

IN BRIEF

Pak cleric agrees to vacate mosque

Islamabad: Deposed cleric of Pakistan's Lal Masjid Maulana Abdul Aziz, who occupied the state-owned mosque here and asserted his claim to be its prayer leader, has agreed to vacate it by Tuesday after striking a deal with the government. Aziz was removed from the post on the orders of the court in 2004 following a fatwa he issued against the army and the operation against terrorists in Waziristan. However, he was reinstated after his release from prison in 2009, but he stirred another controversy in 2014 after he openly extended support to the perpetrators of the Army Public School attack in Peshawar by calling it a reactionary move by the terrorists. Lal Masjid is a state-owned mosque in Islamabad and Maulana Abdullah, father of Aziz, was its first cleric. After his assassination in the 1990s, Aziz was appointed the cleric by the Islamabad Capital Territory's (ICT) Auqaf Department.

Angela Merkel's successor quits

Berlin: German Chancellor Angela Merkel's designated successor unexpectedly threw in the towel Monday, plunging her conservative party into deeper crisis as it struggles to agree on its future political direction after losing votes to the far right. Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer told leading members of the Christian Democratic Union that she won't be seeking the chancellorship in next year's election, upending Merkel's plans to hand her the reins after more than 15 years in power. Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert told reporters in Berlin that Germany's long-time leader stood by her decision not to run for a fifth term in 2021, despite the latest development. Kramp-Karrenbauer's announcement reflects the growing split with the Christian Democrats exposed last week in its handling of the election of a governor in the state of Thuringia.

ISRAEL STRIKE POSED RISK TO RUSSIAN JET

Moscow: Russia's Defense Ministry said that a passenger jetliner in Syria was endangered by Israeli fighter jets that used it as shield while striking the suburbs of Damascus the previous day. The allegation comes as tensions run high in Syria, where fighting has escalated in the northern province of Idlib. Syrian government forces, backed by the Russian military, have clashed with Turkish troops that support the opposition there after failing to observe a cease-fire. A spokesman for the Israeli prime minister did not respond to a request for comment. Israel rarely acknowledges strikes carried out in Syria. Israel has repeatedly struck Syrian and Iran-linked targets in Syria in recent years and has vowed to push back against increasing Iranian influence in its neighboring country. The news of the alleged near-miss came amid jitters just a month after a Ukrainian passenger plane crashed shortly after take-off from Tehran, killing all 176 people on board.

NH vote: Dems trade barbs

Manchester, Feb. 10: Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg locked horns in their fight for the US Democratic presidential nomination Sunday as they scrambled for votes with just two days to go before New Hampshire's closely-watched primary. The 78-year-old Vermont senator and the 38-year-old former mayor of South Bend, Indiana came top of the first contest in Iowa - marred by messy confusion about the result - giving each momentum as Democrats seek a candidate to take on Donald Trump in November. Sanders, a leftist who won the New Hampshire primary by a landslide in 2016, led in four polls released Sunday, each of which had the moderate Buttigieg in second followed by Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and then former vice president Joe Biden. "I think we have an excellent chance to win," Sanders told *CNN* as he started a final push on the ground in the small northeastern state. With the primary season underway in earnest, earlier collegiality among Democrats has fallen away. "I am running against a candidate, Pete Buttigieg, among others, who has raised contributions from more than 40 billionaires," Sanders said. "Our support is coming from the working class of this country." His campaign, based heavily on small donors, says it raised \$25 million

US DEMOCRATIC presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg narrowly won the chaotic Iowa caucuses, collecting 14 delegates, ahead of Bernie Sanders with 12, according to the state party.

last month. Buttigieg, appearing separately on *CNN*, turned aside the billionaire charge, quipping, "Well, Bernie's pretty rich, and I would happily accept a contribution from him." Turning serious, he said he was "building the movement that is going to defeat Donald Trump," boosted by donations from some two million people. Both Buttigieg and Biden - whose status as national frontrunner for the nomination was shaken by taking fourth-place in Iowa's caucuses - said it would be much harder for the party to defeat Trump with Sanders. The senator's position at the very left of the American spectrum - with programmes like extending the Medicare program to all Americans - have been seized on by the president, who told an interviewer last week, "I think he's a communist." Buttigieg said it would be "a lot harder" for the party to win with Sanders than a more moderate candidate, with Biden similarly telling *ABC* it would be "incredibly more difficult." — *AFP*

Taiwan F-16s push back China H-6s

Taipei, Feb. 10: Taiwan's air force scrambled for a second day in a row on Monday to intercept Chinese jets that approached the island claimed by Beijing as its own, as tensions between the two took on a potentially dangerous military dimension. Taiwan's Defence Ministry said Chinese jets, accompanying H-6 bombers, briefly crossed an unofficial mid-line in the Taiwan Strait that separates the two, prompting its air force to rush to intercept and give verbal warnings to leave. The Chinese aircraft then withdrew to the western side of the line, the ministry added, without identifying the jets. The H-6s were on a training mission in the Pacific having passed through the Bashi Channel that separates Taiwan from the Philippines, the ministry added and shared a picture of a Taiwan F-16 accompanying one of the H-6 bombers. China has been flying what it calls "island encirclement" drills on-off since 2016 when Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen first took office. Beijing believes Tsai, who won re-election last month, wishes to push the island's formal independence. Tsai says Taiwan is an independent country called the Republic of China, its official name. On Sunday too, Chinese jets flew into the Bashi Channel then out into the Pacific. — *Reuters*

Thai city copes with fallout of shooting



People attend a memorial service at Terminal 21 Korat shopping mall in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. — *AP*

Nakhon Ratchasima (Thailand), Feb. 10: Authorities in northeastern Thailand began releasing bodies to relatives on Monday after security forces cornered and killed a soldier who carried out the country's worst mass shooting in an hours-long siege at a shopping mall. The soldier killed 29 people starting with his commanding officer in a stunning tragedy that began Saturday and ended Sunday morning when

security forces shot dead the heavily armed attacker in Terminal 21 Korat, an airport-themed mall in Nakhon Ratchasima. The gunman, Sgt. Maj. Jakrapan Thomma, 31, was infuriated at a land deal brokered by his commander's mother-in-law, as far as authorities have been able to determine. She was another of his victims. The death toll surpassed Thailand's last major attack on civilians, a 2015 bombing at a shrine in Bangkok killing 20 people that was allegedly carried out by human traffickers in retaliation for a crack-down on their network. Messages of sympathy for the latest tragedy were sent by several countries. The US Embassy said it "stands with the people of Thailand, saddened by tragic events in Nakhon Ratchasima." Throughout Monday, people dropped by the Terminal 21 mall to offer flowers and leave notes expressing sympathy. — *AP*

Iran again fails to put sat into orbit

Tehran: An Iranian rocket failed to put a satellite into orbit on Sunday, state television reported, the latest setback for a programme the US claims helps Tehran advance its ballistic missile programme. The launch happened at 7:15 pm local time at Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's Semnan province, some 230 km southeast of Tehran. A Simorgh, or 'Phoenix', rocket couldn't put the Zafar 1 communications satellite into orbit, however, due to a low speed, Iranian state TV reported. "Stage-1 and stage-2 motors of the carrier functioned properly and the satellite was successfully detached from its carrier, but at the end of its path it did not reach the required speed for being put in the orbit," Defense Ministry spokesman Ahmad Hosseini told state TV. — *AP*

S. Korea's Parasite beats H'wood greats to win Oscar

South Korean satire on class divides wins Academy Award for best film

Los Angeles, Feb. 10: *Parasite*, a stinging satire on class divides in South Korea, jumped the "one inch long subtitle barrier" to land on the Oscar stage — and in record books — as the first non-English film to win an Academy Award for best picture.

Coloured in various shades of black, Bong Joon-ho's wicked comedy that found resonance the world over also won the best director Oscar as well as the awards for original screenplay and best international feature. While the big wins for *Parasite*, the first South Korean film at the Oscars, came as a surprise for many, given the Academy Awards' 92-year history of favouring English cinema, the awards in the acting categories were along expected lines.

Joaquin Phoenix won best actor for *Joker* and Renee Zellweger bagged best actress for *Judy*. Brad Pitt and Laura Dern won the supporting gongs for *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* and *Marriage Story*. "Four times... It's crazy. It's an unbelievable night. It's such a great honour. I feel like I'll wake up to find this all a dream," Bong, who famously spoke on foreign language films overcoming the "one inch subtitle barrier" when his film won the Golden Globe for best foreign film, said backstage after his Oscar wins. With his film eclipsing big budget extravaganzas such as *1917*, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* and *The Irishman*, an overwhelmed Bong said he looked forward to the day when it would not be such a big deal for a foreign film to win in mainstream categories.

"I applaud and support the new direction that this change symbolises," the 50-year-old said while accepting the international film Oscar from actor Penelope Cruz. — *PTI*

AND THE OSCARS GO TO...

	BEST DIRECTOR Bong Joon-ho, <i>Parasite</i>		BEST ACTOR Joaquin Phoenix, <i>Joker</i>
	BEST ACTRESS Renee Zellweger, <i>Judy</i>		BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR Brad Pitt, <i>Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood</i>
	BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS Laura Dern, <i>Marriage Story</i>		BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY Roger Deakins, <i>1917</i>
	BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY Taika Waititi, <i>Jojo Rabbit</i>		BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY Bong Joon-ho, <i>Parasite</i>
	INTERNATIONAL FEATURE FILM South Korea, <i>Parasite</i>		ANIMATED FEATURE FILM <i>Toy Story 4</i>
	MUSIC (ORIGINAL SONG) <i>(I'm Gonna) Love Me Again</i> from <i>Rocketman</i>		ANIMATED SHORT FILM <i>Hair Love</i>
	MUSIC (ORIGINAL SCORE) <i>Joker</i>		
	DOCUMENTARY FEATURE <i>American Factory</i>		
	BEST COSTUME DESIGN Jacqueline Durran, <i>Little Women</i>		
	BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN <i>Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood</i>		
	LIVE-ACTION SHORT FILM <i>The Neighbors' Window</i>		

SIDELIGHTS

REMEMBERING KOBE

Veteran director Spike Lee, who won the best adapted screenplay Oscar last year for race drama *BlacKkKlansman*, rocked purple on the red carpet once again — this time to honour late basketball legend Kobe Bryant. His jacket lapels bore the number 24, worn by the Lakers icon and Oscar winner, who was killed in a helicopter crash two weeks ago. "Tribute. Honor. Homage. We all miss him," Lee told ABC.

WOMEN'S 'FIGHT CLUB'

In a year that saw female directors snubbed, the big question was — who would speak out about gender equality? The answer turned out to be: almost everyone. Past Oscar winner Natalie Portman donned a Dior cape with names of women left out stitched into it, saying it was her "subtle way" of responding to the omissions. In her opening musical number, Janelle Monae praised "all the women who directed phenomenal films."

DOWN SYNDROME HOST

Another moment of Oscars history was made when Zack Gottsagen, of the indie hit *The Peanut Butter Falcon*, appeared on stage alongside co-star Shia LaBeouf to hand out the best live-action short award. Gottsagen became the first Oscars presenter with Down syndrome, slightly hesitating over his lines before being encouraged by LaBeouf. "Shia was offered to present if he can share that moment with co-star Zack Gottsagen," tweeted Alma Har'el, who directed LaBeouf.

Joaquin talks of cow insemination

Los Angeles, Feb. 10: Hollywood star Joaquin Phoenix finally ended his dry run at the Oscars. He said that he believes we've become "more disconnected from the natural world," and that humanity has become egocentric about our place in the universe. Then things got a little strange: "We go into the natural world and plunder it of its resources," Phoenix said. "We feel entitled to artificially inseminate a cow and then steal her baby, even though her cries of anguish are unmistakable." In a lengthy speech, Phoenix touched upon racism, climate change and gender inequality.

Obamas' film wins best documentary

The Barack and Michelle Obama-produced film *American Factory* snagged an Oscar on Sunday for best documentary — a win for Netflix, which backed the story of a manufacturing plant in the US Midwest reopened by a Chinese billionaire. The film charts a Rust Belt community's journey from optimism at the giant plant's reopening, which brought back vital jobs, towards creeping anger and disillusionment, as the Chinese management imposed strict, exhausting demands on workers — and sacked those who did not comply. — *Agencies*

1,000 bomb hoaxes per day in Moscow

Moscow, Feb. 10: Moscovites are mystified by a flood of bomb hoaxes forcing the evacuation of courts, schools and malls while authorities appear unable to find the culprits even after months of disruption to public life. The warnings of planted bombs, all of them false, have been sent to numerous Russian cities, but particularly targeted the capital, where around 16 million live and work, with up to 1,000 threats per day. Since late November, more than 1.6 million people have been evacuated from buildings in Moscow, the Interfax news agency said citing sources. Yet, both the authorities and Kremlin-controlled television channels stay mostly clear of the topic. — *Agencies*



People stand outside Basmanny Court after an evacuation due to a warning of a planted bomb in Moscow. — *AFP*

HUGE SETBACK

Fine Gael takes a battering in the face of surge in fortunes of Sinn Fein Irish PM Leo's party pushed to 3rd place

London, Feb. 10: Ireland's Indian-origin Prime Minister Leo Varadkar has suffered a huge setback in the general election as his liberal-conservative Fine Gael party took a battering in the face of an unprecedented surge in the fortunes of the nationalist party Sinn Fein. As the poll results poured in overnight on Sunday, Varadkar's party was pushed down to third place with Sinn Fein in the lead, followed by conservative Fianna Fail in second place. The process of government formation is likely to be long drawn with Varadkar having ruled



Indian-origin Irish PM Leo Varadkar

out an alliance with Sinn Fein historically associated with the Irish Republican Army and dedicated to the reunification of Ireland. The final results of the weekend's election are still being counted but with all first preferences counted, Sinn Fein has 24.5 per cent compared to 22.2 per cent for

Fianna Fail and 20.9 per cent for Fine Gael. "Nobody can be forced into some sort of forced marriage or forced coalition," said 41-year-old Varadkar, who took over as the Irish Taoiseach or Prime Minister in 2017. "In order to form a government together, you have to have roughly the same views around the courts and the criminal justice system; around how the economy and society should be run and also how democracy should function. That is what makes my party Fine Gael not compatible with Sinn Fein," he said. — *PTI*



Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald celebrates with supporters after topping the poll, at the RDS count centre in Dublin, Ireland. — *AP*

IN BRIEF

Bill Gates buys hydrogen yacht

San Francisco: Microsoft co-founder and the world's second richest man Bill Gates has commissioned himself a futuristic superyacht that's powered entirely by liquid hydrogen — meaning its only emission is water — for ₹4,600 crore. Gates is a regular superyacht holidaymaker but has not previously owned his own vessel and has preferred to rent during his summer trips. The plans of buying the superyacht were unveiled at the Monaco Yacht Show last year in December. Notably, this is the first of its kind being powered by liquid hydrogen. The luxury liner is 370ft-long and comprises five decks complete with space for 14 guests, 31 crew members, a gym, yoga studio, beauty room, massage parlour and cascading pool on its rear deck, The Daily Mail reported on Sunday.

Solar Orbiter to tell Sun's secrets

Miami: The US-European Solar Orbiter probe launched Sunday night from Florida on a voyage to deepen our understanding of the Sun and how it shapes the space weather that impacts technology back on Earth. The mission, a collaboration between ESA (the European Space Agency) and NASA, successfully blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral at 11:03pm (0403 GMT Monday) and could last up to nine years or more. At 12:24am Monday (0524 GMT) the European Space Operations Centre in Darmstadt, Germany, received a signal from the spacecraft indicating that its Solar panels had successfully deployed. Space Orbiter is expected to provide unprecedented insights into the Sun's atmosphere, its winds and its magnetic fields, including how it shapes the heliosphere, the vast swath of space that encompasses our system.

AFRICA HOLDS 'SILENCE THE GUNS' SUMMIT

Addis Ababa, Feb. 10: African heads of state gather on Sunday at the headquarters of the African Union for a summit meeting due to focus on how the body can play a more prominent role in resolving conflicts proliferating across the continent. The two-day summit has taken as its theme "Silencing the Guns", yet AU officials are well aware of their failure to achieve the goal adopted in 2013 of ending "all wars in Africa by 2020". In remarks to African foreign ministers ahead of the summit, AU Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat painted a bleak picture of the continent's security situation, citing extremist threats stretching from the Sahel to Somalia. The "missed deadline" to silence the guns, he said, "reveals the complexity of the security situation in Africa." Though some progress has been made in Central African Republic and Sudan, long-running conflicts in Libya and South Sudan have been joined by new crises from Cameroon to Mozambique. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who will take over from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as AU chair, appears attuned to these challenges. In late January, he had warned that conflict "continues to hamper" development.

Global virus spread tip of iceberg: WHO

A team led by WHO leaves for China to probe epidemic; countries told to be prepared for virus arrival

Geneva, Feb. 10: The head of the World Health Organisation said on Monday there have been "concerning instances" of coronavirus among people with no travel history to China, warning that it could be the "tip of the iceberg", as he urged all countries to prepare for the possible arrival of the novel virus that has killed over 900 people.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus lauded the doctors, nurses and health workers for doing "their utmost" at personal risk to contain the epidemic, terming them "true heroes" of the outbreak that first surfaced in December in Wuhan city in China's central Hubei province where millions of people are under lockdown in a bid to stop it from spreading. "There've been some concerning instances of onward 2019nCoV spread from people with no travel history to China. The detection of a small number of cases may indicate more widespread transmission in other countries; in short, we may only be seeing the tip of the iceberg," tweeted Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the WHO.

Health team in China An advance team of international experts led by the World Health Organisation (WHO) has left for Beijing to help investigate China's coronavirus epidemic, which authorities said on Monday had claimed 909 lives on the mainland. WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who made a trip to Beijing for talks with President Xi Jinping and Chinese ministers in January, returned with an agreement on sending an international mission. But it took two weeks to get the government's green light.

I've just been at the airport seeing off members of an advance team for the WHO-led #2019nCoV international expert mission to #China — TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS WHO director-general



In this photo released by Xinhua news agency, Chinese President Xi Jinping, wearing a protective face mask, speaks to residents as he inspects the novel coronavirus pneumonia prevention and control work at a neighbourhood in Beijing on Monday. — AP

INFECTED

40,600

Coronavirus outbreak has infected over 40,600 people globally. The latest figures reported by global health authorities as of Monday: China: 908 deaths, 40,171 confirmed cases. Hong Kong: 36 cases, including one death. Japan: 161 Singapore: 43 Thailand: 32 South Korea: 27 Malaysia: 18 Taiwan: 16 Australia, Germany, Vietnam: 14 United States: 12 Macao: 10 US: One died in China France: 11 United Kingdom: 8 UAE: 7 Canada: 6 Philippines: 3 cases, including 1 death India, Italy: 3 Russia, Spain: 2 Belgium, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Cambodia, Finland: 1

After holiday, Chinese start work Citizen journo goes missing

Beijing, Feb. 10: Millions of people in China returned to work on Monday after an extended holiday aimed at slowing the spread of a coronavirus, with the extra travel deepening contagion concerns as the toll climbed above 900.

And although the World Health Organisation (WHO) has said there are signs the epidemic is stabilising, the agency's chief warned on Monday there could be more infections abroad in people who have never travelled to China. In an attempt to contain the virus, cities in Hubei have been locked down and transport routes across the country cut to stop the movement of hundreds of millions of people who usually visit family during the annual Lunar New Year holiday. The unprecedented measures included an extension of the holiday, with citizens told to stay inside as much as possible. Officially the holiday was extended by only three days, but many cities and provinces pushed the deadline until February 10. The measures have left businesses, shops, factories and tourist sites closed and turned many cities into ghost towns, sparking concerns about the impact of the outbreak on the economy. Wuhan city has carried out tests on 10.59 million people, almost 99 per cent of its population. — AFP

Xi in Beijing; 98 new deaths take toll to 909

Beijing, Feb. 10: Chinese President Xi Jinping, wearing a mask, on Monday toured Beijing city to oversee the efforts to contain the coronavirus outbreak and said though the situation remained "very serious" China can score a full victory over the epidemic, which has emerged as the biggest challenge to his leadership. The death toll from the outbreak rose to 909 with 98 new fatalities reported on Sunday, mostly in the

Wuhan, Feb. 10: Over the past couple of weeks, Chinese citizen journalists Chen Qiushi and Fang Bin have served as the world's eyes and ears inside Wuhan, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak.

Broadcasting via their mobile phones, they've offered a glimpse of how dire things have been. Many of those videos have been posted to Twitter and reposted on YouTube. Now one of them is missing. Chen has been out of reach for more than 20 hours. Fang, who was silent much of Friday until a video posted in the evening, was previously detained briefly by authorities for his video of corpses in a hospital. When he filmed the dramatic moment people in hazmat suits broke down his apartment door to take him into quarantine, it sparked hundreds of comments urging the authorities to release him. It's no accident that their posts grew viral on American platforms. China's internet watchdog has stepped up its policing efforts, announcing it would conduct "targeted supervision" on social media platforms Weibo, WeChat and Douyin. — Agencies

Coronavirus a threat to public health: Britain

London, Feb. 10: Britain has declared the new coronavirus that emerged from China a "serious and imminent threat to public health" and announced new measures Monday to combat its spread. The UK Department of Health and Social Care said people with the virus can now be forcibly quarantined and will not be free to leave. It named two British hospitals as isolation facilities for those affected by the disease and designated the Chinese city of Wuhan and the surrounding Hubei province where the virus first emerged as a "infected area".

"The incidence or transmission of novel coronavirus constitutes a serious and imminent threat to public health, and the measures outlined in these regulations are considered as an effective means of delaying or preventing further transmission of the

- **HALFWAY THROUGH** a two-week quarantine, 66 more people aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Yokohama have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, bringing the tally to 136 with only a fraction of the passengers tested, Princess Cruise Lines said Monday.
- **THE EUROPEAN** will host an extraordinary meeting of health ministers on Thursday, along with a WHO envoy, to discuss the novel coronavirus outbreak.
- **AMID GROWING** pressure to bring back its nationals from coronavirus-hit Hubei province, the Pakistan government has said it is closely monitoring the situation in China and will soon decide on their evacuation.

virus," the agency said in a statement. It added that the changes were designed to ensure the health and safety of medical workers who came into contact with infected patients. The change comes after a British man who caught the virus at a business conference in Singapore in January appears to be linked to at least seven other confirmed cases in Europe. — AP

HANDWASHING AT AIRPORTS MAY CHECK DISEASE

Boston, Feb. 10: Improving the rates of handwashing by travellers passing through just 10 of the world's leading airports could significantly reduce the spread of many infectious diseases, including the novel coronavirus, according to a study.

The greater the improvement in people's handwashing habits at airports, the more dramatic the effect on slowing the disease, said researchers, including those from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US. The findings, which deal with infectious diseases in general, including the flu, were published late December, just before the recent coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan. However, the study, published in the journal Risk Analysis, could apply to any such disease, and are relevant to the current outbreak. — PTI

In 2017, Asterix villain was named Coronavirus

New Delhi, Feb. 10: While a virus outbreak with origins in Wuhan marches out into the world in the new decade of 2020, a character in a 2017 Asterix comic series was actually called Coronavirus! Asterix, the Gaul from the eponymous French comic faced Coronavirus, a masked Roman villain with a reputation of stopping at nothing to win.

In the 37th edition of the "Asterix and the Chariot Race", Asterix battles his way across Italy in a chariot race against the Romans. Written by Thibaut Deleaz, an illustration from the edition — shared by actor Jaaved Jaaferi on his Twitter handle — shows "the Masked Auriga, the Great coronavirus" being introduced. "Here comes our favourite, straight from Rome! The Champion with MCDL XII victories! The one they call the "The



strain of coronavirus in December 2019. Written by Jean-Yves Ferri and drawn by Didier Conrad, the comic features Asterix and his sidekick Obelix participate in a chariot race across Italy organised by senator Caesar across Italy. They have to contend with the villain named Coronavirus and his sidekick Bacillus. Bacillus is the Latin term for bacteria! It is interesting to note that Coronavirus failed to win. — Agencies

Record! NYC-London flight lands nearly 2 hours early

London, Feb. 10: For the first time in years, a commercial passenger plane has flown across the Atlantic in less than five hours. A British Airways flight landed early Sunday morning at Heathrow Airport in London after leaving John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York just four hours and 56 minutes earlier. The previous record was held by a Norwegian Air flight, which flew between the two cities in five hours and 13 minutes. The flight had been expected to take 102 minutes longer. The recent average flight time between New York and London is 6 hours and 13 minutes, according to Flight-

adar24. The wind and air currents were ideal for a fast flight, said Ian Petchenik, Flightradar24's director of communications. "In the winter, the jet stream dips down a bit," he said. "It's kind of in a perfect spot for flights across the North Atlantic to take advantage of it." British Airways just narrowly beat out a Virgin Atlantic flight, which arrived in London at around the same time but one minute slower. British Airways confirmed the flight time for the Boeing 747 plane, saying the company prioritises safety over speed. The supersonic Concorde flights used to fly across the Atlantic in just over three hours, but stopped flying in 2003. — AP

GOOD NEWS ■ Rain ends drought in some towns but has not fallen evenly

Deluge in Australia puts out fires



Sea foam brought by waves outside beach front houses after heavy rain and storms at Collaroy in Sydney's Northern Beaches on Monday. — AP

Wellington, Feb. 10: Drought, wildfires and now flooding have given Australia's weather an almost Biblical feel this year. The good news is that a recent deluge in eastern parts of the country has drenched deadly fires and helped ease a crippling drought. But experts say it will take some time yet to know to what extent the rainfall has replenished dried-up rivers and quenched parched soil in some inland areas most affected by the three-year drought. Quentin Grafton, an economics professor and water expert at Australian National University in Canberra, said the rain had broken the drought in some towns but had not fallen evenly across all the affected areas. "At this stage, it's very good news, and certainly much more than people could have wished for or expected," he said of the rainfall. "There are some very happy people." Fire authorities had a reason to celebrate, with many wildfires being extinguished or significantly dampened down by the rain. On Saturday, authorities declared the Currawong Fire south of Sydney was finally out after destroying more than 300 homes and razing 500,000 hectares over two-and-a-half months. — AP

