

TOPOF THE WORLD



A law signed by Putin in May requires internet providers to install equipment to enable centralised control of traffic

RUSSIA

Moscow tests ‘sovereign’ Net amid fears of online isolation

Moscow: Russia carried out tests Monday to ensure the “security” of its internet infrastructure in case of a foreign cyberattack, measures that rights activists worry could also tighten censorship and lead to on-line isolation. A controversial law that allows the country to cut internet traffic from international servers came into force in November, but the communications ministry has denied the government is gearing up to isolate the Russian segment of the internet and said ordinary users wouldn’t notice tests.

HONDURAS

Prison clashes leave 36 dead

Tegucigalpa: At least 36 people were killed in weekend clashes in Honduran prisons as the military and police try to regain control after a spate of murders linked to the criminal gangs plaguing the country. On Sunday afternoon, 18 gang members died in a clash between inmates at El Porvenir prison, 60 kilometers (40 miles) north of the capital Tegucigalpa. “Firearms, knives and machetes” were used in the brawl, which also left 10 wounded, Lieutenant Jose Coello, a spokesman for the National Inter-Institutional Security Force (Fusina), told local media. On Friday night, 18 prisoners died and 16 were wounded in a shooting at the prison in the port town of Tela, northwest of the capital.

USA

Maryam Nawaz denied permission to travel abroad

Islamabad: The Pakistan government has denied permission to PML-N vice president Maryam Nawaz to travel abroad, saying those involved in any economic crime and institutional fraud could not be allowed to leave the country, according to a media report on Monday. Maryam, the daughter of Pakistan’s former PM Nawaz Sharif, was placed on the no-fly list in August 2018. Maryam had sought permission for flying to London to look after her ailing father.

DOUGLAS MARTIN  
DECEMBER 23

BABA RAM Dass, who epitomised the 1960s of legend by popularising psychedelic drugs with Timothy Leary, a fellow Harvard academic, before finding spiritual inspiration in India, died on Sunday at his home on Maui. He was 88.

The death of Ram Dass, who was born Richard Alpert, was announced on his official Instagram account. Having returned from India

# Saudi court sentences five to death in Khashoggi murder

BEN HUBBARD  
BEIRUT, DECEMBER 23

A COURT in Saudi Arabia sentenced five men to death and three to prison terms over the killing of Saudi dissident writer Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul last year, the kingdom’s public prosecutor’s office said Monday.

The killing of Khashoggi, 59, a veteran Saudi media figure and columnist for *The Washington Post*, brought international outrage and battered the reputation of Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince and de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Salman.

The kingdom’s handling of the case has also raised concerns. Turkey has accused Saudi Arabia of failing to cooperate in investigating the killing, which a United Nations investigator said could amount to obstruction of justice. Khashoggi, who lived in Virginia, entered the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018, to obtain paperwork he needed to marry his Turkish fiancée. Inside, he was confronted

## Nepal arrests 97 Chinese nationals ‘preparing to commit major financial crimes’

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, DECEMBER 23

IN A massive operation in multiple locations around Kathmandu on Monday, Nepal police arrested 97 Chinese nationals.

Police declined to give details about the activities of the arrested, but said, “We have definite information that they were preparing to commit major financial crimes.”

The arrests come four months after four Chinese nationals were arrested for hacking ATM machines in Kathmandu.

Police raided three places in Kathmandu where the arrested persons had rented multi-storey houses, which they were purportedly using as offices and as residences.

Police said some of those arrested may have committed crimes in several countries, including China, but came to Nepal to conducted organised crimes.

Police are investigating the antecedents of the suspects, as well as scrutinising around 400 computers that they seized following Monday afternoon’s coordinated raids.



At a protest against the killing of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Khashoggi was killed inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018. *Reuters*

by Saudi agents, who killed him and dismembered his body. His remains have yet to be found.

The kingdom never announced the suspects’ names, and foreign diplomats who attended sessions of the trial were sworn to secrecy.

The public prosecutor’s office

said Monday it had examined 31 suspects and arrested 21 of them. Of those, 11 were put on trial.

Five men were sentenced to death for their direct involvement in Khashoggi’s killing. Three others were given a total of 24 years in prison for covering up the crime and violating

## Algeria’s powerful Army Chief Ahmed Gaed Salah dies at 79

LAMINE CHIKHI  
ALGIERS, DECEMBER 23

ALGERIA’S POWERFUL Army Chief, who masterminded the state’s response to mass protests this year, died suddenly of a heart attack on Monday, and a likely successor quickly emerged from the same old guard the demonstrators want swept away.

Lieutenant General Ahmed Gaed Salah had become the most visible figure in Le Pouvoir — the “power”, as Algerians describe their secretive ruling elite, helping to bring down long-time president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April.

As military Chief of Staff, his strategy was to replace Bouteflika and his allies while keeping the essential structure of power unchanged and allowing the protests to continue, hoping to

wait out the demonstrators.

Huge crowds continued to flood the streets through much of 2019 to demand wholesale change to the leadership, unappeased by Bouteflika’s resignation and the arrest of many of his aides and allies on corruption charges.

The protest movement has no formal leaders or organisation. But among its main demands throughout the weekly rallies has been that the Army step away from its central political role since Algeria’s 1962 independence from France, with marchers often chanting: “A civilian state, not a military state”. As the year wore on, protesters also increasingly called for Gaed Salah himself to resign, especially after he pushed hard for an election to replace Bouteflika that they regarded as illegitimate while the old guard still held sway. **REUTERS**



Gaed Salah was seen as Algeria’s de facto strongman after president Abdelaziz Bouteflika quit in April

## Mystery of missing boy found in closet grips Germany

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
FRANKFURT AM MAIN, DEC 23

THE CASE of a missing 15-year-old boy found in a closet at the flat of a suspected paedophile has gripped Germany, but his mother says she just wants to celebrate Christmas with her son.

Marvin had been missing for over two years when he was found hiding in a cupboard last Friday as police searched the home of a 44-year-old man suspected of distrib-

uting child pornography.

The stunning discovery in the western town of Recklinghausen has drawn comparisons to two shocking cases in Austria — of Natascha Kampusch, who was held by her kidnapper for eight years before she managed to escape in 2006; and of Elisabeth Fritzl, who was

kept in a cellar and repeatedly raped by her father Josef in an ordeal that lasted 24 years.

Marvin, who disappeared after saying goodbye to his carers at a youth shelter on June 11, 2017, is currently in psychiatric care.

“I want to visit him for Christmas, to celebrate a little with him,” his mother Manuela



His first book, *Be Here Now*, sold over 2 million copies

Richard Alpert was born in Boston on April 6, 1931. His father, George, a lawyer, was a founder of Brandeis University



MEANWHILE

PUTIN TAKES 1ST TRAIN OVER CRIMEA BRIDGE

President Vladimir Putin on Monday stood in the driver’s cabin of a train for the official opening of a railway bridge that links annexed Crimea to southern Russia, with the launch drawing sharp criticism from Ukraine and the EU. During his ride, from Kerch in Crimea, Putin also spent time drinking tea with engineers on the \$3.6-billion project.

DAY AFTER INITIAL RESULTS RELEASED



Afghanistan’s incumbent President Ashraf Ghani arrives to speak after he won a slim majority of votes in preliminary results of presidential election, in Kabul on Sunday. *Reuters*

## Afghan election runoff likely amid thousands of complaints: officials

OROOJ HAKIMI  
KABUL, DECEMBER 23

AFGHANISTAN’S ELECTORAL Complaints Commission said on Monday the election might go to a second round as it begins reviewing thousands of complaints a day after the preliminary result handed incumbent president Ashraf Ghani a narrow victory.

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced on Sunday a much delayed preliminary result of the Sept. 28 presidential vote which was marred by allegations of massive fraud, technical problems with biometric devices used for voting, attacks and irregularities.

IEC said the total turnout was over 1.8 million with Ghani securing 50.64 percent to win the first round of voting, beating his main rival Abdullah Abdullah who currently shares power with him in a unity government.

However, if a review by the complaints commission reduces Ghani’s vote share to below 50 percent and no other candidate has a majority, a second round will be held between the two top contenders.

Deen Mohammad Azimi, deputy head of the Electoral Complaints Commission, said



Ahsan Iqbal

## Pakistan’s anti-graft body arrests former interior minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
ISLAMABAD, DECEMBER 23

PAKISTAN’S FORMER interior minister and senior PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal was arrested on Monday for alleged corruption in a sports complex construction project, according to a report.

Iqbal, 60, was arrested from the National Accountability Bureau’s (NAB) Rawalpindi office, where he had appeared to record his statement in the alleged corruption in the Narowal Sports City Project, Dawn reported.

The NAB will produce him before an accountability court on Tuesday for his physical remand. He served as interior minister from August 2017 to May 2018.

Iqbal, who also served as planning and development minister and the deputy chairman of the planning commission, is charged with illegally using funds meant for a sports city in Narowal.

## EXPLAINED Critical moment in political crisis

THE DEATH of the Gaed Salah has come at a crucial time in the Algerian state machinery’s response to the political crisis in the country. Following mass demonstrations against president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, he quit after Gaed Salah, as Army Chief, called for his resignation. This, combined with the Army’s refusal to use force against the protesters, had made him a highly regarded figure among the protest movement. However, once he took control of the country’s government, he refused to accept the protesters’ demands for major reforms. He called an election that protesters describe as illegitimate. The new president has sought talks to end the crisis, but the protesters want the Army to move away entirely from politics and don’t recognise the new president. This marks the latest critical moment in the country’s political crisis.

B., 53, told Germany’s best-selling tabloid *Bild*.

A police spokesman on Monday said the decision on when Marvin can go home “is up to the doctors, not the police”.

Many questions remain answered in the case that German media have dubbed an “Advent miracle” — including how the boy ended up at the flat and if he could have left at any time.

Police said in a statement that the officers who discovered him “did not see any indications

at that point that he was being held against his will”.

But Marvin’s mother, who was briefly reunited with her son on Friday, doubted he was there entirely out of free will. “The man whose place they found him at must have manipulated him,” she told *Bild*.

“I could go crazy thinking about what’s been done to him.”

She said Marvin was found wearing the same clothes as on the day he vanished, and said he looked like “a broken old man”.

he crossed paths with Leary.

Leary was researching on psilocybin, the main psychoactive ingredient in some species of mushrooms.

After taking a dose of psilocybin with Leary, Alpert recalled, he felt supreme calm, then panic, then exaltation. He believed he had met his own soul. “It was OK to be me,” he said he had realised.

The Harvard work led to many news articles, but it also provoked criticism.

In May 1963, both Leary and Alpert were fired — Alpert for giving drugs to an undergraduate, and

Leary for abandoning his classes.

Alpert went to India in 1967. Events led him to Neem Karoli Baba, who was called Maharajji by his followers. Maharajji appeared to read Alpert’s mind by telling him that his mother had recently died of spleen disease — information he had told no one in India, he said. The experience sparked a spiritual upheaval in Alpert, who forever after considered Maharajji his guru. It was Maharajji who gave Alpert the name Ram Dass, and added the prefix, Baba.

In 1968, Maharajji told Ram Dass to return to the United States.

ermen and residents who fear possible health effects from releasing the radioactive water as well as harm to the region’s image and fishing industry.

The water has been treated, and the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., says all 62 radioactive elements it contains can be removed to levels not harmful to humans except for tritium.

There is no established method to fully separate tritium from water, but scientists say it is not a problem in small amounts. Most of the water stored at the plant still contains other radioactive elements including cancer-causing cesium and strontium and needs further treatment.

When he got off the plane in Boston — barefoot, robed and bearded — his father, he said, told him to get in the car quick “before anyone sees you.” He moved into a cabin on his father’s estate in New Hampshire. Soon, as many as 200 people were showing up to chant with him.

Ram Dass’s biggest public success came in 1971, when the Lama Foundation published *Be Here Now*, originally issuing it as loose pages in a box. It has had more than three dozen printings, with total sales exceeding two million. **NYT**