

TOPOF THE WORLD



Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle after recording the annual Christmas Day message

BRITAIN

Queen admits 'bumpy' year in Christmas speech

London: Queen Elizabeth II plans to acknowledge that both Britain and her family have endured a difficult year by saying during her Christmas message that it has been a "bumpy" time. The pre-recorded message will be broadcast in Britain and the Commonwealth nations on Christmas Day. It was recorded before the queen's husband, Prince Philip, was hospitalised in London. Excerpts released by Buckingham Palace before the speech show the queen admits difficulties during the course of the year. "The path, of course, is not always smooth, and may at times this year have felt quite bumpy, but small steps can make a world of difference," she said.

INDONESIA

28 killed as bus falls into ravine

Palembang: A bus plunged into a ravine on Indonesia's Sumatra island after its brakes apparently malfunctioned, killing at least 28 people and injuring 13 others, police and rescuers said Tuesday. The accident occurred just before midnight Monday on a winding road in South Sumatra province's Pagaralam district. Palembang search and rescue operation chief Berty Kowaas said the bodies were taken to a hospital for identification, including that of a young boy who was pulled from a river near the crash site. One of the injured was in critical condition, local police chief Dolly Gumara said.

WEST ASIA

Saudi, Kuwait ink deal to resume joint oil output

Kuwait City: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait signed an agreement Tuesday to resume pumping at two major oilfields in a shared neutral zone shut for five years due to a bilateral disagreement, officials said. Kuwait's oil minister Khaled al-Fadhel said on Twitter that the memorandum of understanding signed with Saudi Arabia included "the resumption of production in the divided zone". KUNA news agency reported the countries also signed an agreement on demarcation of borders in the neutral zone.



THOUSANDS FLOCK TO BETHLEHEM FOR CHRISTMAS

A visitor lights a candle at the Church of the Nativity, built on top of the site where Christians believe Jesus Christ was born, on Christmas Eve in the West Bank City of Bethlehem on Tuesday. Thousands of Christian pilgrims descended on Bethlehem ahead of the annual Christmas Eve celebrations. The Church of the Nativity was set to host Palestinian dignitaries and pilgrims from around the world for a midnight Mass. Christmas festivities are typically a boost for Bethlehem's flagging economy and for the Holy Land's dwindling Christian population, which has shrunk over the decades compared to the general population. *AP*

With impeachment trial stuck in limbo, Trump lashes out

Senate Republican, Democratic leaders at impasse over trial

ZEKE MILLER

PALM BEACH, DECEMBER 24

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump lashed out Tuesday as his Senate impeachment trial remains at an impasse, with Republican and Democratic leaders at odds over its format and whether witnesses should be called.

Speaking at his private club in Palm Beach, Florida, after a phone call with troops stationed across the globe, Trump singled out Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is indefinitely holding up sending the articles of impeachment the House passed last week to the Republican-controlled Senate.

"She hates the Republican Party. She hates all of the people that voted for me and the Republican Party," Trump charged on Christmas Eve. "She's doing a tremendous disservice to the country." Trump has long seen a Senate trial, where he is almost certain to be acquitted, as an opportunity for vindication.

"We have the majority and

SENATE LEADERS AT ODDS OVER TRIAL PROCESS



**THE SENATE'S** top Democrat, Chuck Schumer, insisted that witnesses, including ex-NSA John Bolton, should be called during the trial. He also wants the White House to present documents related to the case. He said a trial without these would be a 'sham'.



**SENATE MAJORITY** leader Mitch McConnell, a Trump loyalist, has all but promised a swift acquittal of the President, resisted making any guarantees, and cautioned Trump against seeking the testimony of witnesses for fear of prolonging the trial.

now they want McConnell to do wonderful things for them," Trump complained of Democrats, adding that he will leave it to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to do whatever he thinks best.

Pelosi has said she is waiting until she receives more clarity from McConnell about what a

trial will look like. He has said he has not ruled out calling witnesses, but has also indicated that he is in no hurry to seek new testimony either. Meanwhile the Senate's top Democrat, Chuck Schumer of New York, has countered that any trial without witnesses would be "Kafkaesque" and a "sham". *AP*

TURKEY SAYS SAUDI TRIAL A SHAM; 'U.S. INTEL AGENCIES REJECT VALIDITY OF PROCEEDINGS'

Khashoggi fiancee slams death sentences

REUTERS

ANKARA, DECEMBER 24

THE FIANCEE of murdered Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi described the sentencing of five people to death in relation to the killing as unfair and invalid, adding that their execution would further conceal the truth.

Khashoggi disappeared after going to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on Oct. 2, 2018, to obtain documents for his wedding.

A Saudi court on Monday sentenced five people to death and three to jail over the murder.

Hatice Cengiz, Khashoggi's fiancée, was waiting outside the consulate when he went inside

EXPLAINED

Saudi death sentences leave many unanswered questions

WHILE A Saudi Arabian court has announced death sentences for five people in connection with Khashoggi's murder, it has failed to dispel multiple questions connected with the crime. A UN expert, as well as Turkish investigators and US intelligence agencies have implicated the Crown Prince and his close aide in the crime, but they did not even face trial. Other aspects of the Saudi handling of the case have raised questions, such as why the kingdom did not name the five who were sentenced to death. The Saudis' initial refusal to even accept that his murder took place shook trust in the government's intentions, while the location of Khashoggi's body has remained a mystery even after the trial.

to retrieve the documents.

In a statement on Tuesday, Cengiz said: "If these people are

executed without any chance to speak or explain themselves, we might never know the truth be-

hind this murder."

Turkey's Communications Director Fahrettin Altun slammed the verdict as an "insult to the intelligence of any fair observer". "The international media must pursue the case of Khashoggi until there is true accountability... Those responsible must face justice sooner or later," Altun said on Twitter, calling the case a "sham trial".

After Monday's verdict, a source familiar with US intelligence assessments on the killing of Khashoggi, who was US resident, said key government agencies rejected the validity of the court proceedings and CIA experts still believed Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman was involved in some way in the killing.

to carry out that rebalancing.

Officials say the overhaul of Africa deployments will be followed by one in Latin America, and that drawdowns will happen in Iraq and Afghanistan, as has been expected.

The initiative reflects what has become the defining priority for Esper: moving away from 18 years of counterterrorism deployments in places troubled by militancy and insurgency where thousands of US troops cycle through in an attempt to maintain minimal stability but without much prospect of definitive solutions.

"We've begun a review process where I'm looking at every theater, understanding what the require-

BRAZIL

BOLSONARO RELEASED FROM HOSPITAL AFTER FALL

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro was released from the hospital Tuesday following an overnight stay after hitting his head in a fall at his official residence, his office said. The fall was the latest health scare for Brazil's 64-year-old leader, who was wounded in a knife attack in September 2018 while campaigning ahead of the presidential election.

FATF blacklisting could affect Pak's capital inflows: IMF

Pakistan already on terror financing watchdog's Grey List

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, DECEMBER 24

THE POTENTIAL blacklisting of Pakistan by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) could have implications for capital inflows to the country, according to a report released by the IMF.

The FATF, a global watchdog for terror financing, that kept Pakistan on the Grey List for an extended period till February 2020, had warned in October that Islamabad would be put on the 'Black List' if it did not give satisfactory answers to the remaining 22 points in a list of 27 questions.

Pakistan submitted a report comprising answers to 22 questions to the FATF on December 6.

"A potential blacklisting by FATF could result in a freeze of capital flows and lower investment to Pakistan," said the IMF in its staff-level report that was finalised during the visit of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) team to Pakistan.

The IMF programme continues to face significant risks, both from domestic and external factors, the report added.

Potential external risks include blacklisting by the FATF that could result in a freeze of capital flows to Pakistan, slow progress in refinancing/re-pro-

Pak top nuclear scientist approaches SC seeking freedom of movement

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, DECEMBER 24

PAKISTAN'S TOP nuclear scientist Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan has filed a petition in the Supreme Court, seeking enforcement of his fundamental rights, including free movement across the country, media reports said on Tuesday.

Advocate Zubair Afzal Rana filed the petition on behalf of Khan on Monday against the September 25, 2019 judgment of the Lahore High Court (LHC) that had rejected a similar plea on the



filing loans from major bilateral creditors, and increasing headwinds from a weaker global economic backdrop, the report said. The IMF report said Pakistan continues to be included in the FATF's list of jurisdictions with serious AML/CFT deficiencies.

The Asia-Pacific Group on money laundering also discussed Pakistan's Mutual Evaluation Report, noting that existing efforts were inconsistent with the level of risks and greater effectiveness needs to be demonstrated.

Due to a delay in completing the 27-point action plan, the IMF has also, accordingly, adjusted a programme condition to complete the work from October 2019 to June 2020.

But Pakistan has to show a substantial level of effectiveness to the IMF by end of March 2020 that should be consistent with FATF Immediate Outcome 9 on terrorism financing investigations and Immediate Outcome 10 on targeted financial sanctions, according to the IMF. *PTI*



Abdul Qadeer Khan

grounds that it lacked jurisdiction in view of the special security measures taken by the state for his protection.

Nepal Dy PM quits as his key Madhesi party withdraws Oli backing

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, DECEMBER 24

AFTER WEEKS of failed talks, Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Samajwadi Party leader Upendra Yadav resigned on Tuesday from the Cabinet, and announced the withdrawal of his Madhes-based party's support to the KP Oli government.

Yadav said he resigned due to Oli's reluctance to amend the Constitution, which was the condition for his joining the Cabinet.

While joining the government last year, the Samajwadi Party had

had reached a three-point agreement with the leaders of the ruling Nepal Communist Party. The party's demands include restructuring of the state, federalism along with ethnic identity and rights of Madhes and other marginalised groups and citizenship, the party's vice-chairperson, Hisila Yami said.

The party's move comes after the Nepal Communist Party struck an electoral deal with another Madhes-based Party — Rastriya Janata Party — for the upcoming by-election to the National Assembly, the Upper House of Parliament. —*WITHPTIINPUTS*

Nepal charges 122 Chinese nationals with 'indecent behaviour', seeks to deport them

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, DECEMBER 24

THE NEPAL police charged the 122 Chinese nationals arrested on Monday with "indecent behaviour" in court.

Although they were arrested on suspicion of being involved in cases of "serious financial crimes" in China and other countries including Nepal, the police's decision to book them under the less serious charges of indecent behaviour is believed to be a way to allow for their early deportation to China, as per Beijing's wishes.

Senior sources said the raids against the Chinese nationals were conducted based on information supplied by Chinese authorities. "A special plane will come to take them to China soon," sources said.

Charging them with indecent behaviour allows police to release them any time.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang, in his regular press briefing in Beijing, said, "These Chinese citizens are suspected of engaging in cross-border cyber fraud. The relevant case is currently under investigation. This is a very important case that is a result of active cooperation between the Chinese and Nepali police."

"China is willing to increase cooperation with Nepal in various fields, including law enforcement, to jointly fight cross-border crime and promote friendly exchanges between people from the two countries," he added.

PUSH TO REDUCE MISSIONS BATTLING DISTANT TERRORIST GROUPS, AND INSTEAD REFOCUS ON RUSSIA AND CHINA

Pentagon eyes Africa drawdown as first step in global troop shift

HELENE COOPER, THOMAS GIBBONS-NEFF, CHARLIE SAVAGE & ERIC SCHMITT

WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 24

US DEFENCE Secretary Mark Esper is weighing proposals for a major reduction — or even a complete pullout — of US forces from West Africa as the first phase of reviewing global deployments that could reshuffle thousands of troops around the world, according to officials familiar with internal deliberations.

The discussions of a large-scale pullback from West Africa include abandoning a recently

built \$110 million drone base in Niger and ending assistance to French forces battling militants in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The deliberations stem from a push to reduce post-9/11 missions battling terrorist groups, and instead to refocus Pentagon priorities on confronting so-called Great Powers like Russia and China.

With an initial decision about Africa expected in January, the plans are sure to draw criticism from lawmakers, allies and military officials, and could eventually affect most global missions in some way. About 200,000 US forces are currently stationed abroad, similar to the force posture when President Donald Trump



American Special Forces and Nigerien forces in Agadez, Niger, last year during a joint training exercise. *NYT*

took office with a promise to close out the nation's "endless wars".

But Trump is not so much

ending wars as he is moving troops from one conflict to another, and Esper's initiative aims