

TOP OF THE WORLD



Perviz Musharraf

PAKISTAN SC to only hear Musharraf plea 'after surrender'

Islamabad: Pakistan's Supreme Court has returned the petition of self-exiled former dictator Perviz Musharraf against his conviction and sentencing by a special tribunal with objection that he is not allowed to appeal without surrendering to the law, according to a media report. On Thursday, 74-year-old retired general, now based in Dubai, approached the court to challenge the ruling of the special tribunal that had handed him death sentence on charges of high treason. Barrister Salman Safdar, counsel for Musharraf, submitted the petition in the top court.

SRI LANKA Ban on drones after Easter attacks lifted

Colombo: Sri Lankan authorities have lifted a ban on drones imposed after the Easter Sunday attacks that left 263 people dead in the Indian Ocean island nation. The lifting of the ban comes amid a growing demand for flying drones from media institutions, foreigners, wedding videographers and photographers and commercial advertising companies. However, drone operations will continue to be restricted in dangerous and restricted flying zones. All civil operators will be required to obtain approval from Defense Ministry to fly drones, the ministry said.

USA White extremist trio arrested for anti-govt plot

Washington: Three alleged members of a US white supremacist group were arrested on charges of plotting to overthrow the government and conspiracy to murder two anti-fascist activists. Police said the trio were members of The Base, which US prosecutors have described as a network of white nationalists who discuss "committing acts of violence against minority communities." "The group was involved in recruiting new members online, meeting to discuss strategy and practicing in paramilitary training camps", Floyd County police said.

IRAQ Two killed in violence during protests

Baghdad: Two protesters were killed and over a dozen wounded in central Baghdad on Friday in renewed violence between anti-government demonstrators and Iraqi security forces, activists and officials said. Riot police fired tear gas and hurled sound bombs to disperse crowds on the strategic Sinak Bridge after protesters attempted to breach cement barriers previously erected by security forces, causing the casualties, activists and medical and security officials said. Two protesters were killed and at least 20 wounded, three activists and a security official said.

FINAL DAY OF XI'S TWO-DAY VISIT

Myanmar, China ink deals to speed up BRI as Xi courts isolated Suu Kyi

AGENCIES NAYPIDAW, JANUARY 18

CHINA AND Myanmar inked dozens of deals on Saturday to speed up infrastructure projects in the Southeast Asian nation, as Beijing seeks to cement its hold over a neighbour increasingly isolated by the West. Xi and Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi signed 33 agreements shoring up key projects that are part of the flagship Belt and Road Initiative, China's vision of new trade routes described as a "21st century silk road". They agreed to hasten implementation of the China Myanmar Economic Corridor, a giant infrastructure scheme worth billions of dollars, with agreements on railways linking southwestern China to the Indian Ocean, a deep sea-port in conflict-riven Rakhine state, a special economic zone on the border, and a new city project in the commercial capital of Yangon. They did not address a controversial \$3.6 billion Beijing-backed mega dam, where work has been stalled since 2011. Holding talks with Xi on the final day of his two-day visit, Suu Kyi slammed the western countries for criticising Myanmar

over the handling of the Rohingya issue. Some countries intend to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries with such excuses as human rights, ethnicities and religions, and Myanmar will never accept such interference, she said. Suu Kyi said Myanmar hoped China would continue to maintain justice for middle and small countries including Myanmar, state-run *China Daily* reported. The silence of Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace prize winner, over the Rohingya crisis has come under intense global criticism. The International Court of Justice, where Gambia has filed a case of genocide against Myanmar, on Wednesday said it will deliver its decision next week on whether emergency measures should be imposed on Myanmar. Xi, in his remarks, said China was a trustworthy friend of Myanmar and always respected the development paths of other countries by upholding the principle of non-interference in other countries' affairs. China will continue to maintain justice for Myanmar on the international stage, and it supports Myanmar in safeguarding its national sovereignty and legitimate interests, the *Daily* report quoted Xi as saying.



FROM LEFT: Chinese President Xi Jinping, Myanmar President Win Myint and Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw. Reuters



EXPLAINED E. Needed ally, but distrust remains

AT A time when many global powers have condemned and isolated Myanmar for its treatment of Rohingyas, it has become closer to China, which could act as a valuable ally. This is in contrast to the past, especially prior to 2017, when their ties were far less cordial. Many in Myanmar continue to be distrustful of the influence Beijing could wield in their country via investments and projects. Xi's visit is likely to act as an icebreaker, though it may take time before the two nations announce any potentially contentious projects.

PHILIPPINES: SHROUDED IN ASH



Police and military personnel walk along a road covered in volcanic ash at a village beside the Taal volcano on Saturday. AP

- Decimated fish, scarred coffee plants and vanished tourists: the Taal volcano eruption in the Philippines has inflicted significant damage on the livelihoods of tens of thousands.
- The agriculture agency said Friday it estimates so far the volcano caused about \$59 million in damage to the industry, which is just about four per cent of what the region produced in 2017.
- The volcanic ash is being mixed with plastic waste to make bricks in an inventive response to the persistent problems of pollution and natural disasters.

PTI

China reports 4 more cases of mystery virus

ASSOCIATED PRESS BEIJING, JANUARY 18

FOUR MORE cases have been identified in a viral pneumonia outbreak in the central Chinese city of Wuhan that has killed two people and prompted countries as far away as the United States to take precautionary measures. The latest cases bring to 45 the number of people who have contracted the illness, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission said Saturday. Five are in serious condition, two died and 15 have been discharged. The others are in stable condition. The cause of the pneumonia has been traced to a new type of coronavirus. Health authorities are keen to avoid a repeat of SARS, or severe acute respiratory

syndrome, another coronavirus that started in southern China in late 2002 and spread to more than two dozen countries, killing nearly 800 people. The US announced Friday it would begin screening passengers at three major airports arriving on flights from Wuhan. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it would deploy 100 people to take the temperatures and ask about symptoms of incoming passengers at the Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York City's Kennedy airports. At least a half-dozen countries in Asia have started screening incoming airline passengers from central China. The list includes Thailand and Japan, which have together reported three cases of the disease in people who had come from Wuhan.

AMID TRUMP IMPEACHMENT PROCEEDINGS

Pompeo breaks silence on 'threat' to envoy in Ukraine, Democrats release more evidence

AGENCIES WASHINGTON, JANUARY 18

SECRETARY OF State Mike Pompeo on Friday broke nearly 72 hours of silence over alleged surveillance and threats to the former US ambassador to Ukraine, saying he believed the allegations would prove to be wrong but that he had an obligation to evaluate and investigate the matter. In interviews with conservative radio hosts, Pompeo said he had no knowledge of the allegations until earlier this week when Democrats released documents from an associate of President Donald Trump's personal attorney suggesting that Marie



I suspect that much of what's been reported will ultimately prove wrong, but our obligation, my obligation as secretary of state, is to make sure that we evaluate, investigate. — MIKE POMPEO

Yovanovitch was being watched. Pompeo, who was traveling in California when the documents were released, had been harshly criticized by lawmakers and current and former diplomats for not addressing the matter. "We will do everything we need to do to evaluate whether there was something that took place there," he said in a radio interview with Tony Katz, an Indianapolis-based broadcaster. More evidence released Meanwhile, House Democrats released another round of information on Friday that raised questions about elements of the impeachment inquiry, including allegations

about the surveillance of Yovanovitch and efforts by an aide to a top congressional Republican to pursue investigations sought by President Trump. The information came from the electronic devices of Lev Parnas, the businessman who worked with the president's personal lawyer Rudolph W Giuliani to pursue the pressure campaign on Ukraine. Parnas, who is facing federal campaign finance charges in Manhattan, has publicly turned on Trump and his allies. House Democrats have been releasing the contents of Parnas's devices over the past week in an effort to bolster their demand that witnesses be permitted to testify in the Senate trial.

'THESE PINES OUTLIVED THE DINOSAURS... WE HAD TO DO EVERYTHING WE COULD TO SAVE THEM'

In Australia, firefighters save world's only 'dinosaur trees'

ASSOCIATED PRESS CANBERRA, JANUARY 18

SPECIALIST FIREFIGHTERS have saved the world's last remaining wild stand of a prehistoric tree from wildfires that razed forests west of Sydney, officials have said. Firefighters winched from helicopters to reach the cluster of fewer than 200 Wollemi Pines in a remote gorge in the Blue Mountains a week before a massive wildfire bore down. National Parks and Wildlife Service Director David Crust said.

The firefighters set up an irrigation system to keep the so-called dinosaur trees moist and pumped water daily from the gorge as the blaze that had burned out of control for more than two month edged closer. Firefighting planes strategically bombed the fire front with fire retardant to slow its progress. "That helped just to slow the intensity of the fire as it approached the site," Crust told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "The Wollemi Pine is a particularly important species and the fact that this is the only place in



Government personnel inspect the Wollemi pine trees. AP

the world where they exist and they exist in such small numbers is really significant," he added. New South Wales state Environment Minister Matt Kean said the operation had saved the stand, although some plants had been singed. "These pines outlived the dinosaurs, so when we saw the fire approaching we realised we had to do everything we could to save them," Kean said on Thursday. The Wollemi Pine had only been seen in its fossilized form and was thought long extinct

after the stand was found in 1994. The fire that threatened it was brought under control this week after razing more than 510,000 hectares (1.26 million acres). The fire also destroyed 90 per cent of the 5,000-square-kilometer (1,930-square-mile) Wollemi National Park, where the rare trees grow, Crust said. The exact location of the stand remains a closely guarded secret to help authorities protect the trees. The Wollemi's survival is one of the few positive stories

to emerge from the unprecedented wildlife crisis in southeast Australia. The fires have claimed at least 28 lives since September, destroyed more than 2,600 homes and razed more than 10.3 million hectares (25.5 million acres), mostly in New South Wales state. The area burned is larger than the US state of Indiana. But the fire danger has been diminished by rain this week in several areas. The first green buds of regrowth have already emerged in some blacked forests following rain.

RARE COIN AUCTIONED FOR \$1.3 MN

One of the world's rarest coins, a gold piece bearing the image of Britain's King Edward VIII before his abdication, has sold for 1 million pounds (USD 1.3 million), setting a new record for a British coin. The historical oddity shows Edward, the uncle of Queen Elizabeth II, before he relinquished the throne in 1936 to marry American divorcee Wallis Simpson

Be careful with your words, Trump tells Khamenei

REUTERS WASHINGTON, JANUARY 18

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei should be very careful about what he says after Khamenei harshly criticized the United States in a Friday prayers sermon in Tehran. "The so-called 'Supreme Leader' of Iran, who has not been so Supreme lately, had some nasty things to say about the United States and Europe," Trump said in a tweet. "Their economy is crashing, and their people are suffering. He should be very careful with his words!" Meanwhile, the top US envoy for Iran said threats made by the country will only further isolate it. He made the remark after Khamenei said Iran's fight could move beyond its borders. "As long as the regime threatens the world it will become more isolated," Brian Hook, US Special representative for Iran, told reporters. "Until Iran behaves like a normal nation its isolation will only deepen," he said. In his first Friday prayers sermon in eight years, Khamenei told worshippers chanting "Death to America" that the elite Revolutionary Guards could take their fight beyond Iran's borders after the U.S. killing of a top Iranian commander.



Protesters near the US embassy in Seoul. AP

BLACK BOX TO UKRAINE

Dubai: Iran said it was sending to Ukraine the black boxes from the passenger plane that the Iranian military shot down this month. The authorities were prepared for experts from France, Canada and the United States to examine information from the data and voice recorders of the Ukraine International Airlines plane, said sources. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who has been pressing for a full investigation into the plane downing, said on Friday Iran should send the black boxes to France.

Europe will face terror threat if Tripoli govt falls, says Erdogan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ISTANBUL, JANUARY 18

TURKISH PRESIDENT Recep Tayyip Erdogan has warned Europe it could face new threats from terrorist organisations if Libya's UN-recognised government in Tripoli were to fall, in an article published in *Politico* on Saturday. In the article, which was published on the eve of a Libya peace conference in Berlin, Erdogan said the EU's failure to adequately support the Government of National Accord (GNA) would be "a betrayal of its own core values, including democracy and human rights". "Europe will encounter a fresh set of problems and threats

HAFTAR FORCES 'BLOCK' OIL EXPORTS

<b>FORCES LOYAL</b> to military strongman Khalifa Haftar on Saturday blocked oil exports from Libya's main ports, the National Oil Company said, raising stakes on the eve of peace talks.	500,000 barrels and cause losses of \$55 million a day, the firm warned.
<b>THE CLOSURE</b> of Libya's oil crescent will cause daily crude production to plunge from 1.3 million barrels to	<b>THE STRING</b> of export hubs along Libya's northeastern coast has been controlled by Haftar — who is at war with the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) — since 2016

if Libya's legitimate government were to fall," Erdogan wrote. "Terrorist organisations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, which suffered a military defeat in Syria and Iraq, will find a fertile ground

to get back on their feet." Turkey and Russia have brokered a ceasefire but Haftar walked away from talks in Moscow this week aimed at finalising the truce agreement.

Seven missing, 140 rescued in Nepal avalanche

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE KATHMANDU, JANUARY 18

AT LEAST seven people were missing and 140 others were rescued on Saturday after an avalanche blocked an Expedition route along Annapurna mountain range. Of the seven missing, four are Koreans and three are Nepali, siad police. They were last located closer to Deurali, 25 km before the base camp of the mountain. Rescue operations were launched, in which over 140 people were rescued. "All we can say is that about 100 are foreigners while the rest are Nepalis," a Home ministry official said, adding, "we want to ensure that everyone is rescued safely."