

NEWS IN brief

Somalia refuses to take back expelled UN envoy

AFP, United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday agreed to appoint a new UN envoy to Somalia after its president refused to reverse a decision to expel a representative for raising human rights concerns. Nicholas Haysom, an experienced diplomat, was told to leave Somalia on Tuesday after he questioned the government's decision to arrest an Al-Shabaab defector who was running in elections.

6 schoolchildren killed in India bus crash

AFP, Shimla

Six children were killed along side their driver and 12 more were injured after their bus fell into a gorge in northern India yesterday, police said. Seven injured students were said to be in a critical condition after their vehicle crashed in the Himalayan mountains in Himachal Pradesh state. All children aboard were between four and 14 years old.

Tear gas fired to break up Sudan protests

AFP, Khartoum

Sudanese police fired tear gas on Friday to break up protests in the capital Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman, witnesses said. Anti-government rallies have rocked cities across Sudan since December 19 when protests first broke out over a government decision to raise the price of bread.

Car bomb injures six in Pakistan's Peshawar

AFP, Peshawar

A car bomb injured six people in Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar yesterday, police said, with the blast ripping through multiple storefronts. Officers said a 10 kilogramme improvised explosive device (IED) was fitted to a car parked in the Saddar area of the city. At least three stores were damaged by the bomb's impact.



Brazil leader fires hundreds of 'left wing' civil servants

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Brazil's new president has authorised the dismissal of civil servants who do not share his far-right ideology, it has been reported.

Having taken office this week, Jair Bolsonaro has launched a purge of left-wing government officials with approximately 300 people expected to be dismissed.

Officials who are seen as being supportive of the previous left-wing and centrist governments will be removed to "clean the house", Bolsonaro's chief of staff Onyx Lorenzoni said.

"It's the only way to govern with our ideas, our concepts and to carry out what Brazil's society decided in its majority," Lorenzoni said, according to Die Welt.

He added that the vast proportion of those dismissed are on temporary contracts and their removal is necessary to "do away with the Socialist and Communist ideas that during 30 years have led us to the chaos in which we live."

Bolsonaro was elected to the Brazilian presidency on a far-right platform, where he promised to overhaul many aspects of life in Latin America's largest nation.

In his first few hours in office he targeted Brazil's indigenous groups, descendants of slaves and the LGBT community with executive orders.



A Kashmiri boatman clears snow from shikara boats near a frozen portion of Dal Lake after snowfall in Srinagar, yesterday. Kashmir's road links with the rest of India were cut off as heavy snowfall closed the Jammu-Srinagar national highway.

PHOTO: AFP

SABARIMALA TEMPLE ROW IN KARNATAKA

Violence rages on

AFP, Thiruvananthapuram

Twin arson and bomb attacks rocked southern India yesterday, continuing a violent backlash that followed the entry of two women into a Hindu temple that forbids female devotees.

The Sabarimala temple in Kerala state has been at the centre of a prolonged showdown between religious hardliners and authorities since September, when India's top court overturned a ban on women aged 10 to 50 setting foot inside.

Police said unidentified attackers hurled a homemade bomb at the home of a politician from the rightwing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and set ablaze the office of its Hindu nationalist parent group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Both are opposed to the court's order to allow women inside the temple.

No injuries were reported, police said.

The fresh attacks came hours after unknown attackers bombed the house of a politician linked to the state's ruling Communist Party, which has vowed to implement the court order.

One person has died and more than 270 others have been injured since Wednesday, when thousands protested after two women devotees in their 40s prayed inside the temple.

The two local women had become the first to access the



entrance.

Modi's party accuses the state government of backing "anti-religious" groups to violate Hindu traditions.

The Communist Party has accused the BJP and RSS of inciting violence in the state.

But the Supreme Court in a landmark judgement in September overturned the Kerala court's ruling after six women lawyers petitioned it in 2006, challenging a ban they said violated their fundamental rights.

World pressure mounts on DR Congo ahead of election result

AFP, Kinshasa

DR Congo was on edge yesterday, just 24 hours ahead of a deadline for announcing preliminary results from last week's crucial presidential election as world powers heaped pressure on Kinshasa to respect voters' wishes.

Despite the January 6 deadline, the election commission chief warned earlier this week that publication of the provisional results may well be delayed in a move likely to stoke further tension in this notoriously unstable central African nation.

The December 30 vote saw 21 candidates running to replace President Joseph Kabila who has ruled the country for almost 18 years. Kabila had been due to step down two years ago, but managed to cling onto power, sparking widespread protests which were brutally repressed and leaving dozens dead.

Despite repeated delays, the vote went ahead last Sunday, pitting Kabila's hand-picked successor Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary against two opposition candidates, veteran heavyweight Felix Tshisekedi and newcomer Martin Fayulu.

Although election day itself was relatively

peaceful, many fears the result could be manipulated in Shadary's favour and with any delay likely to further exacerbate the situation. Frustrations have been building steadily since the election after the authorities cut internet access and blocked broadcasts by Radio France Internationale.

The European Union on Friday urged the authorities "to ensure the upcoming results conform with the Congolese people's vote". Washington has also urged Kinshasa to release "accurate" results and warned of sanctions against anyone seeking to "undermine the democratic process" in the former Belgian colony.

Although the UN Security Council met late Friday to discuss the election, it did not issue a concluding statement. It will hold another meeting on the issue on Tuesday.

The last two elections in 2006 and 2011, both of which were won by Kabila, were marrred by bloodshed, and many fear a repeat of the violence if the results are put in doubt. Between 1996 and 2003, DR Congo lived through two fully-fledged wars that claimed millions of lives through bloodshed, fighting, starvation and disease.



A crew member from the Dutch-flagged Sea-Watch 3 rescue vessel throws a buoy and a rope to rescue a migrant, after he dived on Friday from the vessel in the cold Mediterranean off Malta's coast, in an attempt to reach the shore by swimming. Rights activists accused Europe of clinching a new "record of shame" with its refusal to open ports to migrant children and families stranded at sea in the Mediterranean.

PHOTO: AFP

Ready to fight alone

Says Congress after Mayawati-Akhilesh Yadav UP snub

NDTV ONLINE

A day after sources indicated that Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati are looking at a "grand alliance" in Uttar Pradesh in India to take on the BJP in the 2019 general elections without partnering with the Congress, a senior leader from the Rahul Gandhi-led party yesterday said they are ready to go it alone in the state.

PL Punia, a Rajya Sabha member from the Congress, today said his party is preparing to contest alone.

"A coalition is not important... Our workers are ready... We have not spoken to anyone about an alliance," he said.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and Bahujan Samaj Party boss Mayawati met in Delhi on Friday over the seat sharing formula in Uttar Pradesh for the national elections. The two leaders, both upset with the Congress, are not too keen on allying with it in Uttar Pradesh, sources said.

However, this afternoon, a senior Samajwadi Party leader tried to downplay the reports. Ram Gopal Yadav, uncle of Akhilesh Yadav and effectively number 2 in Samajwadi Party, said talks of sidelining the Congress are

2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN INDIA



"imaginary".

"Why are you imagining?" he asked reporters.

Akhilesh Yadav had last week hinted at payback when his party's only lawmaker in Madhya Pradesh did not make it to new Chief Minister

Kamal Nath's list of ministers. The Congress, he said, had gone back on its promise to do so, despite his party's role in helping the Congress reach the majority mark.

"Thanks to the Congress, they did not make our vidhavak (legislator) a minister," Akhilesh Yadav had told reporters last week. By doing so, the Congress had "cleared the path for Uttar Pradesh," he had said.

Mayawati, after ruling out a pre-poll alliance with the Congress, had reluctantly extended support to the party after the recent round of assembly elections to keep the BJP out of power in Madhya Pradesh, where the Congress fell a whisker short of majority.

The BJP and its allies had won 73 of the 80 seats in the last general elections in Uttar Pradesh, but lost Gorakhpur and Phulpur bypolls to Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav - who set aside their bitter rivalry to team up - last year.

Storm kills 3 in Thailand, moves into Andaman Sea

CNN ONLINE

Tropical Storm Pabuk has been downgraded to a depression and is moving into the Andaman Sea after claiming three lives as it swept across Thailand, Thai authorities said yesterday.

Two elderly people drowned in Nakhon Si Thammarat, and a third person died after his fishing boat capsized in Pattani, according to Thailand's Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation.

The storm, which blew through outlying islands off Thailand's eastern coast Friday before crossing mainland provinces, has now reached the Andaman Sea on the western side of the country, Thai Meteorological Department spokesman Phuwieng Prakhamminta told reporters.

Thai authorities had issued warnings and opened shelters fearing extensive damage from Pabuk as it approached Thailand, which does not usually experience such fierce weather conditions.

Pabuk made landfall Friday in the Pak

Panang district of Nakhon Si Thammarat province around 3:30pm, with maximum sustained wind speeds of 95 kilometers per hour (59 mph), according to the Joint Typhoon Warning Center.

Some of the country's most popular tourist destinations, including Koh Samui, Koh Phangan and Koh Tao islands, along with islands in the Andaman Sea such as Phuket and Koh Phi Phi -- made famous by the movie "The Beach" -- were affected by the storm during what is peak holiday season.

A number of holidaymakers found themselves stranded in their resorts as ferry crossings and flights were canceled for safety reasons. Flights resumed yesterday.

It is highly unusual for tropical storms and typhoons to make landfall in Thailand. The last time a tropical storm made landfall in Thailand was in 1962, when Tropical Storm Harriet claimed 900 lives. The only typhoon ever to make landfall in the Southeast Asian nation was Typhoon Gay in 1989.

Iran to deploy warships to Atlantic: media

AFP, Tehran

Iran is to deploy its newest warship to the Atlantic Ocean on a five-month mission -- the navy's longest in a decade, the conservative Fars news agency reported yesterday.

"The navy has had a plan to deploy a flotilla to the Atlantic Ocean for a few years and now everything seems prepared to launch the mission," said Fars, which is considered close to Iran's military.

Rear Admiral Touraj Hassan-Moghadam told the official IRNA news agency on Friday that the mission would start early in the next Iranian year, which begins in late March.

The flotilla will comprise the new guided missile frigate destroyer escort Sahand, which was unveiled just last month, and the recently upgraded 33,000-ton fuel ship Kharg.

The vessels are expected to dock in a friendly Latin American country such as Venezuela, Fars said.

The ships are among Iran's largest and both are capable of carrying helicopters.

The Sahand is a radar-evading stealth ship capable of electronic warfare, Rear-Admiral Alireza Sheikhi told IRNA last month.

Meanwhile, Tehran yesterday claimed it has potential buyers of its oil despite US sanctions.

The United States withdrew from a nuclear deal with Iran last year and snapped sanctions in place to choke Iran's oil and banking industries, while temporarily allowing eight customers to keep buying crude from the Islamic Republic.

Iran said China, India, Japan, South Korea and other countries that were granted waivers from America to import Iranian oil are not willing to buy more oils than the sanctions permit.

However, without giving details, Zamaninia said: "Despite US pressures on Iranian oil market, the number of potential buyers of Iranian oil has significantly increased due to a competitive market, greed and pursuit of more profit."

The 180-day exemptions were also granted to Italy, Greece, Taiwan and Turkey.