

NEWS IN brief

Second Kim meet 'in Jan or Feb': Trump

AFP, Washington
US President Donald Trump said Saturday he hoped to organize a second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in early 2019, perhaps as soon as January or February. Trump told reporters traveling home to Washington with him aboard Air Force One from Argentina that "three sites" were in consideration for the meeting, without naming them.

Leftist Obrador sworn in as Mexico president

AFP, Mexico City
Anti-establishment leftist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador vowed a "deep and radical" change in Mexico as he assumed the country's presidency Saturday, five months after winning a landslide election victory. The new president inherits a sticky set of problems, a war with drug cartels, corruption and migrant issues, from his unpopular predecessor, Enrique Pena Nieto.

US admiral found dead in Bahrain

AFP, Washington
The admiral leading US Navy operations in the Middle East was found dead Saturday in Bahrain, the military branch said, adding that no foul play was suspected in the case. Vice admiral Scott Stearnes, who began his post as commander of US Naval Forces Central Command -- including the US Fifth Fleet -- and Combined Maritime Forces in May, was found dead at his residence in the Gulf country.

BITS OF HISTORY (DECEMBER 02)

- 1971:** The United Arab Emirates was formed.
- 1990:** After German reunification, Chancellor Helmut Kohl's coalition of CDU/CSU and FDP won the first free all-German elections since 1932.
- 1993:** Pablo Escobar, boss of the Medellin cocaine cartel in Colombia, was killed in a shootout as police tried to arrest him.

France mulls state of emergency

REUTERS, Paris
President Emmanuel Macron rushed to the Arc de Triomphe yesterday after one of France's most revered monuments was vandalised by rioters, with the government considering a state of emergency after the worst bout of unrest for years.

Masked, black-clad groups ran amok across central Paris on Saturday, torching dozens of cars and buildings, looting shops, smashing windows and fighting police in the worst unrest the capital has seen since 1968, posing the most formidable challenge Emmanuel Macron has faced in his 18-month-old presidency.

Macron and key ministers meet yesterday to consider declaring an emergency to prevent a recurrence of the riots. The government is open to dialogue but will not change course, spokesman Benjamin Griveaux said. A popular revolt over fuel tax hikes and

Masked protesters ran amok in central Paris in worst violence in decades

400 arrested, 133 injured; key monuments vandalised

Defiant Macron holds emergency cabinet meeting, cancels visit to COP24 meet

VIOLENT NATIONWIDE PROTESTS OVER FUEL TAX HIKE, HIGH LIVING COSTS



high living costs erupted suddenly on Nov 17 and has spread quickly via social media. Protesters have blocked roads across France and impeded access to shopping malls, factories and some fuel depots.

On his return from the G20 summit in Argentina, Macron paid an immediate visit to the Arc de Triomphe, the 19th-century arch that towers over the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and avenues nearby where cars had been torched and luxury shops pillaged.

TV footage showed the interior of the Arc ransacked, a statue of Marianne, symbol of the French republic, smashed, and graffiti scrawled on the exterior ranging from anti-

capitalist slogans to social demands and calls for Macron's resignation.

Under heavy security, the French leader spoke with police and firefighters on one of the avenues near the Champs Elysees boulevard, with some bystanders cheering but more jeering him, including yellow-jacketed protesters chanting, "Macron, resign!"

The protests began as a backlash against Macron's fuel tax hikes, but have mined a vein of deep dissatisfaction felt towards his liberal economic reforms, which many voters feel favour the wealthy and big business.

Macron says higher diesel taxes are needed to fight climate change by spurring

motorists to drive cleaner cars. Authorities were caught off guard by Saturday's escalation in violence overshadowing the spontaneous protest movement, dubbed the "yellow vests" because many participants are wearing the fluorescent safety jackets kept in all cars in France.

In Paris, police said they had arrested more than 400 people while 133 were injured, including 23 members of the security forces. Police fired stun grenades, tear gas and water cannon at protesters at the top of the Champs-Elysees, at the Tuilleries Garden near the Louvre museum, and other sites.

Disturbances also rocked several cities and towns and across France - from Charleville Mezieres in the northeast to Nantes in the west and Marseille in the south.

A driver was killed overnight in an accident at a yellow vest blockade in southeastern France after a car collided with a heavy goods vehicle, the third death since the protest began, a gendarmerie official told Reuters.

Twenty cars, including three police vehicles, were also torched near Narbonne in the southwest, the official said.

Authorities said violent groups from the far right and far left as well as "thugs" from the suburbs had infiltrated the yellow vests movement in Paris on Saturday, though Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said most of those arrested were regular protesters who had been egged on by fringe groups.



'The war will continue' in Ukraine: Putin

AFP, Buenos Aires

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Saturday he saw no end to the conflict in eastern Ukraine "as long as the current authorities remain in power."

"The current Ukrainian authorities have no interest in resolving the conflict, especially by peaceful means," Putin told reporters at the end of the G20 summit in Argentina.

"As long as they remain in power, the war will continue," the Russian leader said.

The conflict pitting Russian separatists against Ukrainian government forces is estimated to have claimed more than 10,000 lives -- one-third of them civilian -- since it broke out four years ago.

Putin also said he briefed his US counterpart Donald Trump on the Ukraine crisis when the leaders met briefly at a G20 summit dinner Friday.

"We spoke standing up. I replied to his questions about the incident in the Black Sea," he said.

Putin strode into the summit under a cloud, having drawn outrage from Europe over last week's incident in which his navy detained three Ukrainian ships and 24 sailors -- causing Trump to abruptly cancel their scheduled meeting.

Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko kept up the pressure from Kiev, saying Putin had refused to take his calls since the crisis started.

He said that when the incident happened, he instructed his office to set up a call with the Kremlin leader to say "we are ready for this negotiation to de-escalate... and unfortunately, until now, Putin did not answer my request for a direct phone conversation."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel took Putin to task at length over the naval spat, a day after French President Emmanuel Macron urged him to "de-escalate" the crisis.

Enough evidence to indict PM

Says Israeli cops; Netanyahu slams baseless recommendation

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli police yesterday said they had found enough evidence for bribery and fraud charges to be brought against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife in a third corruption case against the Israeli leader.

Authorities allege Netanyahu awarded regulatory favours to Israel's leading telecommunications company, Bezeq Telecom Israel, in return for more positive coverage of him and his wife on a news website, Walla, owned by the company. Netanyahu denies any wrongdoing.

If indicted, the four-term prime minister would be facing one of the greatest challenges to his political survival. Despite his dominance of Israeli politics, the newest police recommendation comes just after his right-wing coalition's majority was reduced to a precarious one seat in parliament.

The final decision on whether to indict rests with Israel's attorney-general, who is still weighing whether to charge Netanyahu in the other two cases. Those relate to allegations that Netanyahu accepted gifts from busi-

nessmen and that he tried to strike a deal with a different media mogul for better coverage in return for curbs on a competing newspaper.

Some analysts have said Netanyahu could call a snap vote in light of the legal proceedings against him. The

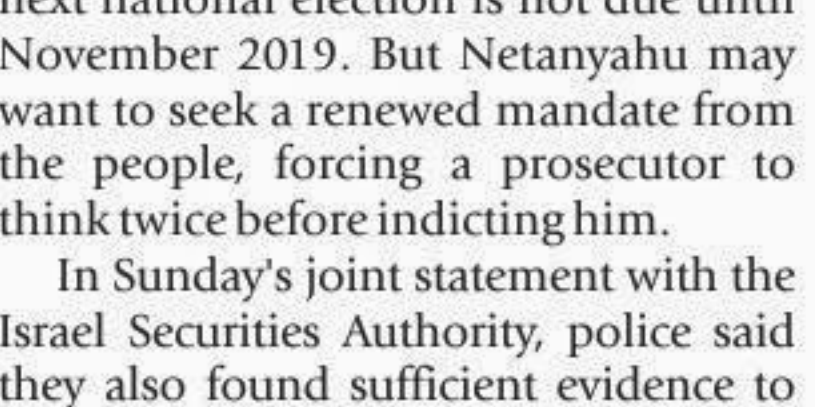
charge Shaul Elovitch, a family friend of Netanyahu, with bribery. At the time Elovitch was chairman and controlling shareholder of Bezeq. The authorities said there was also evidence to charge the company's then-CEO Stella Handler with fraud.

In their statement, the authorities said: "The main suspicion is that the prime minister bribes and acted out of a conflict of interest by intervening and making regulatory decisions that favour Shaul Elovitch and Bezeq." It alleged that Netanyahu sought to interfere with content of Bezeq's Walla website "in a way that would benefit him."

The police also recommended that charges of fraud and breach of trust be brought against Netanyahu and his wife.

Shortly after the police recommendations were made public, Netanyahu issued a statement saying that the allegations had no legal basis and that ultimately nothing would come of the investigation.

"I am sure that also in this case the relevant authorities, after examining the matter, will reach the same conclusion - that there was nothing because there is nothing," he said.



CORRUPTION CASE

US to keep aiding Saudis in Yemen

AFP, Buenos Aires

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo vowed that the United States would continue supporting Saudi Arabia's military campaign in Yemen, despite rising outrage over the kingdom.

Speaking from a Group of 20 summit in Buenos Aires, Pompeo acknowledged that the humanitarian crisis in Yemen -- where millions are at risk of starvation -- had reached "epic proportions" but said Washington and Riyadh were offering aid.

"The program that we're involved in today we intend to continue," Pompeo told CNN when asked about military assistance to the Saudi-led coalition.

The US Senate on Wednesday took an initial vote to cut off the war support, with 14 members of President Donald Trump's Republican Party defying appeals from Pompeo and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. A final vote could come in the next week, setting the stage for a fresh battle if Trump vetoes the bill.

Pompeo, who met in Buenos Aires with his Saudi counterpart, has backed the war as a way to counter Iran, which has ties to Yemen's Huthi rebels.

According to UN figures, nearly 10,000 people have been killed since the Saudi-led coalition joined the conflict in 2015 to bolster the government against Huthi rebels.

UN agencies say that 14 million people are at risk of starvation in Yemen.

ASIA BIBI BLASPHEMY CASE

Islamists charged with terrorism and treason

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Pakistan has charged a right-wing leader with treason and terrorism over his party's disruption of daily life with nationwide rallies following the acquittal of a Christian woman in a blasphemy case.

Khadim Hussain Rizvi, chief of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), and three other party leaders were charged on Saturday for making incendiary remarks against the judiciary and military chiefs after Aasia Bibi was acquitted of blasphemy by the Supreme Court.

"Today we have decided to take legal action against the TLP leadership," Pakistan's Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told reporters. More than 3,000 people had been arrested in connection with the TLP protests.

Thousands of demonstrators, rallied by TLP, had blocked major roads, burning cars and buses last month, as they called for Bibi's execution to be carried out. The chaos followed a landmark verdict which saw the court overturn Bibi's death penalty and ordered her release after eight years in jail.

During the violent protests, one of the TLP co-founders, Afzal Qadri, called for mutiny against the powerful army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, murder of the Supreme Court judges who acquitted Bibi, and branded Prime Minister Imran Khan as a "son of Jews".

An Indonesian jockey rides two bulls with a cart during a traditional sport bull race locally called "pacu jawi" in Pariangan of Tanah Datar regency in West Sumatra on Saturday.

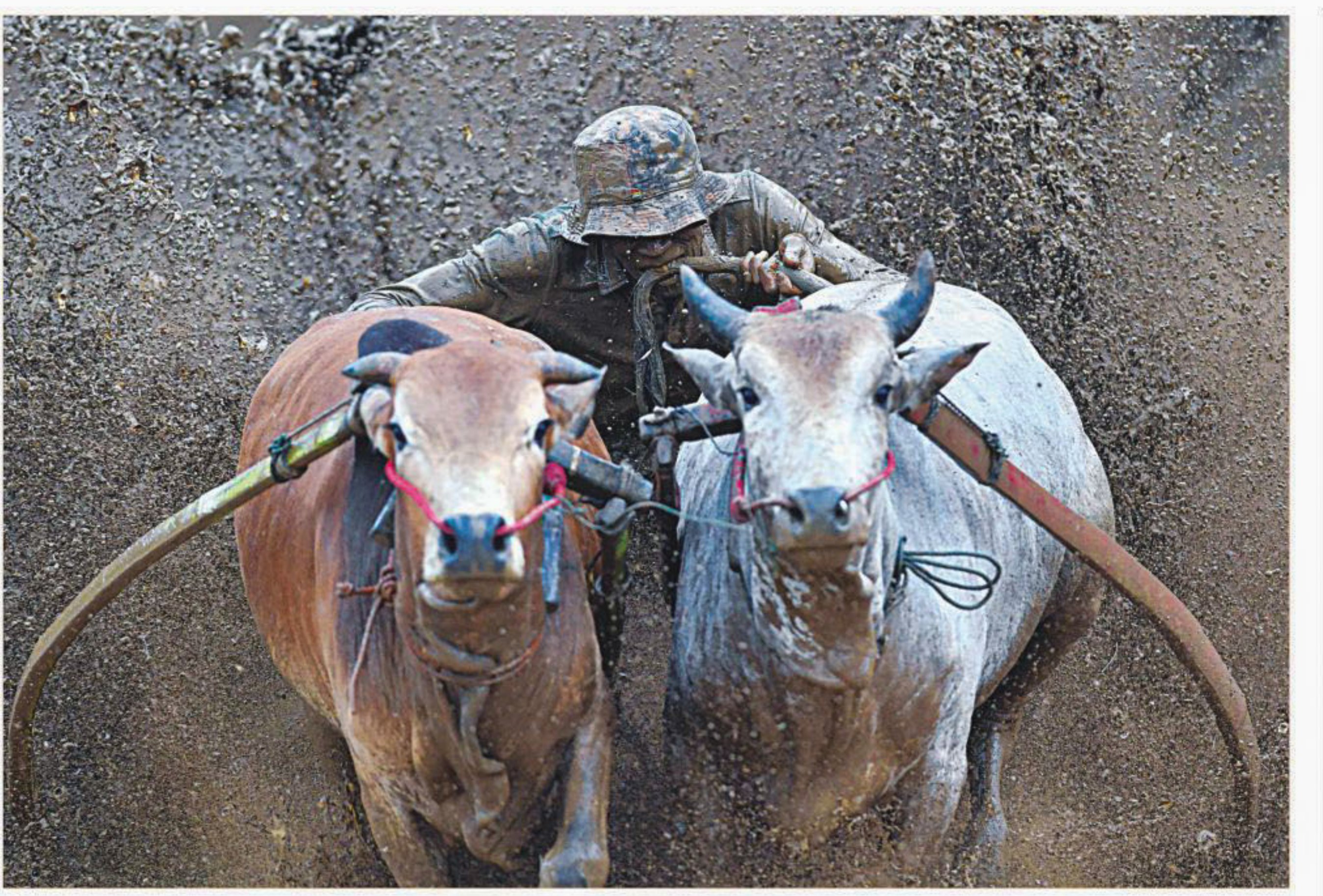


PHOTO: AFP

Egypt actress faces trial over dress

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

An Egyptian actress is set to face trial next month for wearing a see-through dress at the Cairo International Film Festival that showed her legs, a judicial source said on Saturday.

Rania Youssef appeared at the closing session of the event on Thursday wearing a black lacy dress that exposed what some commentators described as a swimsuit beneath it.

This prompted two lawyers to lodge a case against her accusing the actress of "inciting debauchery", a charge that could land her in jail for up to five years if she is convicted, the source said.

The first legal case alleging obscenity was filed by lawyer Amro Abdelsalam and the second by Samir Sabri, another lawyer known for taking celebrities to court.

COP24 begins with direst warnings

AFP, Katowice

With the direst environmental warnings yet still ringing in their ears, nations gathered in Poland yesterday for a UN summit aimed at heading off the "urgent threat" of runaway climate change.

The UN talks come at a crucial juncture in mankind's response to planetary warming. The smaller, poorer nations that will bear its devastating brunt are pushing for richer states to make good on the promises they made in the 2015 Paris agreement.

In Paris three years ago, countries committed to limit global temperature rises to well below two degrees



Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), and to the safer cap of 1.5C if at all possible.

But with only a single degree Celsius of warming so far, the world has already seen a crescendo of deadly wildfires, heatwaves and hurricanes made more destructive by rising seas.

In a rare intervention, presidents of previous UN climate summits issued a joint statement as the talks got underway, calling on states to take "decisive action... to tackle

these urgent threats".

"The impacts of climate change are increasingly hard to ignore," said the statement, a copy of which was obtained by AFP. "We require deep transformations of our economies and societies."

At the COP24 climate talks, nations must agree to a rulebook palatable to all 183 states who have ratified the Paris deal. This is far from a given: the dust is

still settling from US President Donald Trump's decision to ditch the Paris accord. G20 leaders on Saturday agreed a final communique after their summit in Buenos Aires, declaring that the Paris Agreement was "irreversible".

But it said the US "reiterates its decision to withdraw" from the landmark accord.

The UN negotiations got off to a chaotic start in the Polish mining city of Katowice yesterday, with the opening session delayed nearly three hours by a series of last-ditch submissions from countries.

Even solid progress on the Paris goals may not be enough to prevent runaway global warming, as a series of major climate reports have outlined.

Just this week, the UN's environment programme said the voluntary national contributions agreed in Paris would have to triple if the world was to cap global warming below 2C. For 1.5C, they must increase fivefold.

While the data are clear, a global political consensus over how to tackle climate change remains elusive.

TAMPERING ROW IN INDIA STATE POLLS

CCTVs in EVM room faced blackout: EC

NDTV ONLINE

The Election Commission (EC) in India has admitted that CCTV cameras installed at a Bhopal strongroom where electronic voting machines (EVMs) were stored after the Madhya Pradesh polls did not function for over an hour due to an unprecedented power cut on Friday, resulting in a blackout that provoked accusations of tampering from opposition parties.

The election body also said that it has taken action against an official who allegedly delayed the handover of EVMs in Sagar by nearly two days, when it should have been done soon after the completion of the polls on November 28.

"A report obtained from the Bhopal Collector states that CCTV cameras and an LED display installed outside the strongroom did not function from 8:19 am to 9:35 am on 30.11.2018 due to failure of electricity supply. Because of this, recording could not be done during the given time period. An additional LED screen, an inverter and a generator have been installed in order to ensure continuous electricity supply," a statement released by the poll body on Saturday read.

Meanwhile, Sunil Arora, who was appointed as the new Chief Election Commissioner by President Ram Nath Kovind, has taken charge yesterday. He succeeds OP Rawat, who demitted office on Saturday.



Sabri told the AFP news agency that Youssef's appearance "did not meet societal values, traditions and morals and therefore undermined the reputation of the festival and the reputation of Egyptian women in particular".

Her trial is scheduled to begin on January 12.

Pictures of the 44-year-old star left social media users divided, with some criticising her and others defending Youssef's right to wear what she wants.

Youssef later issued an "apology" on her official Twitter account to the "many (people) angered" by her appearance.

Former COP heads urge 'deep transformations of our economies and societies.'

G20 says Paris agreement 'irreversible.'