



Cyclone Sarai batters Fiji, two killed
WELLINGTON
Tropical Cyclone Sarai was moving slowly away from Fiji on Sunday, leaving two people dead and more than 2,500 needing emergency shelter. The cyclone damaged houses, crops and trees, cut power and forced the cancellation of several flights, stranding holidaymakers visiting the island nation, which is a major tourist draw. AFP

50 dead as cold wave grips Bangladesh
DHAKA
At least 50 people have died in Bangladesh as cold weather continues to sweep across the country, officials said. The country's lowest temperature this year was recorded at 4.5° C early on Sunday in Tetulia, a border town in Bangladesh's north, the weather office said. The weather office said the cold snap, accompanied by chilly winds and dense fog, was likely to continue for few more days. REUTERS

U.S. forces hit Iraqi Hezbollah bases
WASHINGTON
The U.S. has bombed the headquarters of the Iran-backed Iraqi Hezbollah militant group in Iraq and Syria, the Pentagon said on Sunday, following a rocket attack in Iraq that killed an American civilian contractor. "In response to repeated Kata'ib Hizbollah (KH) attacks on Iraqi bases that host Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) coalition forces, U.S. forces conducted precision defensive strikes against five KH facilities in Iraq and Syria that will degrade KH's ability to conduct future attacks against OIR coalition forces," a Pentagon spokesman said in a statement. AFP

Taliban council agrees to ceasefire in Afghanistan

ASSOCIATED PRESS KABUL
The Taliban said on Sunday it has agreed to a temporary ceasefire. It provides a window during which a peace agreement with the U.S. could be signed. A peace deal would allow Washington to bring home its troops from Afghanistan and end its 18-year military engagement there. The U.S. wants any deal to include a promise from the Taliban that Afghanistan would not used as a base by terrorist groups.

Intra-Afghan talks
The Taliban chief must approve the agreement but that is expected. The duration of the ceasefire was not specified but it is being sug-

gested it would last for 10 days. Members of the Taliban negotiating team met for a week with the ruling council before they agreed on the ceasefire. The team returned on Sunday to Qatar, where they maintain their political office. Officials familiar with the negotiations spoke on condition of anonymity. A key pillar of the agreement, which the U.S. and the Taliban have been hammering out for more than a year, is direct negotiations between Afghans on both sides of the conflict. Those intra-Afghan negotiations are expected to be held within two weeks of the signing of a U.S.-Taliban peace deal.

Five people stabbed at New York rabbi's home in 'terrorist' attack

The incident happened during celebrations for the Jewish festival of Hanukkah

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MONSEY
An intruder stabbed and wounded five people at a rabbi's house in a New York suburb late on Saturday, in an incident the State Governor said was "an act of terrorism" after a spate of attacks on Jewish targets. Local media reported that a man with a machete entered the rabbi's property in Monsey, Rockland County, during celebrations for the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, knifing several people before fleeing.

Victims were rushed to nearby hospitals, with no official details on their injuries. The police said a suspect was later arrested. "This is an act of terrorism. I think these are domestic terrorists. They are trying to inflict fear," New York Governor Andrew Cuomo told reporters at the scene on Sunday. "They're motivated by hate. They are doing mass attacks. These are ter-



Difficult times: A Jewish man walking near the area where five people were stabbed in Monsey on Saturday. •REUTERS

rors in our country perpetrating terrorism on other Americans, and that's how we should treat it." Last year, a white supremacist walked into a Pittsburgh synagogue and killed 11 people – the deadliest attack against the Jewish community in the United States. Earlier this month, six people, including two suspects, were killed in a Jersey City shooting at a kosher deli, which authorities said was fuelled in part by anti-Semitism. A report in April from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) stated that the number of anti-Semitic attacks in 2018 was close to the record of 2017, with 1,879 incidents. "I was praying for my life," said witness Aron Kohn, 65, comparing the knife used by the attacker to "the size of a broomstick." Mr. Kohn threw chairs and tables in an attempt to head off the assault. "I saw him stabbing people," he added. "He injured a guy, he was bleeding in his hand, all ov-

er." Mr. Kohn said the attacker tried to enter the adjacent synagogue, but it was locked. Yossi Gestetner, of the Orthodox Jewish Public Affairs Council (OJPAC), told *The New York Times* that one of the victims was a son of the rabbi. "The house had many dozens of people in there," Mr. Gestetner said. "It was a Hanukkah celebration."

Israel condemns attack
Rockland has the largest Jewish population per capita of any U.S. county, with 31.4%, or 90,000 Jewish residents. In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the country "strongly condemns the recent displays of antisemitism including the vicious attack at the home of a rabbi in Monsey, New York." "We will cooperate however possible with the local authorities in order to assist in defeating this phenomenon," Mr. Netanyahu said.

Turkey evacuates victims of Somalia bomb blast

Military plane lands with doctors, medicine in Mogadishu

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MOGADISHU
A Turkish military plane on Sunday evacuated 16 gravely wounded victims of a devastating bombing that killed 79 people and overwhelmed local health services, in the latest attack on a city dogged by insecurity. The aircraft also brought doctors to help treat the some 125 people injured in Saturday's blast, which happened when a vehicle packed with explosives detonated at a busy security checkpoint.

"The rescue mission continues since yesterday when the blast occurred and after long and diligent efforts, we have managed to evacuate 16 of the wounded people to Turkey for further medical treatment," Mogadishu Mayor Omar Mohamed Mohamud told reporters at the airport. No group has claimed the bloody attack, however President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo has blamed Isla-



Seeking aid: A couple carrying their wounded child to be airlifted to Turkey for treatment on Sunday. •AP

mist group Al-Shabaab, which regularly carries out car bombings and other attacks on the capital, in their decade-long bid to topple the internationally-backed government. Saturday's bombing was the deadliest since truck exploded in 2017 near a fuel tanker, creating a fireball that killed over 500 people. "There are still rescue operations going on to assist those who have been massacred by the terrorists while going about their busi-

ness," Somalia's Information Minister Mohamed Abdi Heyr said. "We have received this morning doctors and medicine sent by the Turkish government and we are working to separate people seriously wounded from others in order to send them outside the country and the rest will be treated by the doctors," he added. The Minister said about 24 doctors specialising in trauma had arrived from Turkey – a key ally of Somalia.

3 Indians die in Egypt accident

13 injured after two buses carrying tourists crashed into a truck

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA CAIRO
Three Indians were killed and 13 others injured when two buses carrying tourists crashed into a truck in Egypt's Suez governorate, the Indian Embassy here said on Sunday. The buses were heading to the beach-resort town of Hurghada on Saturday when they collided with the truck near Ain Sokhna town, about 120 km east of Cairo. "We regret to inform that



Paramedics transporting a victim upon arrival at Suez General Hospital. •AFP

3 Indian citizens have lost their lives in the bus accident that occurred on 28 December near Ain Sokhna.

Others who are injured are receiving medical treatment at various hospitals in Egypt," the Indian Embassy in Egypt tweeted, adding that relatives of the victims had been informed. The Embassy said there were 16 Indian tourists on the buses. According to the local media, the deceased also include two Malaysians and three Egyptians. More than 20 people were injured and rushed to the hospital.

Blast hits military parade in Yemen

Six dead, several injured; Houthi rebels blamed

REUTERS DUBAI
A missile fired by the Iran-aligned Houthi group struck a military parade in Yemen's town of al-Dhalea, killing at least six people and injuring others, government-allied southern separatist forces who control the area said on Sunday. No claim of responsibility was made and Houthi media



People gathering at the scene of a blast in al-Dhalea, Yemen. •REUTERS

did not immediately comment on the blast or accusation. The missile struck a pa-

rade ground where a military graduation for Security Belt forces had just finished, statements from the Security Belt group and the al-Dhalea southern separatist forces said. The Security Belt forces are part of a government-aligned southern separatist front in south Yemen which favours the creation of an independent state. They are also backed by the United Arab Emirates in a fight against Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi group. Witnesses said the blast occurred near a guest plat-

form during the parade, causing injuries and deaths. They reported seeing bodies at the scene. Pictures from the scene showed a blast hole in the concrete floor of an outdoor square. Six people died and between 15 and 25 were injured, according to local health authority figures quoted by the local forces' spokesman. Yemen has suffered from almost five years of conflict since the Houthi movement ousted President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's government in late 2014.

Putin thanks Trump for intel on attacks

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MOSCOW
Russia's President Vladimir Putin on Sunday thanked U.S. counterpart Donald Trump for intelligence that helped foil attacks on Russian soil, the Kremlin said. Mr. Putin thanked Mr. Trump "for the transfer, through special services, of information allowing the prevention of terrorist acts," the President's office said in a statement. Russia's FSB, a successor to the KGB, quoted by Russian agencies, said two citizens were arrested for planning an attack in St Petersburg during the New Year festivities. They appeared to have been preparing a "terrorist act".

Ukraine rivals exchange 200 prisoners in controversial swap

It was initiated by Russian and Ukrainian leaders

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE CHECKPOINT MAYORSKE
Ukraine and Russia-backed separatists in the country's war-torn east exchanged 200 prisoners on Sunday, swapping detained fighters for civilians and servicemen held captive in some cases for years in two breakaway regions. Kiev handed over to separatists five riot policemen suspected of killing protesters during a pro-Western uprising in 2014 as part of the swap, sparking public outrage. "The mutual release of the detainees has



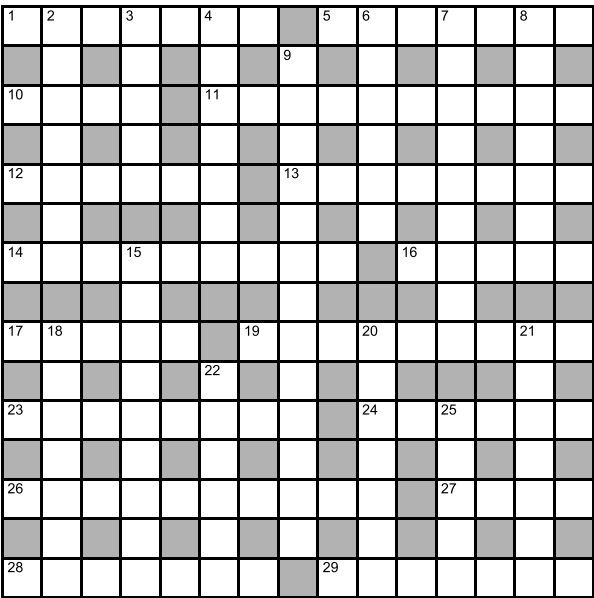
An Ukrainian prisoner being embraced by his mother after his release. •AFP

ended," the Ukrainian presidential office said in a statement on Facebook, adding that it would provide more details later. The presidency said Kiev received 76 captives, while separatist officials said the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics took in a total of 124.

The head of the Lugansk stronghold, Leonid Pasechnik, congratulated his people on a new "victory" ahead of the New Year's festivities. **De-escalating tensions** The exchange came after Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky held their first face-to-face talks in Paris on December 9 and agreed measures to de-escalate Europe's only active war. The swap, which was overseen by monitors from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, came three months after Ukraine carried out an exchange with Russia of 35 prisoners each.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12819

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



ACROSS

- 1 Swimming sea coral – not a fish (7)
- 5 Rock diva catches girls starting to elope (7)
- 10 Goan articles, essentially about greeting (4)
- 11 Fever, returning last month after leaving South Africa is controlled (10)

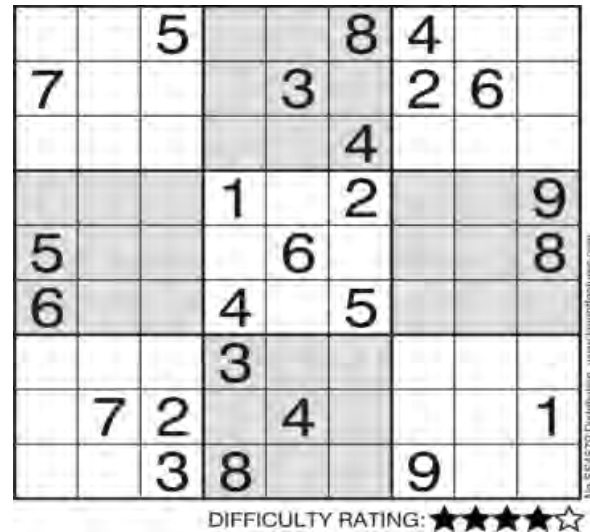
- 12 A priest – he's in trouble once again (6)
- 13 French tree is trimmed and shaped for cutting board (8)
- 14 Cool fellow returning for love at Virginia is New York's pro (2,5,2)
- 16 A pretty grave (5)
- 17 I seal ground passage (5)
- 19 See leaders of Glasgow accepting royal invitation to host marriage function (9)
- 23 Paying respects to newly anointed sultan, I start to genuflect (8)
- 24 Santa's close to the rider (6)
- 26 Warehouse with gold stocks is recovered by Dollar Bank's customers (10)
- 27 Stone – cut all round, polished and luminescent, originally (4)
- 28 Wives, on vacation, getting nervy about monsters (7)
- 29 Senile foggy Haroldson stripped at one party after another (3,4)

DOWN

- 2 Avtaar ditches son's snack filled with essence of wheat starch (7)

- (set by Avtaar)
- 3 Gas measurement unit (5)
- 4 "Hoot" is a high sound from a hooter (7)
- 6 Nomadic outsiders went around like this with sis (6)
- 7 Half-cooked gnocchi decays in absence of hard bacteriae (9)
- 8 Vote guys for Conservative party (7)
- 9 A dietician's advise to an anorexic, possibly, is useless (1,3,3,2,4)
- 15 Ninety nine out of hundred and two students end, say, in first class (3,3,3)
- 18 Ludicrously, Stokes is dismissed in a nonsensical manner (7)
- 20 Bill getting extremely casual about America's charge (7)
- 21 Married male employee having drive (7)
- 22 Attendant's touching underskirt (6)
- 25 Upcoming star gets over bypass (5)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12818								
U	P	T	O	N	E	R	H	E
A	O	D	A	R	I	I		
E	N	D	O	E	N	D	E	R
D	S	A	I	D	L	E		
E	A	S	T	E	R	S	U	N
C	E		S	E				
C	A	M	P	U	S		R	U
R								
B	A	I	H	O	N	E	S	T
T	E	N	I	S	T			
T	K	T	R	L	L			
B	A	S	E	M	E	N	T	
R	R							

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

FAITH

Subtleties of devotional life

Suka confesses that though he is a Brahma Nishta sage steeped in meditation of the Nirguna Brahman, he finds much joy and delight in singing the praises of the Lord's excellences. This statement is made when Parikshit asks him the way to salvation. Quoting the Upanishad thought about what is really worthwhile, Suka says that each one has to know about the All-pervading and Omnipotent Lord, and to this end one has to hear His glories expounded, and then remember Him always, pointed out Sri R. Krishnamurthy Sasstrigal in a discourse. The Bhagavata Purana is capstone of leading people out of samsara by fostering devotion true and simple, regardless of whether they have opted for the spiritual path of renunciation, Nivritti, or the path of a householder, Pravritti. There is a story about how the Lord wishes to enlighten Narada on the true devotion practised by even those in Pravritti. The Lord speaks highly of the devotion of a farmer in a village. Noticing that Narada feels disappointed that the Lord has not credited him as an ideal devotee, the Lord entrusts him with a simple task, to carry a bowl filled with oil around the world without spilling even a drop of it. Narada leaves with the oil bowl and proudly comes back to the Lord after carefully finishing the assignment. The Lord is pleased and as He takes back the bowl, asks Narada about the number of times he chanted His name when he was on the errand. Narada admits to the Lord that he had forgotten to chant the Lord's name during his trip as he had to focus on not spilling the oil. After all, he was only doing the work allotted by God, argues Narada. The Lord points out that the farmer too does the work ordained for him, and in the midst of it takes care to remember Him.

