

TOP OF THE WORLD



The Coast Guard launched a search after the helicopter was declared missing

USA

6 killed in Hawaii tour helicopter crash, 1 missing

**Honolulu:** The search for the final person missing after a Hawaii tour helicopter crash killed six is expected to resume Saturday depending on weather, officials said. There are no indications that anybody survived the crash, authorities said Friday night after the remains of six of the people on board were found. Authorities have not named those on board and said families are being notified. The helicopter was set to tour the rugged and remote Kauai's Na Pali Coast. The plane crashed at the top of a mountain on the island of Kauai, authorities said.

DR CONGO

Ferry blaze: 20 bodies recovered from river

**Tshikapa:** Twenty bodies have been recovered from a river in the Democratic Republic of Congo after a ferry blaze, local officials said Saturday. The boat, which was transporting dozens of passengers as well as goods, caught fire overnight Monday in Tshimbinda, a village near Tshikapa, the capital of the central province of Kasai. A report by a naval force in charge of waterway security in the DRC said a member of the crew lit a cigarette just as his comrades were filling up the boat with fuel.

THAILAND

Navy SEAL dies due to yearlong infection after cave rescue

**Bangkok:** A Thai Navy SEAL who aided with the rescue of a youth football team trapped in a flooded cave last year has died from an infection he contracted during the dramatic recovery mission. Petty Officer Beirut Pakbara fell ill with a blood infection while working to retrieve the 12 young boys and their coach, the Thai Navy said in a statement posted late Friday on their Facebook page. After the 18-day ordeal came to an end last June — with the entire team emerging safely from the cave — he was under close supervision by doctors during his yearlong illness.

# At least 90 people killed in Mogadishu checkpoint blast

Dozens more injured after bomb-laden vehicle explodes in Somalia's capital

ABDISHEIKH

MOGADISHU, DECEMBER 28

AT LEAST 90 people were killed and dozens were wounded when a bomb-laden vehicle exploded at a bustling checkpoint in the Somali capital Mogadishu on Saturday, an international organisation working in the country said, in one of the most deadly recent attacks.

The dead included many students and two Turkish nationals, the Somali foreign minister said. Rescuers carried bodies past the twisted wreckage of a vehicle and a minibus taxi smeared with blood.

A report by the international organisation, which did not want to be named, said the death toll was more than 90. A Somali MP also tweeted that he had been told the death toll stands at more than 90, including 17 police officers.

Abdikadir Abdirahman Haji Aden, founder of Aamin ambu-



At the scene of the bomb blast in Mogadishu on Saturday. Reuters

lances, told Reuters that dozens of people were also wounded.

No-one immediately claimed responsibility for the blast.

Al Qaeda-linked Islamist group al Shabaab regularly carries out such attacks in an attempt to

undermine the government, which is backed by the United Nations and African Union troops.

The most deadly attack blamed on the group was in October 2017 when a bomb-laden truck exploded next to a

fuel tanker in Mogadishu, creating a storm of fire that killed nearly 600 people.

While al Shabaab carries out frequent attacks, the death tolls are often lower than in Saturday's blast. **REUTERS**

EXPLAINED

Adding to concern as AU, US troops set to pull back

THOUGH NO group claimed responsibility for the attack, suspicion has fallen on al Shabaab, which controls parts of Somalia. An African Union (AU) offensive had driven Shabaab out of Mogadishu, but it still frequently carries out bomb blasts in the Somali capital. The AU also has a number of Special Operations forces in Somalia to fight Shabaab. However, the AU has begun pulling troops from Somalia, raising concern that Shabaab could take advantage. Adding to the worry are recent reports that the US is planning on significantly downsizing its operations in Africa.

## Navy SEAL cleared by Trump called 'evil' by comrades

DAVE PHILIPPS

DECEMBER 28

THE US NAVY SEALs showed up one by one, wearing hoodies and T-shirts instead of uniforms, to tell investigators what they had seen. Visibly nervous, they shifted in their chairs, rubbed their palms and pressed their fists against their foreheads. At times they stopped in mid-sentence and broke into tears.

"Sorry about this," Special Operator 1st Class Craig Miller, one of the most experienced SEALs in the group, said as he looked sideways toward a blank wall, trying to hide that he was weeping. "It's the first time — I'm really broken up about this."

Video recordings of the interviews obtained by *The New York Times*, which have not been shown publicly before, were part of a trove of Navy investigative materials about the prosecution of Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher on war crimes charges, including murder.

They offer the first opportunity outside the courtroom to hear directly from the men of Alpha platoon, SEAL Team 7, whose blistering testimony about their platoon chief was dismissed by President Donald Trump when he upended the military code of justice to protect Gallagher from punishment.

"The guy is freaking evil," Miller told investigators.

"The guy was toxic," Special Operator 1st Class Joshua Vriens, a sniper, said in a separate interview.

"You could tell he was perfectly OK with killing anybody that was moving," Special Operator 1st Class Corey Scott, a medic in the platoon, told the investigators.

Such dire descriptions of Gallagher, who had eight com-



Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher was investigated for alleged war crimes. *NYT*

bat deployments and sometimes went by the nickname Blade, are in marked contrast to Trump's portrayal of him at a recent political rally in Florida as one of "our great fighters."

Although combat in Iraq barely fazed the SEALs, sitting down to tell Naval Criminal Investigative Service agents about what they had seen their platoon chief do during a 2017 deployment in Iraq was excruciating for them. Not only did they have to relive wrenching events and describe grisly scenes, they had to break a powerful unwritten code of silence in the SEALs, one of the nation's most elite commando forces.

The trove of materials also includes thousands of text messages the SEALs sent one another about the events and the prosecution of Gallagher. Together with the dozens of hours of recorded interviews, they provide revealing insights into the men of the platoon, who have never spoken publicly about the case and the leader they turned in. **NYT**

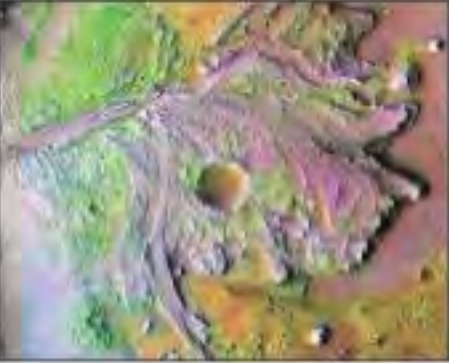
## NASA's Mars 2020 rover to hunt fossils, scout for manned missions

ROLLO ROSS

PASADENA, DECEMBER 28

A NASA robotic rover is nearing completion ahead of a journey next year to search for evidence of past life on Mars and lay the groundwork for the space agency's mission to send humans into deep space.

The US space agency on Friday showed off its Mars 2020 rover, whose official name will be chosen early next year. NASA will in February ship the rover to Florida's Kennedy Space Centre where its three sections will be fully assembled. A July launch will send the rover to a dry lake bed on Mars that is bigger than the island of Manhattan.



The Jezero Crater on Mars, identified as a potential landing site for the Mars 2020 Rover. Reuters

The four-wheeled, car-sized rover will scour the base of Mars' Jezero Crater, an 820-foot-deep crater thought to have been a lake, once the craft lands in February 2021. The crater is believed to have

## Hundreds of accused clergy left off Church's sex abuse lists

CLAUDIA LAUER & MEGHAN HOYER

DECEMBER 28

RICHARD J Poster served time for possessing child pornography, violated his probation by having contact with children, admitted masturbating in the bushes near a church school and in 2005 was put on a sex offender registry. And yet the former Catholic priest was only just this month added to a list of clergy members credibly ac-

cused of child sexual abuse — after *The Associated Press* asked why he was not included.

Victims advocates had long criticised the Roman Catholic Church for not making public the names of credibly accused priests. Now, despite the dioceses' release of nearly 5,300 names, most in the last two years, critics say the lists are far from complete.

An AP analysis found more than 900 clergy members accused of child sexual abuse who were missing from lists released



Richard J Poster had served time for possessing child pornography. AP

by the dioceses and religious orders where they served.

## 2 dead, many shot at in music video 'ambush'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON, DECEMBER 28

TWO PEOPLE were shot and killed and multiple others were wounded when a group filming a music video was "ambushed" near Houston, Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said.

After holding a media briefing

in which he said two people were killed and four wounded, Gonzalez in a tweet revised the total number of gunshot victims in the Friday night shooting to eight.

It's unclear whether that total includes the deceased. He said some of the wounded were being treated for "very serious injuries." The sheriff said authorities received a call about a drive-by

shooting around 9:30 pm.

Officers responded to what Gonzalez characterised as a residential area, where a group of males had been filming a music video in an office parking lot. The shooting scene stretched several block, the sheriff said, and it wasn't clear what led to the shooting.

"There were other vehicles that were staged there and we believe

## Hong Kong protesters demand mainland Chinese traders leave



At a protest inside a mall in Hong Kong Saturday. Reuters

ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONG KONG, DECEMBER 28

PROTESTERS SHOUTING "Liberate Hong Kong!" marched through a shopping mall Saturday to demand that mainland Chinese traders leave the territory in a fresh weekend of anti-government tension.

The protest in Sheung Shui, near Hong Kong's boundary with the mainland, was part of efforts to pressure the government by disrupting economic activity.

Protests that began in June over a proposed China extradition law have spread to include demands for more democracy

and other grievances.

Protesters at the Sheung Shui mall shouted, "Liberate Hong Kong! Revolution of our time!" and "Return to the mainland!" There were no immediate signs of violence. Some merchants wrapped orange tape around kiosks or partially closed security doors on shops but business went ahead normally.

Hong Kong is a popular destination for mainland Chinese traders who buy goods in the territory, which has no sales tax and a reputation for genuine products, to resell on the mainland.

Sheung Shui was the site of clashes between police and demonstrators in June.

## Court returns Musharraf's plea against conviction due to winter vacations

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, DECEMBER 28

THE LAHORE High Court has returned Pakistan's former military ruler Gen (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf's application challenging the death sentence handed to him by a special court in a high treason case, citing non-availability of the full bench due to winter vacations.

The registrar office of the Lahore High Court (LHC) returned Musharraf's application, which named the federal government and others as respondents, filed through his lawyer Azhar Siddique on Friday.

The 86 page-long petition

sought constitution of a full bench of the court to quash the verdict of the three-member tribunal which sentenced the 76-year-old Musharraf to death in absentia for high treason following a six-year legal case on December 17.

The registrar of the court returned the application on Friday with observation that the full bench was not available due to winter vacations, *Dawn* reported.

A three-member bench constituted by the LHC is set to hear on January 9 Musharraf's main application through which he has challenged all actions against him starting from complaint of high treason to establishment of the special trial court and its proceedings. **PTI**

child pornography. On top of that, the AP found another nearly 400 priests and clergy members who were accused of abuse while serving in dioceses that have not yet released any names.

Church officials say that absent an admission of guilt, they have to weigh releasing a name against harming the reputation of priests who may have been falsely accused. By naming accused priests, they note, they also open themselves to lawsuits from those who maintain their innocence. **AP**

## Indian among 6 killed in Egypt bus accident

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CAIRO, DECEMBER 28

A ROAD crash in Egypt killed six people, including tourists from India and Malaysia, and injured at least 24 others Saturday, security and medical sources said.

The accident occurred when two buses carrying tourists crashed into a truck east of Cairo on the road to the Ain Sokhna resort on the Red Sea, a security official said.

A medical source said two female Malaysian tourists and an Indian man were killed along with three Egyptians — one bus driver, a tour guide and a security guard.

At least 24 others were injured, several of them tourists and some left in serious condition, a medical source said without giving further details.

Traffic accidents are common in Egypt where many roads are poorly maintained and regulations are laxly enforced.

But efforts by authorities to crack down on traffic violations, including speeding, appear to have borne fruit in recent years, with official figures showing a decline in road deaths.

### CHINA HAS SEPARATED NEARLY HALF A MILLION CHILDREN FROM THEIR FAMILIES IN XINJIANG

## 'Block impact of religion': China sends Muslim children to boarding schools

AMY QIN

HOTAN, DECEMBER 28

THE FIRST grader was a good student and beloved by her classmates, but she was inconsolable, and it was no mystery to her teacher why.

"The most heartbreaking thing is that the girl is often slumped over on the table alone and crying," he wrote on his blog. "When I asked around, I learned that it was because she missed her mother."

The mother, he noted, had been sent to a detention camp for Muslim ethnic minorities. The girl's father had passed

away, he added. But instead of letting other relatives raise her, the authorities put her in a state-run boarding school — one of hundreds of such facilities that have opened in China's far western Xinjiang region.

As many as a million ethnic Uighurs, Kazakhs and others have been sent to internment camps and prisons in Xinjiang over the past three years, an indiscriminate clampdown aimed at weakening the population's devotion to Islam. Even as these mass detentions have provoked global outrage, though, the Chinese government is pressing ahead with a parallel effort tar-



Sending children in Xinjiang to boarding schools has been presented by authorities as a way to fight poverty. Reuters

getting the region's children. Nearly a half million children

have been separated from their families and placed in boarding

schools so far, according to a planning document published on a government website, and the ruling Communist Party has set a goal of operating one to two such schools in each of Xinjiang's 800-plus townships by the end of next year.

The party has presented the schools as a way to fight poverty, arguing that they make it easier for children to attend classes if their parents live or work in remote areas or are unable to care for them. And it is true that many rural families are eager to send their children to these schools, especially when they are older.

But the schools are also de-

signed to assimilate and indoctrinate children at an early age, away from the influence of their families, according to the planning document, published in 2017. Students are often forced to enroll because the authorities have detained their parents and other relatives, ordered them to take jobs far from home or judged them unfit guardians.

The schools are off limits to outsiders and tightly guarded, and it is difficult to interview residents in Xinjiang without putting them at risk of arrest. But a troubling picture of these institutions emerges from interviews with Uighur parents living in exile and a review of

documents published online, including procurement records, government notices, state media reports and the blogs of teachers in the schools.

Thrust into a regimented environment and immersed in an unfamiliar culture, children in the boarding schools are only allowed visits with family once every week or two — a restriction intended to "break the impact of the religious atmosphere on children at home," in the words of the 2017 policy document. State media describe education as a key component of President Xi Jinping's campaign to wipe out extremist violence in Xinjiang. **NYT**