

Australia police foil  
NY's Eve terror plot

AFP, Melbourne

An Islamic State sympathiser planned to buy a gun and kill as many revellers as possible on New Year's Eve in Melbourne, police alleged yesterday after foiling the plot. Ali Ali, born in Australia to Somali parents, was arrested in a raid on a house in the Melbourne suburb of Werribee on Monday.

German pro-refugee  
mayor stabbed

AFP, Berlin

German Chancellor Merkel yesterday condemned a knife attack against a town mayor, apparently motivated by the local leader's pro-refugee stance. Andreas Hollstein, 54, mayor of Altena, was stabbed Monday evening at a kebab shop by a man who had loudly criticised his liberal refugee policy.

Canada media groups  
to close 34 newspapers

AFP, Ottawa

Two of Canada's leading newspaper groups, Postmedia and Torstar, announced Monday a swap of 41 newspapers -- 34 of which will be shut down. No money was exchanged in the transaction, and both companies were left on the hook for nearly 300 laid off employees' severance pay.

Prince Harry, Meghan  
to marry in May

AFP, London

Prince Harry and his American fiancée Meghan Markle will marry at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle in May next year, Kensington Palace said yesterday. "Her Majesty The Queen has granted permission for the wedding to take place in the chapel. The Royal Family will pay for the wedding," the palace said in a statement.



People watch Mount Agung volcano erupt from a cafe near Amed, Karangasem Regency, Bali, Indonesia yesterday. Evacuation centres and hotels in Bali filled up with thousands seeking refuge as the volcano threatened to explode in a major eruption, forcing the airport to close for a second day.

PHOTO:  
REUTERS

3,000 migrants died  
in Med this yr: IOM

AFP, Geneva

More than 3,000 migrants and refugees have died crossing the Mediterranean in a desperate bid to reach Europe's shores since the start of the year, the International Organization for Migration said yesterday.

The figure so far represents a 40 percent drop compared to last year's record of 5,000 known or suspected drownings.

"That mark (was) probably passed sometime over last weekend," when more than 30 migrants died off the coast of Libya, IOM spokesman Joel Millman told reporters in Geneva.

The 3,033 deaths happened across three main sea routes in the Mediterranean.

"We've been saying this for years and we'll keep on saying it: It's no longer enough to simply count these tragic statistics. We must also act," IOM director general William Lacy Swing said in a statement.

The number of migrants and refugees who have arrived in Europe this year -- nearly 164,000 -- is less than half of last year's total of 348,000.

Three-quarters of the arrivals in 2017 have been in Italy, the remainder in Greece, Cyprus and Spain.

The flow has been stemmed by controversial deals between the EU, Turkey and Libya.

The EU has been desperate to slow the migrant influx via Libya and Turkey, the two main routes, with more than 1.5 million people reaching Europe since 2015.

Kenya president sworn  
in for a second term

Rival Odinga promises own inauguration

REUTERS, Nairobi

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta was sworn in for a second term yesterday, shortly before riot police teargassed the convoy of opposition leader Raila Odinga who told supporters he would be sworn in himself on Dec 12.

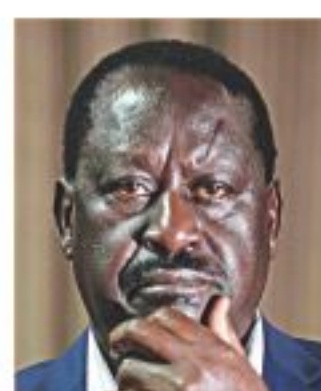
Kenyatta won a repeat presidential election on Oct. 26 that was boycotted by Odinga, who said it would not be free and fair. The Supreme Court nullified the first presidential election, in August, over irregularities.

Kenyatta's speech acknowledged that the extended election season has divided Kenya, a Western ally in a volatile region, and blunted growth in East Africa's richest economy.

"The elections are now firmly behind us ... I will devote my time and energy to build bridges," Kenyatta told the rapturous crowd in a sports stadium in the capital of Nairobi as he formally began his second, five-year term.



Kenyatta



Odinga

But he said Kenyans needed to "free ourselves from the baggage of past grievances, and ... keep to the rule of law".

Supporters of Kenyatta -- who won with 98 percent of the vote after Odinga's boycott -- want Odinga to engage in talks and move on.

But Odinga says talk of unity is tantamount to surrender.

He accuses the ruling party of stealing the election, rampant corruption.

"On Dec. 12, we will have an assembly that will swear me in," Odinga told supporters gathered along a road in the Nairobi suburb of Eastlands after police sealed off the location where he had planned to hold a rally earlier in the day.

Minutes after Odinga spoke, riot police teargassed his convoy and charged the crowd.

A senior police officer who earlier reported one fatality said: "We are aware there is another person dead and it has been said that he was also shot dead."

Pakistan uneasy  
after Islamist deal

AFP, Islamabad

Commuters were jubilant yesterday as a main highway into Islamabad reopened three weeks after an Islamist sit-in blocked it, as uneasy soul-searching grew among many Pakistanis over the government's capitulation to the protest demands.

The Islamabad Highway, used daily by thousands travelling from the garrison city of Rawalpindi into the Pakistani capital, was back to normal yesterday, with traffic flowing, shops open, and sanitation workers cleaning up the mess left behind by the protesters.

The previously little-known hardline group Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah Pakistan (TLY) had virtually paralysed Islamabad, where there is little in the way of public transportation. Drivers were forced to go hours out of their way or overcrowded, potholed sideroads unsuited for heavy traffic.

"Everything clear and moving. Its (sic) good to be back in route," commuter Nauman Naseer posted on a Facebook traffic updates group.

But joy on the roads was dampened for many Pakistanis by fear that a dangerous precedent has been set.

TLY had demanded the resignation of Pakistan's law minister Zahid Hamid over a small, hastily-reversed amendment to the oath election candidates must swear.

The demonstrators had linked the change to blasphemy, a hugely sensitive charge in conservative Muslim Pakistan.



A police prison van, destroyed during clashes, is cleared from the road yesterday a day after the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan Islamist political party called off nationwide protests in Islamabad, Pakistan.

PHOTO: REUTERS

The government was forced to seek help from the military -- widely seen as the country's most powerful institution -- after a bungled attempt to clear the sit-in over the weekend devolved into deadly violence.

The law minister resigned on Monday, with protest leaders saying the government would meet all their demands in a deal the army helped broker.

"It is a surrender so abject that the mind is numb and the heart sinks," wrote the country's leading English newspaper Dawn in a blistering editorial on the deal titled "Capitulation".

"Something profound changed in the country yesterday and the reverberations will be felt for a long time."

But Daily Jang, the country's largest Urdu-language newspaper, praised the outcome and role of the military -- especially army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa -- in ending the protest.

The Islamabad High Court on Monday demanded a full accounting of the agreement and the part played by the military.

Many of the protesters chanted "Long live the Pakistan Army!" as they dispersed, AFP reporters saw.

ADDRESS TO NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS

Trump uses racist slur

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Donald Trump told a group of Native Americans there was a representative in Congress called "Pocahontas" -- the racial slur he frequently uses in reference to Senator Elizabeth Warren.

Speaking in the White House to Navajo Native American "code talkers", military veterans who used their indigenous language as a code to pass messages during Second World War, he said they had been in the country "long before any of us were here".

"Although we have a representative in Congress who they say was here a long time ago," he added. "They call her Pocahontas."

As Trump spoke in the Oval Office, the veterans stared at him. They said nothing and nobody laughed at the President's supposed joke. He then quickly put his hand on the shoulder of one of the veterans and said: "But you know what -- I like you, because you are special."

Trump's comments were immediately

condemned as racist by Warren and others.

"This was supposed to be an event to honour heroes, people who put it all on the line for our country," she told MSNBC. "It is deeply unfortunate that the president of the United States can't even make it through a ceremony honouring these heroes without throwing out a racial slur."

Her fellow Massachusetts senator, Ed Markey, said: "What Mr Trump said about my partner, Senator Warren is a slur. It disparages the Native American war heroes, standing right beside the President, who risked their lives to protect his right to make such a disgusting comment."

The White House sought to dismiss the criticism. Asked if the word was racist, White House press secretary Sara Huckabee Sanders, said: "I don't think that it is."

Many pointed out that Trump's words appeared all the more insensitive given that they were made in front of portrait of Andrew Jackson, the seventh US president who forced hundreds of thousands of indigenous from their land in the 1830s.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (L) and Advisor to US President Ivanka Trump (R) arrive at the Global Entrepreneurship Summit at the Hyderabad convention centre (HICC) in Hyderabad yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pak couple murdered  
in 'honour killing'

AFP, Karachi

Pakistani police have exhumed the bodies of a couple believed to have been murdered and hastily buried by their families after they eloped, in the country's latest "honour killing" case.

Authorities in the port city of Karachi have arrested at least nine people connected to the double homicide, including the father of the male victim, but admitted that several family members sought in the case were still on the run.

The couple were reported missing when the owner of the house they rented in western Karachi entered the property after they gone missing for three days and discovered bloodstains around the home.

"The autopsy report says that the couple were killed by strangulation," Dr Rohina Hasan of the government-run Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, told AFP yesterday.

Police believe the couple were murdered by family members, including male relatives of both victims, after they eloped without their consent.

Authorities later began rounding up relatives of the missing pair, who confirmed they had been killed by their families and buried in unmarked graves at a cemetery.

"Both were killed in the name of honour," said police officer Qasim Hameed on Monday.

Police said the bodies had been stuffed into gunny sacks and dumped in separate graves.

N Korea tests ballistic missile

AFP, Seoul

North Korea fired a ballistic missile early today, South Korean military officials said, the first such launch in two months and just a week after the US slapped fresh sanctions on the hermit state and declared it a state sponsor of terrorism.

The North has stoked international alarm over its banned nuclear missile programme but before Wednesday had not staged a missile test since September 15, raising hopes that ramped-up sanctions were having an impact.

The missile flew east from South Pyongyang Province, the military Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.

South Korea's military staged a "precision strike" missile exercise in response, Yonhap news agency said, also quoting the JCS.

Seoul's unification minister had on

Tuesday said signs of unusual activity had been detected in North Korea, hinting at a possible missile test.

US President Donald Trump was briefed on the ballistic missile test while it was still in the air, the White House said.

Trump was visiting Congress at the time of the launch and "was briefed, while the missile was still in the air, on the situation in North Korea," according to press secretary Sarah Sanders.

The US last week unveiled new sanctions targeting North Korean shipping, raising pressure on Pyongyang to abandon its atomic weapons programme.

Pyongyang condemned the move as a "serious provocation" and warned that sanctions would never succeed.

In September the North conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test and staged an intermediate-range missile launch over Japan.



ANTI-CORRUPTION PROBE

Top Chinese general  
hangs himself

AFP, Beijing

A Chinese general has killed himself in his Beijing home after becoming the latest top official ensnared by President Xi Jinping's sweeping anti-corruption campaign, state media said yesterday.

Zhang Yang, a member of the state's Central Military Commission, was being investigated over connections to two graft-tainted former senior military officers when he hanged himself on November 23, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

Xi promised during last month's Communist Party congress to intensify graft crackdowns which have already brought down 1.5 million party officials of various levels -- including top military brass -- since 2012.

Zhang, 66, was previously head of the state military commission's political work department. Before the congress, he was also part of the Communist Party's Central Military Commission. Members of the two bodies overlap.

According to Xinhua, which cited a commission statement, Zhang "gravely violated disciplinary protocols and broke the law, was suspected of bribery as well as taking bribes, and holding valuable assets whose origins are unclear."

Irish deputy  
PM resigns  
amid crisis

AFP, Dublin

Irish Deputy Prime Minister Frances Fitzgerald is resigning in a bid to ease a political crisis that was threatening to bring down the government, Ireland's public broadcaster RTE reported yesterday.

The crisis erupted last week and could have led to snap elections before Christmas, at a critical time for Ireland ahead of an EU summit where the future of the Irish border after Brexit will dominate.

RTE said Fitzgerald told cabinet colleagues that she was "resigning for the sake of the country and to avoid a general election".

The resignation means that a no-confidence motion put forward in



parliament by the main opposition Fianna Fail party "has been dropped and so too has the threat of a pre-Christmas election," RTE reported.

Fianna Fail has propped up Prime Minister Leo Varadkar's minority government since an inconclusive general election in 2016.

The crisis erupted last week, just as Ireland is trying to extract guarantees from Britain that its border with British-ruled Northern Ireland will remain open even after Brexit ahead of the EU summit next month.

Britain has said it wants to leave the EU's single market and customs union when it quits the EU, which could mean customs checks along the Irish border.