

TOP OF THE WORLD



Lisa Murkowski

IMPEACHMENT
GOP Senator
'disturbed' by
party leader's
coordination with
White House

Washington: Republican US Senator Lisa Murkowski said she was "disturbed" by the Senate leader's approach to working with White House counsel on the impeachment trial of President Donald Trump, saying there should be distance between the two. The comments by the Alaska lawmaker come after Mitch McConnell, majority leader of the Republican-led Senate, said during a Fox News interview earlier this month that he was working in "total co-ordination" with the White House on the upcoming trial.

MYANMAR

Suu Kyi party
official killed in
Rakhine state

Yangon: An official from Aung San Suu Kyi's political party was killed in Rakhine state after planning a show of support for the leader's defence of Myanmar against genocide allegations at The Hague, a spokesman said Thursday. The National League for Democracy's Ye Thein, party chairman in Buthidaung township, had been held for weeks by the Arakan Army, insurgents fighting for more autonomy for ethnic Rakhine Buddhists. The rebels said he was killed in military attacks on Christmas day but the claim could not be verified and NLD spokesman Myo Nyunt said the group bore responsibility.

BRITAIN

Top EU official
writes 'love letter'
to UK over Brexit

London: A top Brussels official has written a "love letter" to Britain expressing his grief at its decision to leave the EU, and stressing it was always welcome back. "I know you now. And I love you. For who you are and what you gave me. I'm like an old lover. I know your strengths and weaknesses," European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans wrote in Thursday's edition of The Guardian newspaper. "You have decided to leave. It breaks my heart, but I respect that decision," he added in a missive titled "My love letter to Britain: family ties can never really be severed".

CHINA

Bruce Lee's kin
sues food chain
for using his image

Shanghai: A company run by Bruce Lee's daughter is suing a Chinese fast food chain for allegedly using an image of the late martial arts film star without permission. Shannon Lee's Bruce Lee Enterprises accuses restaurant chain Kungfu Catering Management of having used her father's image for 15 years in a logo without paying intellectual property rights. The food chain responded by saying the logo had long been authorised by authorities.

SC LAST MONTH CUT DOWN 3-YR EXTENSION TO 6 MONTHS

Pak govt files review petition in Army Chief extension case

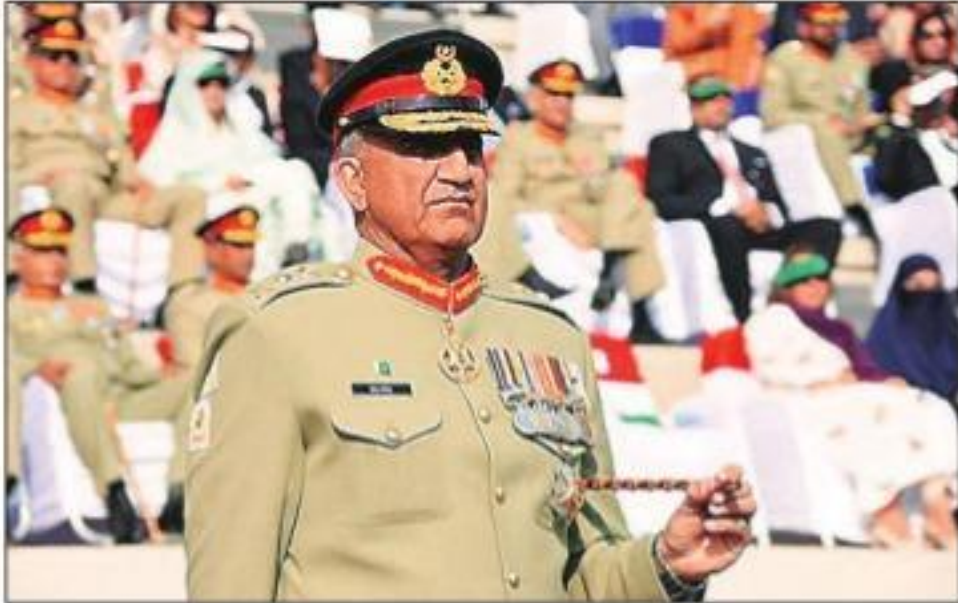
SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, DECEMBER 26

THE PAKISTAN government on Thursday filed a review petition against the Supreme Court's decision about legislation on the extension of service of Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa. A three-member apex court bench headed by then chief justice Asif Saeed Khosa on November 28 granted a six-month extension to Bajwa after being assured by the government that Parliament would pass a legislation on the extension or reappointment of the Army Chief within six months.

The ruling came in the nick of time as Gen Bajwa, 59, was set to retire at midnight on Nov 28. In the review petition filed by Attorney General Anwar Mansoor, the government has urged the apex court to form a larger Bench to hear the case and set aside the earlier judgment. It also requested the court to keep the proceedings in-camera.

Firdous Ashiq Awan, the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for Information and Broadcasting, said the review pe-



The Pakistan government was told by the top court to push through legislation for extending or reappointing General Qamar Javed Bajwa as Army Chief. Reuters

tion was filed "because our legal team thoroughly, comprehensively, and closely reviewed all aspects of the decision and concluded that there are several legal gaps in the verdict".

In its detailed judgment on December 16, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court cautioned the government that "unbridled power or position, like unstructured discretion, is dangerous".

Prime Minister Imran Khan had extended Bajwa's tenure for

another three years through a notification in August, but the Supreme Court suspended it on November 26 due to irregularities in the manner of extension.

After three days of heightened uncertainty, Chief Justice Khosa announced that Bajwa would remain the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) for another six months during which the country's Parliament would legislate on the Pakistan Army Chief's extension or reappointment. PTI

IMRAN: BAJWA TOLD
ME PAK IS PREPARED
FOR INDIA 'THREATS'

Islamabad: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan claimed on Thursday that India could carry out "an action of some sort" in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to divert attention from its domestic issues and warned that his Army was prepared for any such move.

Khan made the remarks while addressing a public gathering in Jhelum district, hours after the Army said that two of its soldiers were killed in "unprovoked firing" by the Indian troops along the Line of Control.

The Prime Minister said he had told Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa about the threats from India and the General "told me that Pakistan is prepared for them". He extended condolences to the families of the two soldiers killed on Thursday. PTI

Israeli lawmaker aims to oust Netanyahu in Likud primary

First serious challenge to PM from his party for over a decade

TIA GOLDENBERG

JERUSALEM, DECEMBER 26

ISRAEL'S GOVERNING Likud party was holding primaries on Thursday, in the first serious internal challenge to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in his more than a decade in power.

Veteran politician Gideon Saar hopes to unseat Netanyahu, arguing that he will be better placed to form a government in national elections in March after Netanyahu failed to do so twice in two repeat elections this year.

Despite the shadow of corruption indictments hanging over him, Netanyahu remains popular among Likud members and the fiercely loyal party, which has only had four leaders since its inception in the 1970s, has stood firmly behind the long-serving leader.

But Saar, who has garnered support from a handful of Likud backbenchers, could benefit from stormy weather that may keep turnout low. If he wins, he would become Likud's candidate for prime minister in the March polls.

"We are imbued with the spirit of victory," lawmaker Yoav Kisch, Saar's campaign manager, told Israeli Army Radio. "This candidacy is good for the party and I believe can also bring the



Benjamin Netanyahu with his challenger for Likud party leadership, Gideon Saar. Reuters

change and the hope for a revolution in the Likud."

Netanyahu has portrayed Saar an inexperienced, while depicting himself as a security buff and master of international diplomacy. Still, in what was seen as an embarrassment at a critical moment a day before the primary, Netanyahu was rushed off stage after a rocket was fired from Gaza, setting off an air raid siren, at a campaign rally in the southern city of Ashkelon on Wednesday.

A similar incident happened in September when Netanyahu was in the nearby city of Ashdod campaigning for the second general Israeli election of the year.

Polls close at 11 pm and results are expected Friday. REUTERS

EXPLAINED
E

Weakened by
graft charges,
electoral setbacks

THE BIGGEST challenge to Netanyahu's grip on his party since 2005 comes at a time when the Israeli PM has been politically weakened after twice being unable to put together a ruling coalition following close elections. Israel now faces an unprecedented third election in less than a year, but Netanyahu's chances have been further hit by indictments in corruption cases. Despite all this, he is still expected to win the party leadership contest. However, he has been campaigning aggressively, seeking a big win in order to consolidate his power within the party and get a big boost ahead of the general election in March. If he loses, or even comes close to losing the party leadership, that could derail his already bumpy general election campaign.

TYPHOON PHANFONE LEAVES 20 DEAD IN PHILIPPINES



In Biliran, Philippines, on Thursday after the typhoon wreaked havoc. Reuters

■ A typhoon that barreled through Philippines left at least 20 people dead and forced thousands to flee, devastating Christmas celebrations in the country, which is predominantly Catholic.

■ Typhoon Phanfone stranded many people in sea and airports at the peak of holiday travel, set off landslides, engulfed low-lying villages with floods, destroyed houses, downed trees and electrical posts and knocked out power in entire provinces.

■ One disaster response officer described the battered coastal town of Batad in Iloilo province as a "ghost town" on Christmas Day.

■ Most of the 20 deaths reported by officials were due to drowning, falling trees and accidental electrocution.

Kremlin critic's Moscow office raided, laptops confiscated



Alexei Navalny outside the office of his Anti-Corruption Foundation during the police raid. Reuters

ANDREW OSBORN &
ANASTASIA TETEREVLEVA
MOSCOW, DECEMBER 26

RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES raided the Moscow headquarters of opposition politician Alexei Navalny on Thursday, using power tools to gain entry before dragging Navalny out by force and confiscating technical equipment such as laptops. Navalny and his allies said the raid on his Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) was carried out by the Federal Bailiffs Service and was connected to his refusal to delete a video investigation which levelled graft allegations against Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and billionaire businessman Alisher Usmanov. The Federal Bailiffs Service said it was carrying out investigative activities at Navalny's foundation as part of a criminal investigation. Usmanov brought and won a defamation lawsuit against Navalny in 2017. That case ended with a court ordering Navalny to delete within 10 days all references to the allegations in his video, which Medvedev and Usmanov said were utterly false. Navalny said on Thursday he would not delete the video, which has been watched over 32 million times on YouTube since it was first posted in March 2017. REUTERS

TURKEY'S TOP COURT: BAN ON WIKIPEDIA VIOLATES FREE SPEECH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ISTANBUL, DECEMBER 26

TURKEY'S CONSTITUTIONAL Court ruled Thursday that the government's ban on access to online encyclopedia Wikipedia violated freedom of expression, the official Anadolu news agency reported.

The ban has remained in place since April 2017. Turkish officials said at the time the measure was needed as Wikipedia had failed to remove content deemed false from its pages that linked Turkey with terror groups.

But the move caused an outcry among freedom of information activists who accuse Turkey of slapping bans on websites and social media with alarming regularity. A local court is due to decide whether the ban will be lifted.

Erdogan: Turkey to send troops to Libya at Tripoli's request

ECE TOKSABAY &
ALIKUCUKGOCMEN

ANKARA, DECEMBER 26

TURKEY WILL send troops to Libya at the request of Tripoli as soon as next month, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Thursday, putting the north African country's conflict at the centre of wider regional frictions.

Libya's internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) has been fending off a months-long offensive by General Khalifa Haftar's forces in eastern Libya, which have been supported by Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

Last month, Ankara signed two separate accords with the GNA, led by Fayeze al-Serraj, one on security



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at a meeting of his ruling AK Party in Ankara on Thursday. Reuters

and military cooperation and another on maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean.

"Since there is an invitation (from Libya) right now, we will

accept it," Erdogan told members of his AK Party in a speech. "We will put the Bill on sending troops to Libya on the agenda as soon as Parliament opens." REUTERS

ROADSIDE BOMBINGS, AMBUSHES AND AIRSTRIKES

In Afghanistan, driving on the highway makes you a target

DAVID ZUCCHINO

KABUL, DECEMBER 26

AFTER SHIR Mohammad Panjshiri shovelled a final spadeful of dirt onto his brother's grave, he left the cemetery burdened with questions.

His brother, Aziz Ahmad Panjshiri, a retired college professor, had been abducted from a car in northern Afghanistan on Nov 5. He was later shot dead, his body dumped in a neighbouring

province. His grieving brother still did not know why. "What happened to my brother isn't clear," Panjshiri said after the 69-year-old professor was buried on a Kabul hillside. "We're waiting for the government to tell us."

Afghan roads are some of the most dangerous in the world, turned into killing grounds through years of bitter guerrilla warfare. Off-duty police officers and soldiers, judges, government officials, human rights workers, businessmen, prosecutors — all



have been killed on highways in Afghanistan's rugged countryside. Often, Taliban insurgents claim

Afghan roads are some of the most dangerous in the world, turned into killing grounds through years of guerrilla warfare. Reuters

responsibility for ambushing representatives of the Afghan government. But in other cases, like the

killing of Professor Panjshiri, families are left wondering whether their loved ones were killed by insurgents, thieves, kidnappers or someone else — and why.

There are so many ways to be killed simply for travelling here. Each day, Afghans are killed by suicide blasts, roadside bombs, checkpoint ambushes and airstrikes. People plan their routes carefully, sometimes seeking protection from government security forces who are not always up to the task.

Provincial roadways have strategic value. The Taliban attack travellers to demonstrate that the government cannot protect its citizens. They put up checkpoints in areas they control. Government security forces fight to keep roadways open. But they frequently hunker down on their bases, leaving long stretches of road as no man's lands where travellers risk their lives.

Because only provincial capitals are typically served by commercial airlines, local roads are the

only way for many residents to reach jobs, family members and markets. Many flights are fully booked as people opt not to drive.

Two days after Professor Panjshiri was killed, three judges and a court clerk travelling to Kabul, the capital, were shot dead by gunmen in eastern Afghanistan. A week earlier, a man who worked for a CIA-backed government strike force was shot dead in his car in southern Afghanistan in front of his three-year-old daughter, who survived. NYT