

TOPOF THE WORLD



The Whakaari, also known as White Island volcano. Reuters

NEW ZEALAND

Volcano toll rises to 16; bodies to be recovered today

Whakatane: Police in New Zealand are planning a mission to volcanic White Island on Friday to retrieve bodies of people killed in this week's eruption, while the known death toll from the disaster climbed to eight, with two people dying in hospital. Eight more people are missing and presumed dead, buried under ash and debris from Monday's eruption. More than 20 people are in hospital, many with severe burns, while seven others were transferred to Australia. "I can now confirm that we are finalising a plan to recover the bodies from Whakaari/ White Island tomorrow morning," police deputy commissioner John Tims said.

RUSSIA

Russia's only aircraft carrier on fire in port

Moscow: A fire broke out Thursday on Russia's only aircraft carrier as it underwent repairs in an Arctic shipyard, Russian news agencies said, with at least one worker reported missing. The Admiral Kuznetsov has been undergoing repairs for more than two years in Murmansk and suffered previous damage in October 2018 when a crane crashed onto its deck. State news agency RIA Novosti quoted a source in the Zvezdochka shipyard as saying the fire broke out during welding operations. More than 400 people were on board.

BANGLADESH

Top court rejects Khaleda Zia's bail petition

Dhaka: Bangladesh Supreme Court on Thursday rejected BNP chief Khaleda Zia's bail petition in a corruption case, delaying the release of the ailing former prime minister from the jail. A six-member bench of the Appellate Division of the apex court headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud rejected 74-year-old Zia's appeal against a High Court order that turned down her bail plea in the Zia Charitable Trust corruption case. "Dismissed," the bench ruled after hearing the arguments from both sides. The court, however, ordered authorities to swiftly take measures to ensure that Zia gets 'advanced treatment' in line with the recommendations of a medical board.

Britain votes in elections to decide fate of its exit from EU

Major opinion polls point to victory for PM Johnson's Conservatives over Corbyn's Labour Party

GUY FAULCONBRIDGE & ELIZABETH PIPER LONDON, DECEMBER 12

VOTERS WENT to the polls on Thursday in an election that will pave the way for Brexit under Prime Minister Boris Johnson or propel Britain towards another referendum that could ultimately reverse the decision to leave the European Union.

After failing to deliver Brexit by an October 31 deadline, Johnson called the election to break what he cast as political paralysis that had thwarted Britain's departure and sapped confidence in the economy.

The face of the "Leave" campaign in the 2016 referendum, 55-year-old Johnson fought the election under the slogan of "Get Brexit Done", promising to end the deadlock and spend more on health, education and the police.

His main opponent, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, 70, promised higher public spending, nationalisation of key services, taxes on the wealthy and another referendum on Brexit.

All major opinion polls suggest Johnson will win, though pollsters got the 2016 referendum wrong and their models predict outcomes ranging from a hung parliament to the biggest Conservative landslide since the era of Margaret Thatcher.

Seven eve-of-election opinion polls published on Wednesday showed the Conservatives ahead



UK PM Boris Johnson and opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn at polling stations in London. Reuters



We could have a Conservative majority government which will get Brexit done and unleash Britain's potential."

—BORIS JOHNSON UK PM & CONSERVATIVES' LEADER

You can vote for despair and vote for the dishonesty of this government, or you can vote Labour and get a government that can bring hope to the future."

—JEREMY CORBYN LABOUR PARTY LEADER

of Labour by an average of nearly 10 points although Labour narrowed the gap in four of them.

"We could have a Conservative majority government which will get Brexit done and unleash Britain's potential," Johnson told campaigners. "This election is our chance to end the gridlock but the result is on a knife-edge."

Corbyn said the Conservatives were the party of "billionaires" while Labour represented the many.

"You can vote for despair and vote for the dishonesty of this government, or you can vote Labour and get a government that can bring hope to the future," he said.

Polls opened at 0700 GMT and will close at 2200 GMT when an exit poll will give the first indications of the result. Official results from the bulk of the United Kingdom's 650 constituencies begin to come in from 2300 GMT to 0500 GMT.

While Brexit framed the

United Kingdom's first December election since 1923, the tortuous exit from the EU has variously fatigued, enthused and enraged voters while eroding loyalties to the two major parties.

A majority would allow Johnson to lead the country out of the club it joined in 1973, but Brexit would be far from over. He must negotiate a trade agreement with the EU in a self-imposed deadline of 11 months.

After January 31, Britain would enter a transition period during which it would negotiate a new relationship with the 27 EU members. He has pledged to do that by the end of 2020.

Sterling markets are pricing in a Johnson win and the pound was up against the dollar and the euro in early trading on Thursday. REUTERS

SPAIN

MIGRANT HAILED FOR SAVING MAN FROM FIRE

Spanish authorities said on Wednesday they are considering giving residency to an undocumented migrant from Senegal after he rescued a wheelchair-bound man from a burning, second-story apartment. Street vendor Gorgui Lamine Sow scaled a balcony from which black smoke was pouring out and hoisted the resident over his shoulders and carried him down a ladder.



House panel battles over impeachment articles against Trump

SUSAN CORNWELL & RICHARD COWAN WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 12

US LAWMAKERS moved closer on Thursday to impeaching Republican President Donald Trump, as members of a House of Representatives committee debated formal charges that are likely to be sent to the full House for a final vote next week.

The House Judiciary Committee is expected to approve two articles of impeachment later on Thursday, setting up a vote by the Democratic-controlled House next week that is expected to make Trump the third president in US history to be impeached.

If the House impeaches Trump, who is charged with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, he would then go on trial in the Senate. The Republican-led chamber is unlikely to vote to find the president guilty and remove him from office.

In the first hours of what could be a long day of partisan wrangling, Republicans on the Judiciary panel repeatedly complained about the procedures followed by Democrats in the impeachment inquiry.

Republicans requested another hearing and said their rights had been trampled in the inquiry, but were voted down by the panel's Democratic majority. Republicans also moved to strike the first charge of abuse of power but the committee rejected it on a party line vote.

Democrats accuse Trump of abusing his power by trying to force Ukraine to investigate political rival Joe Biden and of obstruct-



Greta Thunberg and Trump at the UN in Sept

TRUMP LASHES OUT AT THUNBERG AFTER TIME HONOUR

Washington: US President Donald Trump lashed out at 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg on Thursday, a day after she was named by Time as its Person of the Year, calling her selection "ridiculous". The Swedish teenager has become a symbol of a growing movement of young climate activists. In a tweet on Thursday morning, Trump said, "Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend!" He added: "Chill Greta, Chill!" Thunberg responded by changing her Twitter profile bio to read: "A teenager working on her anger management problem. Currently chilling and watching a good old fashioned movie with a friend." AP

ing Congress when lawmakers tried to look into the matter. Former Vice President Biden is a leading contender for the Democratic nomination to run against Trump in 2020. REUTERS

13 killed in fire at plastic factory in Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA DHAKA, DECEMBER 12

AT LEAST 13 people were killed and 21 others critically injured in a devastating fire that ripped through an illegal plastic factory in Bangladesh, police said Thursday.

The fire swept through the Prime Patent Plastic Limited on Wednesday afternoon at Keraniganj, on the outskirts of Dhaka, police was quoted as saying by the bdnews24.com.

Of the injured, 13 workers died and 21 others were being treated for injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Thursday, the report said.

The blaze at the factory was brought under control around 5.45 pm on Wednesday after it originated around 4.30 pm, authorities said. The cause of the fire could not be immediately determined, the added.

ROHINGYA HEARINGS: FINAL DAY

Suu Kyi asks ICJ to drop genocide case

REUTERS THE HAGUE, DECEMBER 12

MYANMAR LEADER Aung San Suu Kyi on Thursday said her country's military justice system needed to be given the chance to work and asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to drop the genocide case against it.

"Myanmar requests the court to remove the case from its list", Suu Kyi said on the third and final day of hearings in The Hague. The ICJ said it would render an order "as soon as possible", but gave no specific date.

Earlier, a lawyer presenting the genocide case against Myanmar said the country could not be trusted to hold its soldiers accountable for the alleged atrocities against the Rohingya, and urged that measures to stop the violence



Aung San Suu Kyi leaves the ICJ in The Hague. Reuters

needed to be taken immediately. Arguing the case brought by Gambia, the country's lead lawyer repeated its demand for "provisional measures" to restrain the Myanmar military until the case is heard in full. Paul Reichler said Myanmar had not even tried during the hearings to deny most of the accusations of violence made against its military nor of the mass deportation of Rohingya following a 2017 crackdown.

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS

Weinstein, his accusers reach tentative \$25 mn settlement

Deal does not require him to admit to any wrongdoing

MEGAN TWOHEY & JODI KANTOR DECEMBER 12

AFTER TWO years of legal wrangling, Harvey Weinstein and the board of his bankrupt film studio have reached a tentative \$25 million settlement agreement with dozens of his alleged sexual misconduct victims, a deal that would not require the Hollywood producer to admit wrongdoing or pay anything to his accusers himself, according to lawyers involved in the negotiations.

The proposed global legal settlement has gotten preliminary approval from all the major parties involved, according to several of the lawyers. More



Harvey Weinstein arrives for a hearing in New York. AP

than 30 actresses and former Weinstein employees, who in lawsuits have accused Weinstein of offences ranging from sexual harassment to rape, would share in the payout

As climate talks wind down, pre-2020 targets take centre stage



EXPRESS IN MADRID

AMITABH SINHA DECEMBER 12

AS THE Madrid climate talks neared its end, negotiators

stepped up efforts to prepare compromise texts that would help the countries keep the discussions going on the contentious issues into the next year.

There was also an indication that the final outcome from Madrid would have some sort of acknowledgment of the fact that the developed countries had not done enough to deliver on their pre-2020 promises.

Pre-2020 targets, a reference to the emission reduction cuts mandated by the Kyoto Protocol

on developed countries, and also other commitments like finance and technology transfer, has been repeatedly raised at this meeting by India and other developing countries, which have said the failure of the developed countries to fulfil their earlier promises was the primary reason for the deepening of the climate crisis.

At a meeting on Wednesday night, Carolina Schmidt, a Chilean negotiator who is presiding over the Madrid talks, acknowledged that fulfilment of pre-2020 prom-

ises was a matter of injecting "trust" into the climate talks, and that decisive action was needed to address the gaps that emerged as a result of those actions not being taken in time. India and others are demanding a "work programme" to assess these gaps.

On Thursday, Spain's minister for ecological transition, Teresa Ribera, said the concerns of countries like India were "important and legitimate" but added it was also important that they did not delay action on the implementation

of the Paris Agreement, the successor to the Kyoto Protocol that expires next year.

India's lead negotiator Ravi Shankar Prasad raised the matter again in a meetings where some countries, mainly small island nations, called for an enhancement of climate action in view of reports that not enough was being done to prevent extreme impacts of climate change. "We have been hearing lots of words on (raising of climate action) ambition, but not seen the same kind of zeal as

far as implementation is concerned. Some countries have not been on track on their Kyoto commitments, and are not on track to fulfill their targets under the Paris Agreement as well. This is a cause of concern. If you seriously want to address the climate crisis, we need to start implementing what we have already promised. India believes that the climate crisis can be effectively addressed if countries are honest, take proper decisions and then implement those decisions effectively," Prasad said.

PAINTINGS DEPICTING HUMANOID FIGURES WITH ANIMAL-LIKE FEATURES FOUND TO BE AT LEAST 43,900 YEARS OLD

Indonesian cave's mythical beings may be oldest imaginative art by humans

BECKY FERREIRA DECEMBER 12

IN DECEMBER 2017, Hamrullah, an archaeologist on an Indonesian government survey, was exploring a cave system in Sulawesi, a large island in central Indonesia. He noticed a tantalising opening in the ceiling above him. A skilled spelunker, Hamrullah (who only uses one name, like many Indonesians) climbed through the gap into an uncharted chamber. There, he laid eyes on a painting

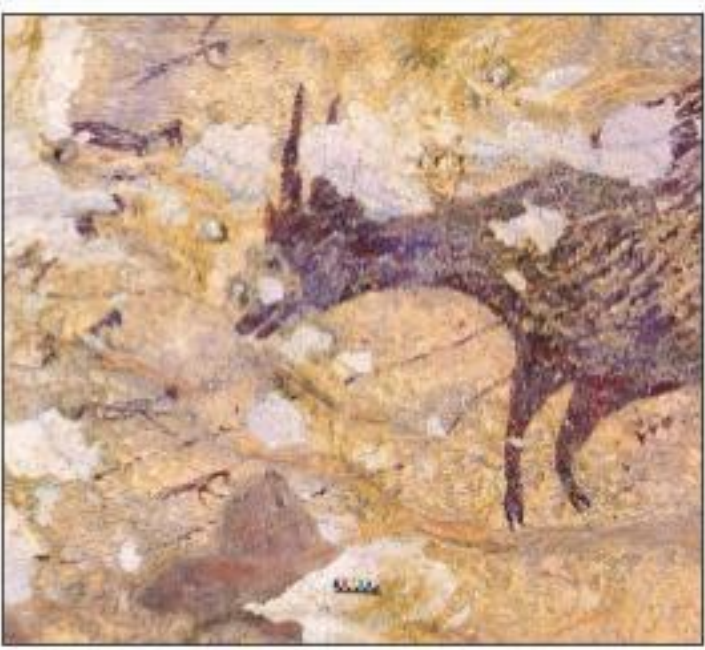
that is upending our understanding of prehistoric humans.

The dramatic panel of art, dating back at least 43,900 years, is "the oldest pictorial record of storytelling and the earliest figurative artwork in the world," a group of scientists said in a paper published Wednesday in Nature, although additional research will be needed to confirm the age of every character in the painting.

In the story told in the scene, eight figures approach wild pigs and anoas (dwarf buffaloes native to Sulawesi). For whomever

painted these figures, they represented much more than ordinary human hunters. One appears to have a large beak while another has an appendage resembling a tail. In the language of archaeology, these are therianthropes, or characters that embody a mix of human and animal characteristics.

Given that these extraordinary characters are wielding thin objects that might represent ropes or spears, the painting may be an artistic demonstration of a game drive, a hunting strategy



A painting of a hunting scene, thought to be at least 43,900 years old, in a cave in Indonesia's Sulawesi island. NYT

that involves guiding animals toward an ambush.

The otherworldly nature of the therianthropes also raises the possibility that they are mythical beings, or manifestations of "animal spirit helpers" that are common in shamanic beliefs, according to the study.

"This scene may not be a depiction of an actual hunting scene but could be about animistic beliefs and the relationship between people and animals, or even a shamanic ritual," said Sue O'Connor, an archaeologist at

Australian National University who was not involved in the study.

These interpretations are speculative, however, and the original inspiration for the painting, as well as its significance to the humans who created it, is likely to remain a mystery.

The rock art predates the next oldest representation of a character with a mix of human and animal figures, found in a cave in Germany, by about 4,000 years. It is also more than 20,000 years older than a hunting scene on the walls of France's Lascaux Cave.

Adam Brumm, an archaeologist at Griffith University in Australia and one of the study's authors, said his team was "completely blown away" by the painting. "We had never seen anything even remotely like this before in the hundreds of cave art sites we'd documented" on this Indonesian island, Brumm said.

"I immediately knew it was special and that it would be a very important site to understand the cognitive evolution of our species," said Maxime Aubert, a co-author also at Griffith. NYT