

## Police detain

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just after midnight, police said.  
The ensuing police chase ended in the city of Thessaloniki, when the vehicle ran a series of red lights and crashed into a passing car.  
Ten men from Bangladesh and two men from Syria were transported to hospital, as was the driver of the car.  
The Syrians were treated and released from hospital and were arrested on suspicion of migrant smuggling.

Thousands of people continue to enter Greece from Turkey, either from the coast to nearby Greek islands or through the land border in far northeastern Greece, despite European efforts to stop migrant flows, according to AP.  
Most hope to make their way to more prosperous northern European countries, it said.

## Gold bar

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That night -- June 30, 1520 -- the Aztecs, furious over the slaughter of their nobles and priests, drove the Spanish invaders from their capital, Tenochtitlan.  
The conquistadors escaped with as much looted Aztec treasure as they could carry, including, apparently, the gold bar in question.

"The so-called 'Noche Triste' is among the episodes of the conquest that will be remembered this year, and there is only one piece of material evidence from it: a gold bar that sank 500 years ago in the canals of Tenochtitlan, and which recent analysis confirms came from the (Spaniards') flight," INAH said in a statement.

Cortes and his men received a wary welcome from Aztec emperor Moctezuma when they arrived in 1519, but soon became unwanted guests at the palace as they appropriated his treasure and turned him into a virtual hostage.  
In June 1520, Cortes -- who had launched his expedition in Mexico without official authorisation -- learned that the Spanish governor in Cuba had sent a party of soldiers to arrest him.  
He left his lieutenant Pedro de Alvarado in charge at Tenochtitlan and went with part of his army to fight the arriving soldiers, ultimately defeating them.  
While he was gone, however, Alvarado began to fear the Aztecs would attack him, and had their nobles and priests killed.

## Mesmerising

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school every Friday to hear the children play ek tara, dotara, sarinda, flute, harmonium and dhul.  
Suklal Roy, 40, a local Bhawaiya artiste in the village, said he and other folk artistes in the village take out time for these students upon the request of Uday. "We guide them on how to play these instruments."  
Uday's 66-year-old grandfather Bhupendra Nath Roy, a farmer, said, he is proud of his grandson. "He is a benevolent kid, always helping others. He helps the disabled get their allowances, arranges food, clothes, and even money for orphans and the poor."  
"I help Uday bathe, dress, eat and go to school. Even though he is dependent on others, he never shies from helping others," said his 60-year-old grandmother Nani Bala. "We love our grandson very much. He always has a smile on his face."  
Thirteen-year-old Sufola Rani, who is learning Bhawaiya, said, "We eagerly wait to attend our music lessons every weekend. We are grateful for this opportunity, all thanks to Uday."  
"I am determined to continue such social welfare works my whole life," Uday told The Daily Star recently.

## 21 died

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injured and 375 went missing in 203 incidents, said the report.  
The road crash victims included 989 drivers, 844 transport workers, 809 students, 115 teachers, 216 law enforcers, 36 journalists, 26 physicians, and 153 political activists, the report said.  
A total of 7,356 vehicles were involved in the road crashes. Of them, 18.99 percent were buses, 29.81 percent trucks and covered vans, and 21.4 percent were motorcycles.  
More than 56 percent of the accidents took place when vehicles ran over the victims while 18.38 involved head-on collisions between vehicles and 18.07 percent involved vehicles falling into roadside ditches.  
The platform said the country witnessed a 4.26 percent decline in accidents involving motorcycles, due to strict monitoring of their operation.  
Of the crashes, 32.38 percent occurred on national highways, 37.51 percent on regional highways, and 21.3 percent on feeder roads, it said.  
According to the report, the highest number of accidents in a single day happened on June 15, when 27 people died and 121 were injured.  
The platform, in its report, also gave 12 recommendations to prevent road accidents. They include proper implementation of Road Transport Act-2018, raising awareness on road safety through the media, reclaiming pavements and parts of highway from illegal occupants and providing training to drivers.



PHOTO: AFP

Activists hold placards and shout slogans against India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi as they participate in a protest against India's new citizenship law, in Kolkata yesterday.

# Libya and Iran top agenda in Merkel-Putin meeting

AFP, Moscow

Confrontation between Washington and Tehran over the US killing of a top general and turmoil in Libya were set to dominate talks in Moscow between the leaders of Russia and Germany yesterday.  
Russia's Vladimir Putin was set to hold talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Moscow yesterday afternoon -- her first visit since May 2018 when the two leaders met at Sochi on the Black Sea.  
Putin visited Syria and Turkey this week and is keen to stress his role as a regional powerbroker.  
German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who will attend the talks, said a "key reason" for the meeting was the escalating crisis in Libya, where

Germany is acting as a mediator in a conflict he has warned could become a "second Syria".  
"We are involving Europe and those players who are influential there, for that we need Russia," Maas told Germany's NTV television. "For us, it's not too far to fly to Moscow to discuss that with Putin."  
Merkel is to invite Putin to a Berlin conference on Libya later this month, diplomatic sources told AFP.  
Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called for a ceasefire in Libya on Wednesday, although they are seen as supporting opposing sides in the conflict.  
While Turkey has sent troops to support the UN-backed Tripoli government, Moscow is accused of backing mercenaries supporting

strongman Khalifa Haftar in his fight against the government.  
Haftar said he would fight on despite the call for a ceasefire.  
The Kremlin said last week that talks would cover the "escalation of tensions" in the Middle East after the US killed top Iranian commander General Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike close to Baghdad.  
Putin warned the killing could "seriously aggravate the situation in the region".  
Iran, an ally of Moscow, responded with missile attacks on Iraq bases housing American troops.  
While Germany condemned the tit-for-tat violence and urged Tehran to end a "spiral" of conflict, Putin said using force would "not contribute to finding solutions to

the complex problems in the Middle East".  
Tehran has announced a further rollback on its commitment to a 2015 nuclear accord following the United States' unilateral withdrawal in 2018. Russia and Germany are among world powers still backing the deal.  
The talks also come after a Ukrainian airliner crashed in Iran on Wednesday killing all 176 on board. Canada and the US have suggested Iran downed it with a missile, which Tehran denies.  
The Kremlin said the talks would also cover the conflict in Ukraine.  
The war with Moscow-backed separatists broke out after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and has killed more than 13,000 people.

# US turns down Iraqi request

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in place the tools to carry out the parliament's decision," his office said in a statement, adding that the forces used in the killing had entered Iraq or used its airspace without permission.  
The State Department said any US delegation would not discuss the withdrawal of US troops as their presence in Iraq was "appropriate."  
"There does, however, need to be a conversation between the US and Iraqi governments not just regarding security, but about our financial, economic, and diplomatic partnership," spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement.  
Trump said in the Fox News interview that if Iraq wanted the United States to leave, he would tell them: "You have to pay us for the money we put in."  
He said the United States has \$35 billion of Iraq's money "sitting in an account."  
"I think they'll agree to pay. Otherwise we'll stay there," Trump said.  
Pompeo told reporters a Nato delegation was in Washington on Friday to discuss the future of the Iraq

mission and a plan to "get burden-sharing right in the region".  
Separately, the State Department said Pompeo had discussed Iran with Canadian Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne as well as "the opportunity for an expanded Nato force in Iraq and appropriate burden sharing".  
The latest flare-up in the long covert war between Iran and the United States began with the US killing of Soleimani, Iran's top general, in a drone strike on January 3. Iran responded on Wednesday by firing missiles at US forces in Iraq.  
In the aftermath, both sides backed off from intensifying the conflict but the region remains tense.  
Iraq's top Shia Muslim cleric condemned the US-Iranian struggle happening on Iraqi soil, saying it risked plunging his country and the wider Middle East into deeper conflict.  
Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani said it was Iraqis who stood to suffer most from the US-Iranian conflict. In a message delivered through a representative at Friday prayers in the holy city of Kerbala, Sistani said no

foreign powers should be allowed to decide Iraq's fate.  
**CALLS TO LEAVE**  
"The latest dangerous aggressive acts, which are repeated violations of Iraqi sovereignty, are a part of the deteriorating situation" in the region, Sistani said. "Iraq must govern itself and there must be no role for outsiders in its decision-making."  
Iraq has suffered decades of war, sanctions and sectarian conflict, including the US-led invasion of 2003.  
At Friday prayers in Tehran, mid-ranking Iranian cleric Mohammad Javad Haj Aliakbari said US interests across the world were now exposed to threats.  
Since Soleimani's killing, Tehran has stepped up its calls for US forces to leave Iraq, which like Iran is a mainly Shia Muslim nation. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has said the retaliatory strikes were not enough and that ending the US military presence in the region was Tehran's main goal.  
Critics have called Soleimani's killing a reckless action.  
But Pompeo said on Friday Washington had specific information

about an imminent Iranian threat including to US embassies, adding: "American lives were at risk."  
As part of his most recent activities in Iraq, Soleimani had encouraged pro-Iranian Iraqi militias to quash months of protests by Iraqis opposed to the influence in their country of foreign powers such as Iran and the United States.  
In Iraqi cities, demonstrators took to the streets again on Friday, determined to keep up the momentum of their protests despite attention turning to the threat of a US-Iran conflict.  
Gunmen killed two local journalists covering protests in the southern city of Basra, security sources and state media said. Ahmed Abdulsamad, Basra correspondent of Dijla TV station -- owned by senior Sunni politician Mohammed al-Karbouli -- was killed immediately while his camera operator succumbed to his wounds in hospital, a medical source told Reuters.  
"Politicians and clerics...are either with Iran, the US or other countries. Our allegiance is to Iraq only, not to factions and politicians," said Essam Faraj, 54, a demonstrator in Baghdad.

# Historic German island is nursery for North Sea seals

AFP, Helgoland

The birthplace of Germany's national anthem and a practice bombing range for British airmen after World War II, Helgoland island in the North Sea turns cuddly at the turn of the year as grey seals arrive to give birth.  
The Jordsand society, dedicated to preserving North Sea coastal life, has counted more than 520 births since November.  
Dozens of tourists come each day to see the white-furred seal pups hop around the beach during the whelping season that lasts into January.  
"They're so close and so lively. I often watch them on TV, but it's much more exciting to come here," said Karin, who had made a long trip to the island, also spelled Heligoland in English, from Essen in western Germany.  
But two local rangers and Jordsand volunteers must keep the excited fans at a distance of at least 30 metres (100 feet).  
Adult seals can grow as large as 300 kilogrammes (660 pounds) and won't hesitate to bite if they feel threatened.  
"Sometimes, the tourists forget the restrictions and get too close. If the seals get too used to people, that has negative consequences in summer," said ranger Ute Pausch.

"They'll want to play in the water and they can injure swimmers."  
Wooden boardwalks have been set up to corral the tourists during whelping season.  
The challenge has become all the greater as seal numbers have grown in response to rising water temperatures.  
Researchers say climate change is behind waters growing 1.6 degrees Celsius (2.9 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer in the past 45 years.  
Now, "the seals are more and more numerous, I think it's because there's more food around," said Elmar Ballstaedt, who works for the Jordsand society.  
But potential negative effects of global warming could one day outweigh the bonanza for the sea-dwelling mammals, he warned.  
"We're at sea level here. If the water rises, we'll certainly have new challenges to overcome," Ballstaedt said.  
In the nearer term, the seal year is just getting started on Helgoland.  
After three weeks nursing with their mothers, the pups are left to fend for themselves in the North Sea.  
But they return to the island in the spring to moult -- and to take another turn in front of crowds of tourists and photographers.

# Sanders leads close 4-way battle in early voting Iowa: poll

AFP, Washington

Bernie Sanders leads a tight race for the Democratic presidential nomination in Iowa for the first time, according to a key poll released yesterday weeks before the state kicks off the 2020 voting on February 3.  
Four candidates are within five points of one another in the closely watched Des Moines register poll, the main Iowa newspaper's first statewide survey in two months.  
Senator Sanders leads with 20 percent of the vote, a five-point gain since November, followed by fellow liberal Senator Elizabeth Warren at 17 percent, and former South Bend, Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg, who sits at 16 percent after a nine-point slide from top spot.  
Centrist Joe Biden is at 15 percent in Iowa, but the former vice president is the national frontrunner in the race to see who challenges incumbent President Donald Trump in November.  
Senator Amy Klobuchar, from neighboring Minnesota, is in fifth spot in Iowa, well back at six percent, followed by entrepreneur Andrew Yang at five percent and Senator Cory Booker at three percent.  
The polling is the latest in a series

of good signs for the 78-year-old Sanders, who suffered a heart attack two months ago but has enjoyed a remarkable comeback to cement his status as a top White House contender.  
"There's no denying that this is a good poll for Bernie Sanders. He leads, but it's not an uncontested lead," said pollster J. Ann Selzer, president of Selzer & Co.  
"He's got a firmer grip on his supporters than the rest of his compatriots."  
The poll of 701 likely Democratic caucus goers has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.  
Sanders is a self-described Democratic socialist who supports universal health care and a massively ambitious policy to arrest climate change -- plans that critics warn will cost tens of trillions of dollars.  
Buoyed by fervent young supporters, he is in second place behind Biden nationally and has solidified his position in recent weeks.  
He is enjoying his largest lead since May over third-place Warren, who surged during the summer but has seen her support slide since October.

## No respite

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to morning today.  
Yesterday's lowest temperature was recorded at 10.2 degree Celsius in Ishwardi of Pabna, while the highest was 28.6 at Teknaf of Cox's Bazar, said the weather bulletin.  
Meanwhile, some 5,529 people took treatment at different government hospitals across the country after being infected with different cold-related diseases in the 24 hours until 8:00am yesterday, according to the statistics of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).  
Most of the infected persons received treatment at outdoor services of government hospitals, while some others were admitted, said Ayesha Akther, assistant director of Health Emergency Operation Center and Control Room of the DGHS.  
The diseases include acute respiratory infection (ARI), pneumonia, asthma, diarrhoea, fever, skin disease, eye infection and jaundice, he told The Daily Star yesterday evening.  
A few trains were running behind schedule, while road and river communications also faced disruption due to thick fog, said officials and transport operators concerned.

## First Akheri

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Thousands of devotees from home and abroad will take part in the prayer.  
Tabligh Jamaat, a coalition of Muslim devotees, has been organising the event on the bank of Turag river, near Tongi upazila of Gazipur, every year since 1967.  
The first phase of the Ijtema is mainly allocated for the followers of Maulana Zubair.  
The second phase will be held from January 17 to 19. This phase is allocated for the followers of Indian preacher Maulana Saad Kandhalvi.  
**FIVE MORE DIED IN IJTEMA**  
Meanwhile, five more devotees died at the Ijtema venue yesterday, mostly due to heart attack and old-age complications. With them, a total of nine people died so far since Friday.  
The dead are Ali Azgar, 70, from Barisal; Md Yusuf, 45, from Narayanganj; Md Shahjahan, 60, from Brahmanbaria; Tamij Uddin, 65, from Cumilla; and Abdur Razzak, 50, from Rajshahi.  
Manjur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Gazipur Metropolitan Police, said the bodies were handed over to the families after their namaz-e-janaza at the Ijtema ground.  
To ensure security of the event, law enforcement agencies have taken up a multi-layered security measures.  
Members of police, Rab and intelligence agencies have been deployed in the adjacent areas.  
Over 400 closed-circuit television cameras, 25 watch towers and 11 checkpoints have been set up to monitor the area, police said.

## Shahriar Alam

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Delhi on Tuesday.  
The annual multilateral conference addresses the most challenging issues facing the global community. Heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials, as well as major private sector executives, members of the media and academics from across the globe will be speaking at the event, according to ORF.  
Asked if anyone would represent Shahriar at the dialogue, a Bangladesh foreign ministry official replied in the negative. "He was invited to the event as a speaker, not just as a participant."  
The cancellation of his visit comes just a month after Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan called off their scheduled visits to India amid protests in the neighbouring country over the passage of Citizenship Amendment Bill in parliament.  
The Citizenship Amendment Act grants Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians who faced "persecution" in Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Critics say it discriminates against Muslims and violates Indian constitution's secular tenets.  
The act sparked furious protests as lakhs of people took to the streets across India. The demonstrations led to many deaths, including more than 20 in Uttar Pradesh alone.  
On December 12, some people from processions and agitations knocked down two signposts of the Bangladesh mission, approximately 30 yards away from the chancery premises in Guwahati. The security vehicle escorting Bangladesh assistant high commissioner, Shah Mohammad Tanvir Monsur, from the airport to Guwahati city was attacked by mobs protesting adoption of the act.  
Talking about CAB, Foreign Minister Momen had told reporters in Dhaka that the bill could weaken India's "historic position" as a tolerant and secular country.  
There were also concerns over the Indian National Register of Citizens (NRC) which excluded nearly two million people in Assam, raising fears they could be rendered stateless.  
Indian Home Minister Amit Shah on several occasions said the NRC would be implemented across India and all illegal migrants would be expelled.  
Delhi has assured Dhaka that the NRC will not affect Bangladesh as it is an internal issue of India.