLAS FANDOS WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 27

TWO OFFICIALS at the White House budget office resigned this year partly because of their concerns about President Donald Trump's decision to hold up congressionally approved security assistance to Ukraine, a third aide at the office told impeachment investigators, revealing dissent within a key agency about Trump's refusal to release the money.

Mark Sandy, an official at the White House Office of Management and Budget, told the House Intelligence Committee in a private interview this month that one of the officials "expressed some frustrations about not understanding the reason for the hold" before resigning in Sept. A second co-worker also re-



An image tweeted without comment by Donald Trump on Wednesday.

sioned after offering a "dissenting opinion" about if it was legal to hold up the aid, Sandy said, according to a transcript of his testimony.

He did not identify the officials.

The issue is at the core of the impeachment inquiry, which marched forward Tuesday as the House Judiciary Committee announced its first hearing on December 4 and invited Trump's legal team to participate. Democrats have charged that Trump abused his power to enlist Ukraine in smearing his political rivals, in part by withholding the nearly \$400 million package of aid. Trump has insisted he was withholding the money out of concern for corruption in Ukraine.

But the money was delivered after the White House became aware that a whistleblower complaint alleged that Trump was using the funding as leverage. Two people familiar with the matter said Tuesday that Trump had been briefed on that complaint when he unfroze military aid for the country in September. **NYT**

**EXPLAINED**  
**Process set to move to next phase**

The House Judiciary panel, after completing its set of hearings, will decide whether to draft articles of impeachment or not. It is likely that the Democrats-controlled panel will do so, leading to a trial of the President in the Republican-controlled Senate. The judiciary panel is expected to include articles on abuse of power and obstruction of justice by the middle of December in order to allow a January trial in the Senate.

## Pakistan Army Chief Bajwa's extension in balance as SC asks govt for clarifications

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, NOVEMBER 27

PAKISTAN CHIEF Justice Asif Saeed Khosa on Wednesday rapped the attorney general for turning the Army Chief into a "shuttlecock" and asked the Imran Khan government to step back and assess what it was doing, as he heard a plea against extending the tenure of Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. Prime Minister Imran Khan



Bajwa's original tenure is set to expire on Thursday

through an official notification of August 19 granted a three-year ex-

tension to General Bajwa, citing "regional security environment". Bajwa's original tenure is set to expire on Thursday at midnight and he can continue as the Army Chief if the Supreme Court decides the case in his favour before that.

"There is still time. The government should step back and assess what it is doing," said Chief Justice Khosa, who is heading a three-member apex court Bench comprising Justices Mazhar Alam Khan Miankhal and Syed Mansoor Ali Shah.

"You have turned the Army Chief into a shuttlecock," he told Attorney General Anwar Mansoor Khan, who presented arguments on behalf of the government.

Chief Justice Khosa said that new summary sent by the PM to the President was a request for reappointment of the Army Chief. But the President issued a notification for extension in his tenure.

"The government should clarify whether it wants to give an extension to Army Chief or wants to reappoint him," he said. **PTI**

## Sri Lankan ex-cricketer Muralitharan to be appointed governor of Northern Province

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA COLOMBO, NOVEMBER 27

SRI LANKAN spin legend Muttiah Muralitharan is set to play a different innings as governor of the country's Tamil-dominated Northern Province after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa "personally invited" him to accept the post, a media report said on Wednesday.

The 47-year-old ace spinner, the record holder for highest wickets in Test cricket (800), is among the three new governors tipped to be appointed by Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who won the Nov 16 presidential election. "President Gotabaya Rajapaksa had personally invited Muralitharan to accept the post of the Governor of the Northern Province," the *Daily Mirror* report said. Anuradha Yahampath is set to become governor of the Eastern Province and Tissa Vitharana will take charge as governor of the North Central Province, the report said.

Yahampath is the chairperson of the Nationalist Entrepreneurs Association and a Director of a reputed garment export company. Vitharana is a former minister and the leader of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, a Trotskyist political party. He is also a specialist doctor.



He was 'personally invited' by Gotabaya to take up the post

## PRESIDENT GOTABAYA EXPANDS CABINET

Colombo: Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa expanded his Cabinet Wednesday by appointing 35 ministers of state and three deputy ministers, all men and none from the Tamil and Muslim minorities, to run his newly-elected government until the parliamentary polls next year. The President named his eldest brother Chamal Rajapaksa, who was already part of his limited 16-member Cabinet, as the new minister of state for defence. However, Namal Rajapaksa, the son of PM Mahinda Rajapaksa, was not given any position. **PTI**

## With tears and white roses, Vietnam receives first bodies found in UK truck

REUTERS NGHE AN, NOVEMBER 27

WITH TEARS in their eyes and white roses in their hands, friends and relatives of the 39 Vietnamese people who were found dead in the back of a British truck last month sobbed as the first bodies to be repatriated arrived in rural Vietnam on Wednesday.

The bodies of 16 victims arrived in the Southeast Asian country in the early hours of Wednesday morning, Vietnam's foreign ministry said.

"After waiting for so many days, my son has finally arrived," Nguyen Dinh Gia, father of victim Nguyen Dinh Luong, said. Under grey and rainy skies, a parade of ambulances snaked through crowds of mourners in the rural town of Dien Chau, Nghe An province, from which



Relatives at a funeral in Nghe An province, Vietnam. Reuters

some of the victims began the doomed journey.

Five of the 16 bodies would be returned to Nghe An on Wednesday, an official there said.

"We are deeply saddened, but we have to hold back the emotion to organise the funeral

## USA STORM THREATENS TRAVEL PLANS

A day after bringing havoc to the Rocky Mountains, a powerful winter storm rolled across the US Midwest on Wednesday, threatening to scramble Thanksgiving plans for millions of people during one of the busiest travel weeks of the year. The storm has been blamed for one death and hundreds of cancelled flights.



## Bangladesh court sentences 7 to death for 2016 cafe attack

Attack on Holey Artisan had killed 22; 1 of the accused freed

RUMA PAUL DHAKA, NOVEMBER 27

A BANGLADESH court handed death sentences to seven members of an Islamist militant group on Wednesday for their role in an attack on a cafe in 2016 that killed 22 people, mostly foreigners, in the south Asian nation's worst such incident.

"Charges against them were proved beyond any doubt. The court gave them the highest punishment," public prosecutor Golan Sarwar Khan told reporters after the verdict, amid tight security at the court in the capital, Dhaka.

One of the eight accused was acquitted, he added.

A defence lawyer said the convicted men would appeal the charges, which include training the attackers and supplying arms, explosives and funds.

After the ruling, they shouted "Allahu Akbar" and "We did nothing wrong" from the dock to a packed courtroom, witnesses said.

Two were seen wearing prayer caps bearing the insignia of Islamic State; authorities opened an investigation into how the caps reached them while they were in police custody.

The July 1 attack on the restaurant popular with foreigners in Dhaka's diplomatic area shocked the nation of 160 million and unnerved businesses,



Convicts shout slogans from inside a police van after their sentencing in Dhaka on Wednesday. AP

including the vital garment exports sector, and foreign investors.

Five young militants, armed with guns, sharp weapons and grenades stormed the Holey Artisan cafe, took diners hostage and killed them over 12 hours. Nine Italians, seven Japanese, an American and an Indian were among the dead. The attackers were also killed in a rescue bid by army commandos.

Prosecutor Khan said the seven men convicted on Wednesday belong to Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, a group that seeks to establish sharia rule in the predominantly Muslim country.

"The ruling will set an example. It will give a message to militant groups that none of them will be spared," Law Minister Anisul Huq said.

Under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has been cracking down on militant groups to preserve its image as a moderate Muslim nation. After the cafe siege, police raided suspected hideouts and killed dozens of militants believed to have helped mount the attack. Hundreds more were arrested.

"We are happy that justice has been served," said Shamsuzzaman Shams, whose policeman brother was killed when he tried to enter the cafe to foil the attackers, adding: "We want immediate execution of the ruling."

But defence lawyer Delwar Hossain said all seven men convicted on Wednesday will challenge the verdict in a higher court. "They didn't get justice," he said. **REUTERS**

## Suspect in killing of US-Indian got angry after she refused to talk to him: Prosecutors

LALIT K JHA WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 27

THE MAN charged with the sexual assault and murder of a teenage Indian-American student in Chicago grabbed her around the neck from behind and put her in a chokehold after she refused to talk to him or acknowledge his catcalls, prosecutors have said.

Donald Thurman, 26, is charged with the first-degree murder and sexual assault of Ruth George, whose body was found Saturday in the backseat of her family's car at a campus parking garage.

Details of the crime emerged during a bail hearing of Thurman. The prosecutors told the court on Tuesday that Thurman had confessed to the crime.

George, 19, was originally from Hyderabad.

Cook County prosecutor James Murphy said Thurman became angry after George did not respond to his catcalls when she was walking from the campus to the parking garage early Saturday. He then followed George to the garage.

Thurman "thought she was pretty" and wanted to talk to George. She did not respond. This made him angry. He allegedly came behind her and put her in a chokehold until she was unconscious, the prosecution said during the bail hearing. **PTI**

## Australia to return historic Indian artefacts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MELBOURNE, NOVEMBER 27

AUSTRALIAN PRIME Minister Scott Morrison, who is set to visit India in January, said on Wednesday that he would return to the country three culturally significant artefacts bought from a New York-based Indian-origin art dealer.

The artefacts were bought by the National Gallery of Australia



Australia's PM is set to visit India in January

from Subhash Kapoor. Criminal proceedings are underway in India and the US against Kapoor.

Research by the gallery led to its decision to voluntarily return the artefacts to India.

The artefacts being returned are a pair of 15th century door guardians (*dvarapala*) from Tamil Nadu and a 6th to 8th century serpent king (*nagaraja*) from Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh.

"Like India, we understand the value of our ancient cultures

and artefacts," Morrison said in a statement.

"The return of these artefacts is the right thing to do. This is another demonstration of deep relationship between Australia and India," he said.

The statement said the Australian government does not have any role in the proceedings.

During his trip, Morrison is expected to meet PM Narendra Modi and deliver an address at the Raisina Dialogue.

## THE COUNTRY HAS BEEN PULLED IN TWO DIRECTIONS AS IT GOES THROUGH A BOOM IN LGBT AWARENESS

# Japan's support for gay marriage is soaring, but legalising it remains a challenge

BENDOOLEY TOKYO, NOVEMBER 27

IN APRIL, Ikuo Sato stood in front of a Tokyo court and told the world he was gay.

To a packed room, he described the anxiety he had felt as a young man, struggling to express his sexuality in Japan's restrictive society. If the law is changed to allow same-sex marriage, he said, perhaps "we'll make a society where the next generation doesn't have to feel that way". Somewhere in the court-

room, his partner sat silently watching, hoping to go unnoticed. His family and co-workers do not know he was gay, and he hopes — at least for now — to keep it that way, fearing discrimination in his workplace.

The couple's story epitomises the contradictions that shape the lives of gay people across Japan. In many ways, there has been dramatic change. Lawsuits filed this year by Sato, his partner and five other couples seeking recognition of same-sex marriage are the first of their kind in Japan. Public support for same-sex

marriage has surged in the last few years, making it seem suddenly within reach. Local governments are increasingly recognising same-sex partnerships, and even Japan's famously rigid culture has begun coming out in favour of them.

Yet in other ways, the gains remain abstract. Gay people face overwhelming pressure to conform to the silent, stifling norms of a society in which many parents and workers are still uncomfortable with the idea of their own children and colleagues being gay. And the conservative politicians



Haru Ono and Asami Nishikawa at their home in Tokyo. NYT

who run the country and extol its sometimes inflexible culture refuse to touch the issue.

"The Japanese people think we should recognise same-sex marriage," said Taiga Ishikawa,

who in July became the first openly gay man elected to the country's Parliament. But, he said, some politicians in the governing party "still have outdated views on this," adding that there is a mistaken belief "that same-sex relationships are a 'hobby' or will add to the declining birthrate."

A recent poll reflected the dichotomy. The survey, by the advertising giant Dentsu, found that more than half of gay men and lesbians in Japan were concerned about coming out. Yet it also showed that almost 80 per cent of people 60 and under now

support same-sex marriage.

That widespread backing comes as Japan has experienced what many describe as a "boom" in LGBT awareness. Advocates see this as an opening.

Haru Ono, an illustrator and rights activist, and her partner, Asami Nishikawa, who are in their 40s and live together in a Tokyo suburb. For years, Ono said, lawyers had told the couple that "the time wasn't right" to sue the government for the right to marry. Then, suddenly, it was. In February, they joined the 12 other couples across Japan in filing law-

suits. Others have since followed.

But the governing Liberal Democratic Party has refused to deliberate a bill proposed by opposition parties that would change Japan's civil code to recognise same-sex marriages. The party insists that legalising the unions would require changing the country's Constitution: Article 24 of the document says that "marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes," language that conservative lawmakers have interpreted as requiring the participation of one man and one woman. **NYT**