

TOPOF THE WORLD



Marc Veyrat

FRANCE
Chef loses court case over lost Michelin star

Paris: A French chef who said he had contemplated suicide after the prestigious Michelin guide removed one of his restaurant's stars on Tuesday lost a legal attempt to force the guide's inspectors to justify their decision. Marc Veyrat, 69, took the Michelin Guide to court in September demanding that it explain why it had stripped him of one of his three stars a year after awarding it. He had said the only explanation he had been given was that he had used English cheddar in a soufflé, instead of traditional French cheese — an accusation he said was false. But a court in Nanterre, on the outskirts of Paris, rejected his request.

AFGHANISTAN
Taliban target security forces, killing 26

Kabul: The Taliban unleashed a new wave of attacks in northern Afghanistan, targeting members of the country's security forces and killing at least 26, local officials said Wednesday. The insurgents quickly claimed responsibility for all the attack. The Taliban today hold sway over practically half of Afghanistan, staging near-daily attacks that target soldiers, security forces and government officials but also kill scores of civilians. In northern Kunduz province, at least 10 Afghan forces were killed in an attack on a police checkpoint in the district of Dashti Archi.

MEXICO
At least 16 dead in prison riot

Mexico City: At least 16 inmates in a central Mexico prison were killed and five more were wounded in a riot that closed out a violent 2019 for the country, authorities said. Zacatecas state security secretary Ismael Camberos Hernández told local press that authorities confiscated four guns that they believe were introduced to the Cieneguillas state prison during prison visits Tuesday. He said the prison was searched for weapons Saturday and Sunday and no guns were found. The melee broke out around 2.30 pm Tuesday and the prison was brought under control by 5 pm.

US troops fire teargas as protesters swarm embassy in Baghdad again

Most protesters disperse after militia leaders call on them to leave; US, Iran sharpen rhetoric

FALIH HASSAN & ALISSA JRUBIN
 BAGHDAD, JANUARY 1

FOR A second day, demonstrators swarmed outside the United States Embassy in Iraq on Wednesday and troops fired teargas in an attempt to disperse them, but after a few hours the militia leaders who had organised the demonstration called on the crowd to leave. Unlike on Tuesday, protesters did not get inside the compound. By midafternoon all but about 200 had dispersed, taking their tent poles with them. US President Trump said on Tuesday that Iran was responsible for events at the embassy compound in Baghdad, and tweeted, "They will pay a very BIG PRICE! This is not a Warning, it is a Threat."

That drew a taunting response on Wednesday from Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader. "You can't do anything," he said in a speech in Tehran, according to his website,

T S Eliot's letters to muse to be unveiled after 60 years

CHRISTINA PACIOLLA
 JANUARY 1

AFTER MORE than 60 years spent sealed up in a library storage facility, about 1,000 letters written by poet T S Eliot to confidante Emily Hale will be unveiled this week, and scholars hope they will reveal the extent of a relationship that's been speculated about for decades. Many consider Hale to not only be his close friend, but also his muse, and they hope their correspondence will offer insight into the more intimate details about Eliot's life and work. Students, researchers and scholars can read the letters at Princeton University Library starting Thursday.

"I think it's perhaps the literary event of the decade," says Anthony Cuda, an Eliot scholar and director of the T S Eliot International Summer School. "I don't know of anything more awaited or significant. It's momentous to have these letters coming out."

Lifelong friends, Hale and Eliot exchanged letters for about 25 years beginning in 1930. The two met in 1912 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but did not rekindle their friendship until 1927. Eliot was already living in England and Hale taught drama at US universities, including Scripps College in California.

In 1956, Hale donated the letters under an agreement they wouldn't be opened until 50 years after either her or Eliot's death, whichever came second. Eliot died in 1965. Hale died four years later.

Biographers say Eliot ordered Hale's letters to him to be burned. Their relationship "must have been incredibly important and their correspondence must have been remarkably intimate for him to be so concerned about the publication," Cuda said. **AP**



The reception room of the US embassy in Baghdad was torched by protesters on Tuesday. *AP*

adding: "If the Islamic Republic decides to challenge and fight, it will do so unequivocally."

The US blamed an Iranian-backed militia for a rocket attack on Friday on an Iraqi military base, which killed an American contractor and wounded several other people. American forces responded on Sunday with strikes on five sites controlled by the militia, in Syria and Iraq, that killed at least two dozen people

and injured twice as many; Iran has put the death toll at 31.

On Tuesday, thousands of Iraqis, many of them militia fighters, marched on the US embassy compound in Baghdad to protest the American strikes; some of them forced their way through the outer wall, set fires and threw rocks. They did not attempt to breach the embassy itself, and there were no reports of serious injuries, but the clash

WAR OF WORDS

"They will pay a very BIG PRICE! This is not a Warning, it is a Threat."

DONALD TRUMP,
TWEETED AFTER BLAMING IRAN FOR THE EMBASSY PROTESTS

"You can't do anything... If the Islamic Republic decides to challenge and fight, it will do so..."

AYATOLLAH KHAMENEI,
HITTING BACK AT THE U.S. THREAT

evoked memories of the takeover of the American embassy in Tehran during the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

On Wednesday afternoon, the umbrella group for the militias, the Popular Mobilisation Forces, ordered everyone to leave the embassy area. **NYT**

US deploys more troops
APadds: After the storming of the US embassy in Baghdad,

JAKARTA HIT BY NEW YEAR FLOODING, 9 DEAD



A rescue team evacuates residents from their flooded house at Jatibening on the outskirts of Jakarta Wednesday. *AP*

Australian authorities scramble to reach victims as fire toll rises

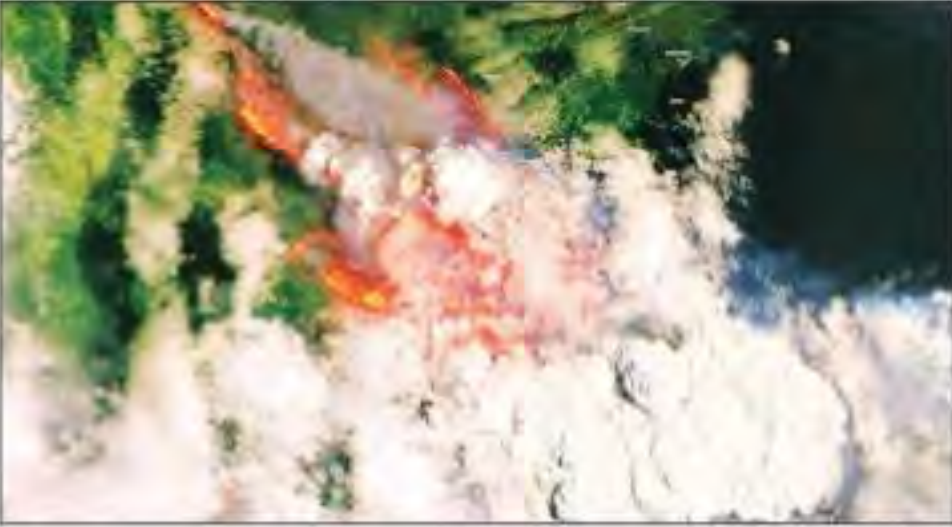
COLIN PACKHAM
 SYDNEY, JANUARY 1

A THIRD person was confirmed dead on Wednesday in devastating bushfires that engulfed Australia's southeast coast this week and a fourth was missing and feared dead, as navy ships rushed to provide supplies and assist with evacuations.

At least 15 people are now believed to have died, while scores of people remain missing after weeks of fires that have ripped through Australia's east coast, much of which is tinder-dry after three years of drought.

Fanned by soaring temperatures, columns of fire and smoke blackened entire towns on Monday and Tuesday, forcing thousands of residents and holidaymakers to seek shelter on beaches. Many stood in shallow water to escape the flames.

Bushfires have destroyed more than 4 million hectares (10



A satellite image of the Batemans Bay shows smoke and fire from wild bushfires in Australia. *Reuters*

million acres) and new blazes are sparked almost daily by extremely hot and windy conditions and, most recently, dry lightning strikes created by the fires themselves.

Cooler conditions on Wednesday gave the country a moment to count the cost of the fires, although there were still more than 100 blazes in New

South Wales state alone and thousands of firefighters on the ground.

The body of a man was found in a burnt car early on Wednesday on the south coast of New South Wales after emergency workers began reaching the most damaged areas, and police said the death toll will rise. **REUTERS**

MEANWHILE POPE APOLOGISES FOR 'BAD EXAMPLE'

Pope Francis apologised on Wednesday for having angrily slapped a woman's arm when she had grabbed hold of his hand and yanked him towards her, saying he had lost his patience and set a "bad example". His apology came after he used his first homily of the new year to denounce violence against women, which he compared to profaning God.



N Korea ends test moratorium, warns of new weapon

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
 SEOUL, JANUARY 1

NORTH KOREAN leader Kim Jong Un has declared an end to moratoriums on nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests and threatened a demonstration of a "new strategic weapon" soon. Analysts said the announcement, reported by state media on Wednesday, amounted to Kim putting a missile "to Donald Trump's head" — but warned that escalation by Pyongyang would probably backfire.

Washington was swift to respond, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urging Kim to "take a different course" and stressing that the US wanted "peace not confrontation" with the North, while Trump played down the development.

Pyongyang has previously fired missiles capable of reaching the entire US mainland, and has carried out six nuclear tests, the last of them 16 times more powerful than the Hiroshima blast, according to the highest estimates.

A self-imposed ban on such tests — Kim declared they were no longer needed — has been a centrepiece of the nuclear diplomacy between Pyongyang and Washington over the past two years, which has seen three meetings between Kim and US President Donald Trump, but little tangible progress.

Any actual test is likely to infuriate Trump, who has repeatedly referred to Kim's "promise" to him not to carry them out, and has downplayed launches of shorter-range weapons.

Negotiations between the two sides have been largely deadlocked since the breakup of their Hanoi summit in February, and the North set the US an end-of-year deadline for it to offer fresh concessions on sanctions relief, or it would adopt a "new way".

"There is no ground for us to get unilaterally bound to the



"There is no ground for us to get unilaterally bound to the commitment any longer," Kim Jong Un said.

EXPLAINED Warning US while keeping options for talks open

BY SAYING that North Korea no longer needs to abide by the moratorium on nuclear and ICBM tests, Kim has sent a warning to the US and Trump that the goodwill from the summits no longer exists and that the actions that have long troubled Washington is set to resume. By adding the threat of developing a new weapon, Kim is also sending a message to the people of North Korea that his regime remains strong and capable. However, he is also aware of the severe damage that economic sanctions have wreaked on his country. He has shown his willingness to enter into talks to remove those sanctions by adding that his efforts to increase the country's nuclear arsenal will be contingent on the US's 'future attitude'. This leaves open the possibility he could curb his nuclear ambitions if conducive talks take place.

commitment any longer," the official KCNA news agency cited Kim as telling top ruling party officials.

Pakistan govt approves Army Act amendment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
 ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 1

THE PAKISTAN government in an emergency meeting on Wednesday approved amendments to the Army Act, nearly four weeks after it assured the Supreme Court of passing a legislation on the extension and reappointment of an Army chief within six months.

Prime Minister Imran Khan had extended Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa's tenure through a notification on August 19. However, on November 26, the Supreme Court suspended the government order, citing irregularities in the manner the Army chief, a close confidant of the Prime Minister, was granted an extension.

On November 28, Bajwa got a six-month conditional extension from the apex court, ending an unprecedented legal wrangle that shook the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government and pitted the powerful military against the judiciary.

Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, who headed a three-member bench, announced the verdict after getting an assurance

In Wednesday's meeting, presided over by Imran Khan, the amendments made to the clauses related to the Army chief's tenure and extension were passed unanimously, Dawn reported

from the government that Parliament will pass a legislation on the extension/reappointment of an Army chief within six months.

In Wednesday's meeting, which was presided over by the Prime Minister, the amendments made to the clauses related to the Army chief's tenure and extension were passed unanimously, the *Dawn* News reported. The amended Bill will now be presented before the Parliament in order to come into effect. Though the details regarding the amendments are not yet clear, Defence Minister Pervez Khattak said it include a proposal to extend the tenure of all the three services chief.

THE RUSSIAN OUTPOST OF MAGADAN STRUGGLES TO KEEP ITS RESIDENTS FROM FLEEING

It's 50 below, the past is a horror show and you'd dream of escaping too

ANDREW HIGGINS
 MAGADAN, JANUARY 1

LIKE MANY young people in Magadan, a frigid northern Russian city more than 3,600 miles from Moscow, Dinat Yur is fed up with living in a place where winters drag on for six months and the average annual temperature is below freezing.

"I really dream of leaving this place," said Yur, a 29-year-old cook. "I can't wait."

Born and raised in a city proud of its resilience against climatic and all other odds, Yur has

for the moment found his calling in a defiantly contrarian occupation for a place so cold: He makes ice cream.

As the temperature in Magadan dipped the other week to well below freezing — on its way to minus 50 Celsius once winter really sets in — he was hard at work mixing milk, sugar and a raspberry mush imported from Italy to produce a summery swirl of frozen gelato.

Eating his confections outside during winter, Yur conceded, is not a good idea — they quickly turn to teeth-cracking chunks of ice — but "everyone

here likes to sit at home in front of the TV with some ice cream."

Russia's curious love affair with ice cream has long been a subject of theorising about how a country plagued by such terrible weather and other miserable conditions manages to keep going, prevailing over seemingly unsurmountable hurdles.

Burdened by its Stalin-era beginnings as the gateway to a string of brutal labour camps in nearby Kolyma — where tens of thousands were executed and more than 100,000 died from disease and hunger — the city is trying to rebrand itself cheer-



A view of Magadan, a town in Russia's far east. *NYT*

ily as the "golden heart of Russia," a reference to vast re-

serves of gold buried in nearby mountains.

Built on an icy bay overlooking the Sea of Okhotsk, north of Japan, Magadan is Russia's version of Dawson City, the Canadian town created by the Klondike Gold Rush at the end of the 19th century. Only Russians never rushed to Magadan; they were dragged there.

The only recent rush has been to the exit.

Young people particularly are making a run for it, a stampede that the city's mayor, Yuri Grishin, has worked to slow. He points to a new sports complex now under construction, a rash of restaurant openings and

fresh licks of paint for buildings in the center of town as possible encouragement for people to stay put.

After years of dramatic decline that slashed the population by more than 40%, the mayor said the number of residents has now "more or less stabilised" at around 91,000.

But among those who have moved away are the mayor's own three grown children. One now lives in Moscow.

The mayor does not understand. Why would anyone trade Magadan for the capital, where "they will live in a tiny apartment

and spend three hours a day in traffic jams," he asked.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Magadan had 155,000 people. But for many in Magadan, the end of the Soviet Union meant economic ruin. The slashing of Soviet-era subsidies sent Magadan salaries tumbling.

But in an effort to keep the city going, the federal government now subsidises daily flights to and from Moscow and is funding new roads, the new sports complex and high-speed internet lines. Subsidies also help keep the interest on mortgages in town much lower than elsewhere. **NYT**