

\$740 BILLION DEFENSE POLICY BILL

House overrides Trump's veto

109 Republicans join Democrats

REUTERS, Washington

Democratic-led US House of Representatives voted on Monday to override President Donald Trump's veto of a \$740 billion defense policy bill, a rebuke that underscored divisions in the Republican Party during Trump's final weeks in office.

The 322-87 House vote, in which 109 Republicans joined Democrats to override Trump's veto, leaves the bill's fate to the Republican-led Senate, where a final vote is expected this week. If the Senate seconds the House action, the bill becomes law. It would be the first veto override of Trump's presidency.

Trump, who is angry that some Republicans have acknowledged his loss to Democratic President-elect Joe Biden in the Nov. 3 election, vetoed the defense bill last Wednesday. Biden will be sworn in as president on Jan. 20.

Trump said he blocked the legislation because he wanted it to overturn liability protections for social media companies unrelated to national security, and he opposed a provision to rename military bases named after generals who fought for the pro-slavery Confederacy during the Civil War.

The legislation, which addresses a host of defense policy issues and includes a pay raise for US troops, has been passed by Congress every year since 1961.

The bill had earlier passed both chambers of Congress with margins greater than the two-thirds majorities needed to override president's veto. But Trump vetoed it anyway and the bill went back to Congress for a possible override.



The wreckage of a car and damaged buildings are seen in Petrinja, some 50kms from Zagreb, after the town was hit by an earthquake of the magnitude of 6.4.

PHOTO: AFP

India finds cases of new strain

May extend UK flight ban; study says Britain must vaccinate two million people a week to prevent third Covid-19 wave

REUTERS, Mumbai

India has found six cases of a more infectious strain of the coronavirus, which has prompted border closures around the world, in people arriving from Britain and will likely extend a flight ban to guard against it, officials said yesterday.

All six of the infected people had been kept in isolation, the health ministry said in a statement, adding that their fellow travellers were being traced.

At least three cases were detected in travellers from the UK who arrived in Pakistan.

And Germany health officials in Germany yesterday said the new coronavirus strain had been traced in the country since November. Researchers were "able to sequence the variant of the B.1.1.7 virus in a person infected in November this year", the health ministry of Lower Saxony said in a statement referring to the new strain.

India had suspended all flights from



Britain until the end of the month over worry about the infectious variant of the virus but about 33,000 passengers had flown in from late November, before the ban was enforced, the ministry said.

Of those arrivals, 114 people were found positive for the coronavirus and their samples were being checked for the new variant, which has been detected across parts of Europe and Asia, it said.

Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said the ban on flights from Britain would probably remain

in force into the New Year.

Meanwhile, a study by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) has concluded that Britain must vaccinate two million people a week to avoid a third wave of the coronavirus outbreak.

The UK has had more than 71,000 deaths from the coronavirus and over 2.3 million cases of Covid-19 infections as of late Monday, according to a Reuters tally.

"The most stringent intervention scenario with tier 4 (restrictions) England-wide and schools closed during January and 2 million individuals vaccinated per week, is the only scenario we considered which reduces peak ICU (intensive care) burden below the levels seen during the first wave," the study said.

"In the absence of substantial vaccine roll-out, cases, hospitalisations, ICU admissions and deaths in 2021 may exceed those in 2020."

Girl killed, many injured as 6.4 quake hits Croatia

Slovenia shuts nuclear power plant

REUTERS, Zagreb

An earthquake of magnitude 6.4 struck a town in central Croatia yesterday, killing a child, injuring many people and wrecking houses, officials said.

Rescuers tried to pull people from the rubble of collapsed buildings, television footage showed, and army troops were sent into the area to help.

The GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences said the quake hit at a depth of 10 km (6 miles). The epicentre was in the town of Petrinja, 50 km south of the Croatian capital Zagreb.

Tomislav Fabijanic, head of emergency medical services in nearby Sisak, said many people had been injured in Petrinja and in Sisak.

N1 news channel quoted a Petrinja town official as saying that a 12-year old child had been killed, but gave no details.

Piles of stone, bricks and tiles littered the streets in the aftermath of the quake, and cars parked in the road were also damaged by falling debris. Patients were evacuated from the Sisak hospital because buildings were damaged.

A worker who had been fixing a roof in a village outside Petrinja told N1 that the quake threw him on the ground. Nine of the 10 houses in the village were destroyed, he said.

The quake was felt in Zagreb, where people rushed onto the streets, some of which were strewn with broken roof tiles and other debris. It also shook parts of neighbouring Bosnia and Serbia.

In Slovenia, the STA news agency said the country's sole nuclear power plant, which is 100 km (60 miles) from the epicentre, was shut down as a precaution.



Protesters take part in a demonstration against the dissolution of the country's parliament in Kathmandu, yesterday. Daily protests are being held in Nepal since PM KP Sharma Oli dissolved the parliament after losing support.

PHOTO: AFP

Gaza groups stage military drills to mark 2008 conflict

AFP, Gaza City

Palestinian armed groups staged military exercises in Gaza yesterday, including firing rockets into the sea, to mark the anniversary of the start of the 2008 conflict with Israel.

The demonstrations were scheduled to last several hours and involve about 10 groups in the Israeli-blockaded Palestinian enclave, said a spokesman for the Al-Quds Brigade forces, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad.

The goal of the exercise, the first of its kind, is to "strengthen the skills of combatants" and demonstrate the "unity" of armed groups in Gaza, added the spokesman, whose face was almost entirely covered by a traditional headscarf.

Hamas, the Islamist group that has controlled Gaza since 2007, was also taking part. Hamas's Al-Aqsa TV showed rockets being fired from the strip on Tuesday into

the Mediterranean Sea.

Israel's army said a projectile device was launched from Gaza overnight Monday to Tuesday, but that it did not cross into Israeli territory. Israel did not immediately retaliate to that launch with airstrikes, as it typically does when rockets fired from Gaza enter Israel.

The drills also come days after Hamas accused Israel of launching strikes that damaged a children's hospital.

Israel, which said it carried out the weekend airstrikes in response to rocket fire from Gaza, denied that its missiles hit the hospital.

In December 2008, Israel launched "Operation Cast Lead" to stop Palestinian rocket fire into Israel.

It ended with a ceasefire in January 2009, after 1,440 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed. Hamas and Israel fought two further conflicts, in 2012 and 2014.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Defying US, Russia says military ties with Turkey to continue

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday said that Moscow and Ankara's military cooperation would not be deterred by US sanctions on Turkey for acquiring a Russian missile defence system. Washington this month punished Turkey for buying Russia's S-400 air defence system, imposing rare sanctions against a Nato ally. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the time told Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu that the American sanctions were intended to prevent Russia from receiving substantial revenues from the sale. On Tuesday, Cavusoglu visited Moscow for talks with his Russia's top diplomat Lavrov, who told reporters that, "we have confirmed our mutual intention to develop military ties with Turkey". Cavusoglu said the US sanctions against Turkey were "an act of aggression against our country's sovereign rights", adding that Ankara would not give in to pressure.

Rajinikanth ends political bid after 'warning from god'

Indian movie superstar Rajinikanth yesterday cancelled his plans to enter politics, saying a health scare had been "a warning from god". The announcement came a day after the 70-year-old Tamil action hero left hospital where he was treated for high blood pressure. Rajinikanth, one of Asia's best paid actors, set off celebrations by his fans when he announced early in December that he would be launching a political party in a bid to bring "corruption free" government to his home state of Tamil Nadu. But the bus conductor-turned-actor said he could not go ahead in a long letter released on his Twitter account. Rajinikanth apologising to his fans said his recent worries had been a "warning from god".

Russia tells Navalny to return immediately or face jail



Russia's prison service on Monday gave Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny a last minute ultimatum: Fly back from Germany at once and report at a Moscow office immediately, or be jailed if you return after that deadline. Navalny, one of President Vladimir Putin's leading critics, was airlifted to Germany for treatment in August after collapsing on a plane in what Germany and other Western nations say was an attempt to murder him with a Novichok nerve agent. Russia denied any involvement in the incident. The Federal Prison Service (FSIN) on Monday accused Navalny of violating the terms of a suspended prison sentence he is still serving out over a conviction dating from 2014, and of evading the supervision of Russia's criminal inspection authority. Navalny has been discharged from hospital in Berlin on Sept. 20.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

The king and the cloud

The story behind the Royal Rainmaking Project in Thailand

SUVAT CHIRAPANT

In the drought-prone plateau of Isan in the northeastern region of Thailand, farming is the way of life for almost half of the population. Dependent on rainfall to sustain their crops, farmers would traditionally gather at the beginning of the wet season to shoot homemade Bang Fai rockets to the sky to ask the weather god to release the monsoon. According to folklore, the higher and louder the rockets blast into the sky, the better. The deity will likely be more pleased with the offering and allow plentiful rainfall for the season's harvest.

On 14 November 1955, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej The Great travelled through the dried-up Isan region during a royal visit. The then 28-year-old monarch noted the effects of water deficiency in the area, which caused low crop yields and subsequently, the people to suffer from chronic poverty and malnutrition. When the young king looked up to the sky in hope of finding a solution, he noticed that the weather was cloudy, yet it did not result into precipitation. As every cloud has a silver lining, literally, King Bhumibol found one while watching the clouds - an idea of how to draw droplets from the clouds onto the farmlands.

Having shown keen interest in science from a young age, the King was equipped with knowledge on technological research from his enrolment at the Faculty of Science at the University of Lausanne. After 14 years of research on meteorology and weather modification, the first experiment in making artificial rain was attempted on 1 July 1969. It was quite a remarkable success. After the fleet of aircraft had distributed dry-ice flakes over the top of the clouds, it started to rain within 15 minutes. This operation marked the dawn of

what is now acknowledged by Thais as "The Royal Rainmaking Project".

Since then, the project has gone through a series of transformations to perfect the artificial rainmaking process.

The rainmaking technique, however, is exclusive to Thailand. In 2001, King Bhumibol received recognition for the Royal Rainmaking Project from the EUREKA organization "for an invention that is beneficial to the world." In 2003, King Bhumibol was granted a patent for weather



modification from the European Patent Office. Ever since the invention caught the attention of the international community, many countries have sought cooperation with Thailand to apply this know-how in addressing their own drought problems. Jordan, for instance, was granted the use of the rainmaking technique in 2009, through an MOU for training and technology transfer. Other countries who have sought cooperation include Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Australia, and the Philippines.

Today, there is no need to rely on weather gods, when citizens can submit a request for rain where needed, and rain shall be granted. The

project enables Thai farmers to harvest without disruption, and to fill hydroelectric dams to help fulfill the increasing demand for electricity.

The project has been upgraded to a Bureau in 1992 and in 2013 it became the Department of Royal Rainmaking and Agricultural Aviation. In Thailand, 14 November is now celebrated as "Father of Royal Rainmaking Day".

In 2019, the Department conducted 1,673 rainmaking operations across the country. Almost 89 percent of the flights were successful, producing rainfall over 63 million hectares of forest, agricultural area, and reservoirs. The downpour of rain has increased the amount of water reserves by 2,595 million cubic metres. Still, the demand of artificial rain is expected to rise due to air pollution problems and the effects of global warming, and the department is now exploring the use of rockets to help scatter the rainmaking substance over the cloud.

Today, under the guidance of His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn, the legacy of the Royal Rainmaking Project continues to live on. Following in his father's footsteps, King Vajiralongkorn has also initiated various irrigation projects to address drought, such as the construction of six reservoirs in the western province of Ratchaburi, and the development of canal systems, check dams, and levees to assist farmers in the deep south of Thailand. This is one of the many testimonies of the vision, continued dedication, perseverance, and ingenuity of the monarchs in the Chakri Dynasty watching over the Thai people and the country.

Suvat Chirapant is currently the Deputy Secretary General and Advisor on Foreign Affairs of the Office of Chaipattana Foundation. He had been a career diplomat until 2017.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
College Education Development Project (CEDP)
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Memo No. 350/mkc/2020 Date: 30/12/2020

e-Tender Notice 01/2020-2021

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following package:

Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Name of works	Last date and time of tender security submission	Tender closing date & time
1.	531374	Renovation of Office Room Classroom, Lab, Library and Auditorium of Mohammadpur Kendriya College, Dhaka	18-Jan-2021 01:00pm	18-Jan-2021 02:00pm

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted.
To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.
The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks' branches up to 17 January 2021.
Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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