



RENOVATION CHIEF'S WARNING
'NOTRE DAME NOT SAVED YET'

The French general who is overseeing the reconstruction of the fire-devastated Notre Dame Cathedral says the Paris landmark is not saved yet. General Jean-Louis Georgelin told French broadcaster CNews on Sunday that "the cathedral is still in a state of peril" after last year's fire, which destroyed its roof and collapsed its spire as the cathedral was undergoing renovations.

TOPOF THE
WORLD



ISRAEL
Netanyahu, in
apparent stumble,
refers to Israel as
'nuclear power'

Jerusalem: In an apparent slip of the tongue on Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Israel as a nuclear power before correcting himself with a bashful nod and an embarrassed smile. Israel is widely believed to have an atomic arsenal but has never confirmed or denied that it has nuclear weapons, maintaining a so-called policy of ambiguity on the issue for decades. Netanyahu stumbled at the weekly cabinet meeting while reading in Hebrew prepared remarks on a deal with Greece and Cyprus on a subsea gas pipeline. "The significance of this project is that we are turning Israel into a nuclear power," he said, before quickly correcting himself to say "energy power".

ITALY
Drunken driver
rams into German
tourists, kills 6

Rome: A drunken driver ploughed into a group of young German tourists in northern Italy early Sunday, killing six people and injuring 11 others, Italian authorities said. The deadly crash occurred in a village near Valle Aurina, near Bolzano in the Alto Adige region, shortly after 1 am as the Germans — who were between the ages of 20-25 — gathered to board their bus. The largely German-speaking autonomous region of northern Italy, with its ski resorts in the Dolomites and quaint villages around Bolzano, is popular with German tourists.

HONG KONG
Dozens held after
protest taking aim
at Chinese traders

Hong Kong: Scuffles erupted between police and protesters in Hong Kong on Sunday, with dozens of arrests made, after thousands marched near the border, shouting pro-democracy slogans and venting their anger at mainland Chinese traders. The demonstrators in Sheung Shui took aim at so-called "parallel traders" from China who buy vast amounts of duty-free goods in Hong Kong and take them back to the mainland to sell at a profit. Locals say it pushes up prices, overcrowds neighbourhoods and adds to growing tensions between Hong Kong mainland residents.

SOLEIMANI KILLING: HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF MOURNERS POUR INTO STREETS IN IRAN

Iraqi lawmakers vote to expel US troops

US-led coalition halts fighting against IS, braces for possible retaliation by Iran

NEW YORK TIMES
BAGHDAD, JANUARY 5

LAWMAKERS IN Iraq voted on Sunday to require the government to end the presence of American troops in the country after the United States ordered the killing of the Iranian leader of the elite Quds Force, Major General Qassem Soleimani, on Iraqi soil.

The decision to heed the demands of angry Shia factions and politicians came as hundreds of thousands of mourners poured into the streets of Iran to pay their respects to Soleimani, the most powerful figure in the country after the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The vote is not final until Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi of Iraq signs the Bill. But since he drafted the language and submitted the Bill to Parliament, there was little doubt he would sign it.

Although the vote was 170-0 in Parliament, many of its 328 members, primarily Kurds and Sunnis, did not attend the session and did not vote, showing the division in Parliament on the demands to oust American troops.

The legislation threads a fine needle: While using strong language demanding that the government "end any foreign presence on Iraqi soil and prevent the use of Iraqi airspace, soil and water for any reason" by foreign forces, it gives no timetable for doing so.

Meanwhile, the American-led coalition in Iraq and Syria halted its yearslong mission of

EXPLAINED
E.
ISIS to regroup?

THE US halting its operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria leaves open the possibility that what remains of the group in those countries will be able to reorganise, leading to a potential revival of ISIS. The killing of Qassem Soleimani is also seen as a boost for the Islamic State, as he was the leader of the Iran-backed militias which did, according to an NYT report, much of the ground fighting to drive the terrorists out of their strongholds in Syria and Iraq. Moreover, after the killing of Soleimani, the militias are likely to focus most of their attention on US troops in the region, giving ISIS further leeway to reorganise.

attacking the Islamic State and training local forces in both countries Sunday as US troops braced for retaliation from Iran.

In a statement, the American command said that after repeated attacks on Iraqi and American bases in past weeks, one of which killed an American contractor on December 27, "we have therefore paused these activities, subject to continuous review".



SOLEIMANI'S BODY ARRIVES IN IRAN: Coffins of General Qassem Soleimani and his comrades, who were killed in Iraq by a US drone strike, are carried on a truck surrounded by mourners during a funeral procession, in the city of Mashhad, Iran, Sunday. AP

Anti-war protests across American cities

JAN WOLFE
WASHINGTON, JANUARY 5

GROUPS OF protesters took to the streets in Washington and other US cities on Saturday to condemn the airstrike in Iraq ordered by President Donald Trump that killed Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani and Trump's decision to send about 3,000 more troops to the Middle East.

"No justice, no peace. US out of the Middle East," hundreds of demonstrators chanted outside the White House before marching to the Trump International



At a protest outside the Texas state capitol in Austin on Saturday. AP

Hotel a few blocks away.

Similar protests were held in New York, Chicago and other cities. Organisers at Code Pink, a women-led anti-war group, said more protests were scheduled in

numerous US cities and towns.

Protesters in Washington held signs that read "No war or sanctions on Iran!" and "US troops out of Iraq!"

Speakers at the Washington

event included actress and activist Jane Fonda, who last year was arrested at a climate change protest on the steps of the US Capitol.

"The younger people here should know that all of the wars fought since you were born have been fought over oil," Fonda, 82, told the crowd, adding that "we can't anymore lose lives and kill people and ruin an environment because of oil."

"Going to a march doesn't do a lot, but at least I can come out and say something: that I'm opposed to this stuff," said protester Steve Lane of Bethesda, Maryland. **REUTERS**

Trump chose most extreme option, stunning officials

Decision taken despite dispute within administration over intel warning about imminent attacks

HELENE COOPER, ERIC SCHMITT, MAGGIE HABERMAN & RUKMINI CALLIMACHI
WASHINGTON, JANUARY 5

IN THE chaotic days leading to the death of Major General Qassem Soleimani, Iran's most powerful commander, top American military officials put the option of killing him — which they viewed as the most extreme response to recent Iranian-led violence in Iraq — on the menu they presented to President Donald Trump.



They didn't think he would take it. In the wars waged since the September 11, 2001, attacks, Pentagon officials have often offered improbable options to presidents to make other possibilities appear more palatable. After initially rejecting the

Soleimani option on Dec 28 and authorising airstrikes on an Iranian-backed militia group instead, a few days later Trump watched, fuming, as reports showed Iranian-backed attacks on the US embassy in Baghdad, according to officials. By late Thursday, the President had gone for the extreme option. Top Pentagon officials were stunned.

Trump made the decision, senior officials said Saturday, despite disputes in the administration about the significance of what some officials said was a new stream of intelligence that

warned of threats to US embassies, consulates and military personnel in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Soleimani had just completed a tour of his forces in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, and was planning an "imminent" attack that could claim hundreds of lives, those officials said.

"Days, weeks," Gen Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Friday, when asked how imminent any attacks could be, without offering more detail other than to say that new information about unspecified plotting was "clear and unambiguous".

But some officials voiced private scepticism about the rationale for a strike on Soleimani. According to one US official, the new intelligence indicated "a normal Monday in the Middle East" — Dec 30 — and Soleimani's travels amounted to "business as usual". That official described the intelligence as thin and said Soleimani's attack was not imminent because of communications the US had between Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Soleimani showing the ayatollah had not yet approved any plans by the general for an attack. **NYT**

Al-Shabab attacks military base used by US forces in Kenya

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NAIROBI, JANUARY 5

THE AL-SHABAB extremist group attacked a military base used by US and Kenyan troops in coastal Kenya early Sunday, with US aircraft and vehicles destroyed, Kenyan authorities said. Kenya's military said the pre-dawn breach was repulsed and at least four attackers were killed.

It was the first known al-Shabab attack against US forces inside Kenya, a key base for fight-



At Camp Simba, Manda Bay, Kenya. AP file

ing one of the world's most resilient extremist organisations. A plume of black smoke rose above the base near the border

with Somalia, where al-Shabab is based. Residents said a car bomb had exploded. Lamu county commissioner Irungu Macharia told *The Associated Press* that five suspects were arrested and were being interrogated.

The US Africa Command confirmed the attack on Camp Simba in Lamu county.

Spokesman Col. Christopher Karns called al-Shabab's claims, including that its attack inflicted severe casualties, "grossly exaggerated." There was no report of US or Kenyan deaths.

Airstrike on military academy in Libya's Tripoli kills at least 30

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CAIRO, JANUARY 5

THE DEATH toll from an airstrike that slammed into a military academy in Libya's capital climbed to at least 30 people, most of them students, health authorities said Sunday.

Tripoli has been the scene of fighting since April between the self-styled Libyan National Army led by Gen. Khalifa Haftar and an array of militias loosely allied with the weak but U.N.-supported gov-

The fighting for Tripoli escalated in recent weeks after Haftar declared a 'final' battle

ernment that holds the capital.

The airstrike took place late Saturday in the capital's Hadaba area, just south of the city center where fighting has been raging for months. The ambulance service in Tripoli said the airstrike also wounded at least

33 others. It posted images of dead bodies and wounded people being treated at a hospital.

The UN Support Mission in Libyan condemned the attack. The Tripoli-based government blamed the airstrike on the self-styled Libyan National Army.

The fighting for Tripoli escalated in recent weeks after Haftar declared a "final" and decisive battle for the capital. That followed a military and maritime agreement Tripoli authorities signed with ally Turkey calling for the deployment of Turkish troops to Libya.

'Serious' cyber attack hits Austrian govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
VIENNA, JANUARY 5

AUSTRIA'S FOREIGN ministry has been targeted by a "serious cyber attack", officials said, warning another country could be responsible.

The attack, which began Saturday, was continuing on Sunday and "experts say it could last several days," a foreign ministry spokesman said.

The interior and foreign ministries issued a statement about the attack which started shortly before 11 pm on Saturday.

"Due to the gravity and nature of the attack, it cannot be excluded that it is a targeted attack by a state actor," the statement said.

"In the past, other European countries have been the target of similar attacks.

Immediate measures have been taken and a "coordination committee" set up, the statement said.

The attack came as Austria's Greens on Saturday gave the go-ahead to a coalition with the country's conservatives at a party congress in Salzburg, removing the last obstacle to the unprecedented alliance.

The German government's IT network was hit by a cyber attack in 2018.

Last year the EU adopted powers to punish those outside the bloc who launch cyber attacks that cripple hospitals and banks, sway elections and steal company secrets or funds.

PM SCOTT MORRISON'S UNWAVERING DISMISSAL OF CLIMATE CHANGE INVITES SCORN

As bushfires rage, Australia sees its leader as missing in action

LIVIA ALBECK-RIPKA, JAMIE TARABAY & ISABELLA KWAI
HASTINGS, JANUARY 5

THE POSTERS have popped up on streets around Australia, showing the prime minister looking very tropical: floral wreath on his head, ocean-blue shirt open at the collar.

"MISSING," they blared. "Your country is on fire."

The immediate reference was clear. The prime minister, Scott Morrison, has been widely castigated for taking a vacation to Hawaii last month, and trying

to keep it quiet, while Australia was in the early clutches of one of its most devastating fire seasons ever.

But the message went well beyond one island getaway. Angry and frightened, Australians have been venting their frustration with Morrison over what they see as his non-chalant and ineffectual response to the disastrous blazes and his unwavering dismissal of the force that has made them so intense: climate change.

With thousands fleeing eastern towns this weekend as fires swept from the hills to the coast, the inescapable realities of a



Morrison has minimised the connection between climate change and Australia's extreme environmental conditions

warming world were colliding with the politics of inaction.

Morrison has minimised the connection between climate

change and Australia's extreme environmental conditions, even as the country just completed its hottest and driest year on record. He has derided calls to end coal mining as "reckless," prioritising economic interests and loyalty to a powerful lobby. He has opposed taxing heat-trapping emissions or taking other significant steps to reduce them, although a majority of Australians say the government should take stronger action.

And he signalled no change in his policies even as 24 people have died, hundreds of homes have been destroyed, and more than 12 million acres have burned, an area larger than Denmark.

"The thing that strikes everyone about the present situation is the federal government's disengagement and lethargy, to put it politely," said Bill Hare, director of Climate Analytics, a policy institute. "People are just bewildered," he added.

As the fire conditions worsened over the weekend, Morrison defended his government's response and announced a military mobilisation — one that he quickly promoted in a video on social media, drawing widespread criticism. He also denied that his government had played down the links between global warming and changes in

Australia's weather patterns.

"The government has always made this connection, and that has never been in dispute," he said.

The PM said he was under-tenured by the anger at him. "There has been a lot of blame being thrown around," he said. "Blame: It doesn't help anybody at this time, and over-analysis of these things is not a productive exercise."

Morrison's attempt at damage control came as Australians have been voicing a growing sense since November, when the fires arrived early and with far more force than usual, that the government is no longer protecting them in the way it once did. **NYT**