

ELSEWHERE



Anti-Putin activist 'forcibly drafted'

MOSCOW

Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny said one of his allies had been forcibly conscripted and sent to serve at a remote Arctic base, in a move his supporters said amounted to kidnapping. Ruslan Shaveddinov went missing on Monday after authorities broke into his Moscow flat. On Tuesday, he resurfaced at an air defence base on an island in the Arctic Ocean, Mr. Navalny said. **AFP**

Japan lawmaker arrested over alleged casino bribes

TOKYO

A Japanese lawmaker was arrested on suspicion of accepting bribes from a company that wanted to build a casino, prosecutors said. Tsukasa Akimoto, a former member of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling party, received three million yen in cash in 2017 (\$27,400 at the current rate), they said. **AFP**

Activists continue Hong Kong protests despite Christmas

They marched through shopping malls, chanting pro-democracy slogans

REUTERS
HONG KONG

Hong Kong anti-government protesters marched through Christmas-decorated shopping centres on Wednesday, chanting pro-democracy slogans and forcing one mall to close early, as the police fired tear gas to disperse crowds gathering on nearby streets.

The protests have turned more confrontational over the festive season, though earlier in December they had been largely peaceful after pro-democracy candidates overwhelmingly won district council elections.

Despite the embarrassing results, Hong Kong's pro-Beijing leaders have made no new concessions.

"Confrontation is expected, it doesn't matter if it's Christmas," said Chan, a 28-year-old restaurant worker who was part of a crowd



Pinned down: Riot police detaining a protester during a demonstration in Hong Kong on Wednesday. **■ AP**

which exchanged insults with the police outside a shopping centre in the Mong Kok district.

"I'm disappointed the government still didn't respond to any of our ... demands. We continue to come out even if we don't have much hope," said Mr. Chan, who only gave his surname.

The riot police patrolled several neighbourhoods while tourists and shoppers,

shopping malls around the Chinese-ruled city, shouting popular slogans such as "Liberate Hong Kong! Revolution of our times!"

The police arrested several people in a shopping mall in the Sha Tin district after pepper-spraying them. The mall closed early.

Christmas ruined: Lam

Baton-wielding police fired tear gas on Tuesday at thousands of protesters who barricaded roads and trashed a Starbucks cafe and an HSBC branch.

The city's leader Carrie Lam said in a Facebook post on Wednesday that many Hong Kongers and tourists were disappointed that their "Christmas Eve celebrations have been ruined".

"Such illegal acts have not only dampened the festive mood but also adversely affected local businesses."

Pope Francis appeals for peace in global flashpoints

Injustice spurring migration, says 83-year-old pontiff

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis appealed for peace in many of the world's hotspots, singling out the crises in the Middle East, Venezuela and Lebanon as well as armed conflicts ravaging many African countries.

"May Christ bring his light to the many children suffering from war and conflicts in the Middle East and in various countries of the world," the 83-year-old pontiff said in his traditional Christmas message at the Vatican.

"May he bring comfort to



Powerful message: Pope Francis delivering the 'Urbi et Orbi' (To the City and the World) speech in Vatican on Wednesday. **■ AFP**

the beloved Syrian people who still see no end to the hostilities that have rent their country over the last decade," he said, urging the international community to find solutions to allow the peoples of that region to live together in peace and security." He used his "Urbi et Or-

bi" (To the City and the World) speech to call for a resolution to the crisis in Lebanon, where he hoped for a return to "harmonious coexistence".

In the Middle East, notably Iraq and Yemen, the Pope lamented that "so many people – struggling but

not discouraged – still await a time of peace, security and prosperity."

The Argentinian Pope, noting that in South America "a number of nations are experiencing a time of social and political upheaval," urged that "the beloved Venezuelan people... receive the aid they need."

Attack on Christians

Pope Francis denounced attacks on Christians in Africa and prayed for victims of conflict, natural disasters and disease in the world's poorest continent.

The pontiff urged "comfort to those who are persecuted for their religious faith, especially missionaries and members of the faithful

who have been kidnapped, and to the victims of attacks by extremist groups, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria."

He prayed for migrants undertaking a perilous and potentially deadly sea crossing to Europe to seek a better life, saying: "It is injustice that makes them cross deserts and seas that become cemeteries."

"It is injustice that forces them to ensure unspeakable forms of abuse, enslavement of every kind and torture in inhumane detention camps. It is injustice that turns them away from places where they might have hope for a dignified life, but instead find themselves before walls of indifference."

Iran clamps down on Net ahead of commemorations

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

A wave of Internet outages was imposed in Iran on Wednesday, ILNA news agency reported, a day before commemorations called for on social media for those killed in unrest last month.

The cut came on the orders of security bodies, the news agency said, citing what it called an informed source at Iran's Information and Communications Technology Ministry.

"This restriction on Internet access solely includes international traffic of mobile phone lines," the source was quoted as saying. It also ex-

cluded what the source called "internal traffic", indicating only domestic websites would be accessible.

The outages come ahead of planned commemorations for people killed in street violence that erupted last month during demonstrations against fuel price hikes. At the time, authorities imposed a week-long Internet blackout as police stations were attacked, shops looted and banks and petrol stations torched.

Officials in Iran have yet to issue an overall death toll for the unrest, but human rights group Amnesty International has put the number at more than 300.

No let up in anti-govt. protests in Iraq

Demonstrators have been demanding the ouster of the entire political class

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DIWANIYAH

Iraqi anti-government protesters again hit the streets on Wednesday, angered by an activist's death and an attempt on the life of a popular TV satirist.

The latest rallies in Baghdad and cities, including Basra and Karbala, came after a night of unrest that saw protesters torch the headquarters of two pro-Iran militias in the country's south.

The demonstrators have rallied for almost three months to demand the ouster of the entire political class that has run the oil-rich yet poverty-ridden country



Mourners carrying the coffin of a civil activist during the funeral on Wednesday.

in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion which overthrew dictator Saddam Hussein.

The mostly youthful acti-

vists accuse Iraq's leaders of enriching themselves, mismanaging the economy and being beholden to Iran, an influential actor in Iraqi politics.

'Bid to silence us'

Passions were inflamed when popular TV satirist Aws Fadhil was targeted on Tuesday by unknown assailants, with three bullets hitting his car.

Mr. Fadhil posted footage of the bullet holes on social media and declared: "They are targeting those who support the revolution, to silence them ... But we are continuing our revolution."

He added that "we have already achieved a goal", referring to a parliamentary vote on Tuesday to approve an electoral reform law, in line with the demands of the protesters. Lawmakers will from now be elected in first-past-the-post contests within electoral districts, rather than through a complex system using provincial party lists and proportional representation.

Despite the reform steps, protesters again rallied on Wednesday – including in the city of Diwaniyah, where they marched under a large Iraqi flag to mourn a prominent activist, Thaer al-Tayeb.

REUTERS
KABUL

Taliban militants have kidnapped 27 peace activists from a highway in Afghanistan's western Farah province, local officials and peace activists said on Wednesday.

Massoud Bakhtawar, the Deputy Governor of Farah, said the activists were travelling in six cars from Herat to Farah on Tuesday evening when their convoy was stopped by the Taliban on a highway and taken to an unknown location.

Bismillah Watandost, a member of the group, said the activists had planned to travel to various parts of Fa-

rah to call for peace and a ceasefire between the warring parties in Afghanistan.

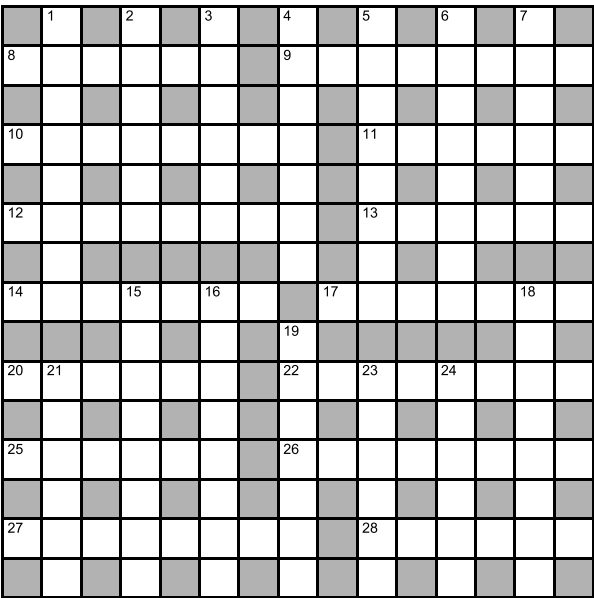
The group, People's Peace Movement, was formed to protest against violent attacks after a car bomb exploded at a sport stadium in Helmand province last year killing 17 civilians. The activists have travelled to various parts of the country, often marching through Taliban-controlled areas to demand a ceasefire between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

The Taliban has previously accused the activists of being financed by the Kabul government, which the group has denied.

27 Afghan peace activists abducted by the Taliban

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12816

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles





To play an interactive version of this crossword online, scan the QR code



- ACROSS
- 8 Bond's interest in money? (6)
- 9 Discounted off or as on-going stock (3,1,4)
- 10 Save second professor at Hogwarts? Not quite! (8)
- 11 Drop inhaler in between work-out (6)

- (set by Hypatia)
- 12 She's spoken for, we hear, in error (8)
- 13 Know how text messages contained trickery (6)
- 14 Ram's short? (7)
- 17 Charged member involved in crooked deal (7)
- 20 Stopped broadcasting after a devouring love liaison (6)
- 22 It's hard to miss terribly tedious person, per Spooner (4,4)
- 25 Several services for one burning in North America (6)
- 26 Conversely, America and France took time about female right to vote (8)
- 27 Step 1: Due training for delegate (8)
- 28 Reason parasite's found in report (6)
- DOWN
- 1 Without closure, many forfeit love – it stings! (8)
- 2 Copies cycling race (6)
- 3 Either of two articles on top of kid's jacket (6)
- 4 Nile's not connected? (3-4)
- 5 Project advertisement by a student about healthy cooking method (8)
- 6 So, came up with naughty clue about a time to kiss (8)
- 7 Kept near India Gate, helmet's tribute taken from the top soldier (6)
- 15 Gradually trim down shape (8)
- 16 Outstanding lady in Greek architecture? (8)
- 18 Stretch the tag – no length secured when pulled up (8)
- 19 As he had assumed, graduate was shy (7)
- 21 Animal raised at emergency ward perhaps, rose (6)
- 23 Once again, smelt garbage (6)
- 24 Favourite student lacking courage (6)

SUDOKU

2				3			4	
5	3				7	8		
4		1	2					
						9		
7			1	2				6
		8						
					6	3		5
		5	7				2	9
6				5				4

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12815

C	E	R	E	A	L		P	R	O	B	A	B	L	I	
A	P	O	N	C	I		U	A	E						
P	U	B	L	I	S	H		C	O	L	O	N	E	L	
T	E	M	A		E	L	I		L						
U	P	S	T	A	I	R	S		T	I	S	S	U	E	
R	E	A	C	H		S	C	A	V	E	N	G	E	R	
D	H	O	M	I	N	E	R	S		U	S	E	D		
M	R	I	V	E	R		M	I	S						
O	R	I	G	I	N		F	A	R	E	W	E	L	L	
T	S	S	R	O	T		O	A							
O	U	T	S	I	D	E		E	X	H	A	U	S	T	
R	E	O	A		N	O	A	E							
S	P	R	I	N	K	L	E								

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

6	5	7	3	1	2	4	8	9
4	2	3	9	6	8	5	7	1
1	8	9	5	4	7	6	3	2
2	4	1	6	7	5	8	9	3
5	3	6	2	8	9	1	4	7
7	9	8	4	3	1	2	5	6
3	6	5	1	9	4	7	2	8
9	7	2	8	5	6	3	1	4
8	1	4	7	2	3	9	6	5

FAITH

His auspicious qualities

As great devotees, azhwars are drawn and moved to emotional heights when contemplating the Lord's countless names that reveal His inexhaustible and auspicious qualities. There is a rich repertoire of experience of God in their hymns and that is why many are able to share and empathise with their devotional fervour, pointed out Kalyanapuram Sri Aravamudhachariar in a discourse. One common aspect of the Lord's nature is His neutrality, that is, He is equally disposed to all beings and objects in His creation. This impartiality is governed by His boundless compassion which is His outstanding trait.

He is known as "sarva bhuta suhruth," one who is always keen on bestowing the best on all beings. He alone can help all and He helps without expecting any return. So, it is accepted that as far as He is concerned, He has no enemies. Nammazhwar is quick to point out that though He has no direct enemies, He cannot brook any harm to His devotees and the good, as they are ever dear to Him. Nammazhwar waxes eloquent about the Lord's Saulabhyha and Saushilya that easily draw many devotees to Him. He alludes to the many instances when out of His Sankalpa He descends from His abode in Vaikunta and assumes various appropriate forms to protect His devotees. He takes the most unique and unheard of form of Narasimha to protect His devotee Prahlada from Hiranyakasipu's wrath.

As Krishna He comes to the rescue of those who dwelt in constant dread of Kamsa. Azhwar is overwhelmed that the Supreme Lord easily becomes one with the common folk such as the cowherds and Gopis without any reserve and affords the highest benefit of God experience to them, an attainment that is hard for even the most realised souls.