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TOP OF THE WORLD



MYANMAR

Small blasts hit Rakhine town as Suu Kyi visits

Yangon: Three small explosions went off in a southern Rakhine town in Myanmar Thursday just before civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi landed there in a rare visit to the conflict-ridden state, a local official said. The blasts happened in the normally quiet town of Manauang on an island off Myanmar's western coast where Suu Kyi was due to open a solar power plant. "There were three explosions, but no casualties," Win Myint, spokesperson for Rakhine's regional government, said. He said it happened before Suu Kyi arrived, but since they were on the other side of town the event went ahead as planned and she had since left safely on a flight to Yangon.

UK

Scottish leader steps up battle for independence

London: Scotland's nationalist leader Nicola Sturgeon will consider "all reasonable options" if Prime Minister Boris Johnson tries to stop her from holding a referendum on Scottish independence, she said on Thursday. Sturgeon's pro-independence, anti-Brexit Scottish National Party (SNP) won 48 of Scotland's 59 parliamentary seats in last week's UK-wide election, which she said showed overwhelming support for her agenda to hold such a referendum. As things stand, a referendum cannot take place without UK government consent.

ALGERIA

New President sworn in

Algiers: Algeria swore in Abdelmadjid Tebboune as president on Thursday as the Hirak protest movement debated its response to his offer of dialogue to end a months-long political crisis. Hirak has mobilised huge street protests since February demanding a full clear-out of a shadowy, long entrenched ruling elite that it sees as corrupt and undemocratic, and the army's withdrawal from politics. Mounted guards lined the way into the Palais des Nations as Tebboune entered, Algeria's flag fluttering overhead.

USA

Stabbing at Oregon shopping centre kills 1

Beaverton: An attacker carried out a series of stabbings and carjackings at a suburban Portland shopping centre and in nearby town Wednesday, killing one person and wounding three others before being arrested, authorities said. Police in the city of Beaverton said two people were stabbed inside a Wells Fargo bank and a man was stabbed at a gym next door. After the stabbings, the assailant stole the man's car and drove into the suburb of Tigard, where he stole another woman's car and stabbed her. He eventually got out of the car and ran from officers before being caught, police said.

IMPEACHED FOR ABUSE OF POWER, OBSTRUCTION OF CONGRESS

BECOMES ONLY 3RD U.S. PRESIDENT TO FACE SENATE TRIAL

TRUMP IMPEACHED

NICHOLAS FANDOS & MICHAEL D SHEAR

WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 19

THE HOUSE OF Representatives on Wednesday impeached President Donald Trump for obstruction of Congress and abuse of power, making him the third president in history to be charged with committing high crimes and misdemeanors and face removal by the Senate.

The votes on the two articles of impeachment fell largely along party lines, after a bitter debate that reflected the deep polarisation gripping American politics in the Trump era.

All but two Democrats supported the article on abuse of power, which accused Trump of corruptly using the levers of government to solicit election assistance from Ukraine in the form of investigations to discredit his political rivals. Republicans were united in opposition. It passed 230-197, with Speaker Nancy Pelosi gaveling the vote to a close from the House rostrum.

On the second charge, ob-

struction of Congress, a third Democrat joined Republicans in opposition. The vote was 229-198.

The vote set the stage for a historic trial beginning early next year in the Senate, which will have final say — 10 months before Trump faces reelection — on whether to acquit the President or convict and remove him from office. Acquittal in the Republican-controlled chamber is likely, but the proceeding is certain to aggravate the political and cultural fault lines in the country that Trump's presidency has brought into dramatic relief.

On Wednesday, Democrats characterized his impeachment as an urgent action to stop a corrupt president whose misdeeds had unfolded in plain view from damaging the country any further.

"Over the course of the last three months, we have found incontrovertible evidence that President Trump abused his power by pressuring the newly elected president of Ukraine to announce an investigation into President Trump's political rival," said Rep. Adam Schiff, Intelligence Committee chairman, who led the impeachment inquiry. **NYT**

THE VOTE IN NUMBERS

Article I: Abuse of Power

Yes **230**

Need to pass

No **197**

Article II: Obstruction of Congress

Yes **229**

Need to pass

No **198**

Fearing 2020 backlash, 3 Democrats vote no; Gabbard votes 'present'

SUSAN CORNWELL

WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 19

WEDNESDAY'S IMPEACHMENT vote against President Donald Trump posed a political test for 31 House Democrats who represent districts that backed Trump in the 2016 presidential election, as Republicans warned that those lawmakers could face a backlash if they supported the effort to remove the president from office.

In the end, only three of the 31 voted against one or both of the articles of impeachment that accuse Trump of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

Representative Tulsi Gabbard, who represents a safely Democratic district in Hawaii, voted "present" on both charges.

The three who voted "no" said they were not convinced of the case against Trump. The two articles of impeachment allege the president abused his power in dealings with Ukraine and obstructed Congress' attempts to investigate.

Trump "has not committed a crime", Representative Collin Peterson of Minnesota, one of



Tulsi Gabbard neither opposed nor supported the impeachment articles

the "no" votes, said last Saturday.

Peterson said most people in his rural Minnesota district were not bothered by the allegations brought against Trump by the Democrats.

Representative Jeff Van Drew of New Jersey voted no and told reporters after the vote that he will announce in coming days whether he will leave the Democratic Party.

Jared Golden an ex-Marine and freshman lawmaker from Maine, voted "yes" on abuse of power and "no" on obstruction of Congress. He said Tuesday that Trump had crossed a "clear red line" by asking Ukraine to help him win re-election. **REUTERS**

Sikh taxi driver assaulted in US in second such attack in under 2 weeks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 19

A 57-YEAR-OLD Indian-origin Sikh taxi driver has been brutally assaulted and hit with a with a barbecue grill cover in the head in front of his home in the US state of California, media reports said, second such attack in less than a fortnight.

Baljeet Singh Sidhu, who works as a mail carrier and a Uber driver, was attacked on Sunday while he was parking his car outside his home near Hilltop Mall, Richmond, California, after finishing his duties, SFGate.com reported.

While he was parking his car, a man came up to his cab and asked him for a lighter.

Sidhu said he didn't have one and the man left, but then he returned with another request. "He asked me and said he had \$5 and he needed a ride. It looked suspicious," Sidhu was quoted as saying by the KTVU television station.

He told the man his shift was over. Then the suspect came back a third time and attacked Sidhu and hit him in the head with a barbecue grill cover, knocking him down and then choking him.

The attack is second such attack in a fortnight. On December 5, Another Indian-origin Sikh taxi driver was assaulted and racially abused in the American state of Washington in a suspected hate crime. **PTI**



HITTING BACK: US President Donald Trump posted this meme on Twitter soon after he was impeached, in what is seen as a message to his supporters. *Twitter*

■ Trump also wrote on

Twitter: "SUCH ATROCIOUS LIES BY THE RADICAL LEFT, DO NOTHING DEMOCRATS," the president wrote. "THIS IS AN ASSAULT ON AMERICA, AND AN ASSAULT ON THE REPUBLICAN PARTY!!!!"

■ Moments after the House

voted to impeach him, he used a campaign rally in Michigan, a crucial state in the 2020 presidential campaign, to describe the vote as an attempt to "nullify the ballots of tens of millions of patriotic Americans".

Senate trial in limbo as Pelosi holds out for assurances

Speedy trial and acquittal at Republican-controlled Senate could boost Trump ahead of 2020 presidential election

NICHOLAS FANDOS

WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 19

SPEAKER NANCY Pelosi indicated Wednesday night that the House could indefinitely delay sending the articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump to the Senate, leaving ambiguous the timing of a trial to decide whether to acquit him or convict and remove him from office.

After a historic nearly party-line vote to impeach Trump for two articles, abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, Pelosi said she would hold the articles back until it was clearer that the upper chamber would give the case a fair hearing. The strategy suggested she was keeping the charges as leverage in a coming negotiation over the terms of a Senate trial.

But it could leave the matter in limbo until early January, delaying the start of a trial for an unknown period.

"We will make our decision as to when we are going to send it when we see what they are doing on the Senate side," Pelosi



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announces the passage of the first article of impeachment. *AP*

said. "So far, we have not seen anything that looks fair to us."

With Trump and his allies said to be interested in a speedy trial and acquittal, which they expect will help their cause in the 2020 presidential election, Pelosi believes slowing down the proceeding could force Senate Republicans to set procedures the Democrats find more favourable to their case, according Democratic officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to dis-

MEANWHILE

'CHINA TO LAUNCH 3RD AIRCRAFT CARRIER IN 2 YRS'

China plans to launch its third aircraft carrier within the next two years and it would be combat ready by 2025, official media reported on Thursday, two days after Beijing operationalised its 2nd aircraft carrier. The third aircraft carrier may have electromagnetic catapult and stealth fighter jets, a report by Ordnance Industry Science Technology, a periodical focused on the national defence industry said.

Impeachment over 'far-fetched' reasons: Putin backs Trump

VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV & HARRIET MORRIS

MOSCOW, DECEMBER 19

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin said Thursday that US President Donald Trump was impeached for "far-fetched" reasons, calling the move by Democrats a continuation of their fight against the Republican leader.

"The party that lost the (2016) election, the Democratic Party, is trying to achieve results by other means," Putin said at his annual news conference in Moscow.

He likened Trump's impeachment to the earlier US probe into collusion with Russia, which Putin played down as groundless. Former special counsel Robert Mueller concluded earlier this year that the Russian government interfered in the 2016 US presidential election in a "sweeping and systematic fashion."

Noting the Republicans have a majority in the Senate, where a trial of Trump will be conducted, Putin said "they will be unlikely to remove a representative of their own party from office on what seems to me an absolutely far-fetched reason." **AP**



Pakistan court on Musharraf: Drag his body to Islamabad square, hang for 3 days

ASIF SHAHZAD

ISLAMABAD, DECEMBER 19

A PAKISTAN special court issued a bizarre but apparently symbolic order for former military ruler Pervez Musharraf on Thursday, saying his corpse should be dragged to Parliament and hang for three days if he dies before his execution.

The court sentenced Musharraf to death on Tuesday after finding him guilty of high treason for subverting the constitution in 2007.

Thursday's announcement came after the government said it had found fault with the sentence, apparently taking sides in a split between the military and the judiciary, and the general's lawyers said he plans to appeal.

The court directed law enforcers to apprehend Musharraf, currently receiving medical treatment in Dubai, to ensure the death sentence is carried out.

But if found dead beforehand, "his corpse (should) be dragged to D-Chowk, Islamabad, Pakistan, and be hanged for three days", it said.

The chowk, or roundabout, is just outside parliament.

Legal experts termed the instructions unconstitutional, even if symbolic.

There is only one precedent — a court sentenced a serial killer to hanging at a public place and his body to be cut into 100 pieces in front of the families of the victims. The sentence was never carried out.

QUEEN'S SPEECH

UK confirms fast-track visa for doctors from countries such as India

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, DECEMBER 19

THE UK government on Thursday confirmed plans to introduce a new visa for qualified doctors and nurses from countries around the world, including India, to address workforce shortages in the state-funded National Health Service (NHS).

Prime Minister Boris Johnson had made references to such a new so-called "NHS visa" on the election campaign trail, which was confirmed as part of the Queen's Speech in Parliament on Thursday — the formal process of Queen Elizabeth II laying out the parliamentary agenda of the newly elected Johnson-led Conservative Party government.

"A modern, fair, points-based immigration system will welcome skilled workers from across the world to contribute to the United Kingdom's economy, communities and public services," the speech notes.

An accompanying government briefing paper elaborates that under its "NHS People Plan", qualified doctors, nurses and allied health professionals with a job offer from the NHS, and who have been trained to a recog-



PAK GOVT WANTS 'MENTALLY UNFIT' JUDGE REMOVED

Islamabad: Furious over a special court's verdict to drag General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf's corpse to the Parliament and hang it for three days, the Pakistan government on Thursday said that it would move the Supreme Judicial Council to unseat the "mentally unfit" head of the tribunal. "The federal government has decided to go to the Supreme Judicial Council as the government believes that such a person cannot be a judge of any High and Supreme Court. If a judge gives such a judgment then such a judge is mentally unfit and incompetent," Law Minister Farogh Naseem said. **PTI**

Information Minister Firdous Ashiq Awan said on Wednesday the government's legal team had found "gaps and weaknesses" in the original death sentence after lawyers briefed PM Imran Khan about the case. **REUTERS**

EXPLAINED

Seeking to assure maiden Tory voters

THE ELECTIONS earlier this month saw Boris Johnson's Conservatives win big over Jeremy Corbyn's Labour. A major reason for the victory has been attributed to how unpopular Corbyn was as a leader. This resulted in many people voting for the Conservatives for the first time, shunning Labour because of Corbyn. Soon after the election victory, Johnson assured such voters their interests would be protected. With the Queen's Speech focusing on boosting health-care funding, one of the key campaign promises of Labour, Johnson is reassuring the former Labour voters that they can trust him.

nised standard, will be offered fast-track entry, reduced visa fees and dedicated support to come to the UK. **PTI**

State of emergency declared as bushfires rage in Australia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BUXTON, DECEMBER 19

A STATE of emergency was declared in Australia's most populated region on Thursday as an unprecedented heatwave fanned out-of-control bushfires, destroying homes and smothering huge areas with a toxic smoke.

As thousands of firefighters battled blazes, temperatures neared 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) in some places and authorities warned the extreme weather conditions could get even worse.

Australia endures bushfires every year but the early and intense start to this season, along with the record temperatures, has fuelled concerns about global warming.



Police block the Old Hume Highway as a blaze jumps the road near the town of Tahmoor, near Sydney, on Thursday. *Reuters*

In New South Wales, Australia's most populated state with Sydney as its capital, more than 100 bushfires were burning on Thursday, many of them out of control.

New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian declared a seven-day state of emergency, the

second since the bushfire season began early in September, due to "catastrophic weather conditions".

At Buxton, about 100 kilometres southwest of Sydney, long-time resident Paul Collins said a nearby bushfire that had destroyed dozens of buildings was "much worse" than in past years.

Cuba to name first prime minister in 40 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

HAVANA, DECEMBER 19

CUBA IS to resurrect the position of prime minister in a parliamentary session at the end of the week, with President Miguel Diaz-Canel nominating a candidate to the post which has remained dormant for more than 40 years.

The last time Cuba had a prime minister, it was Fidel Castro.

However, the position was abolished in 1976 when Castro transitioned to the presidency, taking over from Osvaldo Dorticos after the country's constitution was restructured.

No one knows yet who will be appointed, and the general public is in the dark as to what the role will even entail.

"I don't know what his functions will be, I imagine that he'll



President Miguel Diaz-Canel is set to nominate a candidate for PM

be helping that poor Diaz-Canel who never stops, going here and there trying to sort out the country," said Maria Fernandez, a 65-year-old pensioner.

Parliament will meet on Friday and Saturday before appointing the prime minister based on a proposal by Diaz-Canel. The new official will become "head of government" for a five-year term.