

NEWS IN BRIEF

Gunmen kill Afghan radio journalist in car ambush

An Afghan radio journalist was shot dead yesterday in a car ambush in the central province of Ghor, officials said, the fifth media worker to be killed in two months. Besmullah Adel Aimaq, editor-in-chief of Voice of Ghor radio, was killed en route to Firoz Koh city, the capital of Ghor province, said Aref Aber, the governor's spokesman. In recent months, other prominent Afghans have been ambushed by gunmen or killed in bomb attacks. No group has yet claimed responsibility for Aimaq's murder. It comes weeks after the December 12 killing of Rahmatullah Nekzad, who was shot dead with a silenced pistol near his home in Ghazni. Two Taliban inmates who were freed ahead of peace talks between the insurgents and the Afghan government have been arrested in connection with Nekzad's murder, Afghanistan's spy agency the National Directorate of Security said late on Thursday.

Rakhine insurgents release ruling party politicians

Insurgents from western Myanmar yesterday released three ruling party politicians who had been kidnapped from conflict-torn Rakhine state, a spokesman for the insurgent group said, calling it a goodwill gesture to build trust with the government. The three - two women and a man - were abducted by the banned Arakan Army in mid-October while campaigning in Rakhine as candidates before a Nov. 8 election. The candidates were held for more than two months. Rakhine state has been roiled for more than a year by conflict between government troops and insurgents from the Arakan Army fighting for greater autonomy for the region. The fighting is separate from violence that has led to the flight of hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas, also from Rakhine state. The NLD scored another commanding win in the November parliamentary election. But in Rakhine the party lost most of the seats it took in 2015.

India, Pakistan exchange list of nuclear installations

Continuing a 30-year practice, India and Pakistan yesterday exchanged a list of their nuclear installations under a bilateral arrangement that prohibits the two countries from attacking each other's atomic facilities. The two countries exchanged the list of nuclear installations and facilities covered under the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between India and Pakistan, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. The exchange of the list came amid frosty ties between the two countries over the Kashmir issue as well as cross-border terrorism. The agreement was signed on December 31, 1988 and it came into force on January 27, 1991.

SOURCE: AFP, NDTV



New Year's Eve fireworks erupt over Ras al-Khaimah in United Arab Emirates; confetti flies around the countdown clock in Times Square during the virtual New Year's Eve event in New York City, New York; and nurses greet with a fist bump as they work during New Year's celebrations at a field hospital set up at a sports gym to treat patients suffering with the coronavirus disease in Santo Andre, Sao Paulo state, Brazil. Photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

SURGING NEW CORONAVIRUS CASES

UK in 'eye of the storm'

France tightens virus curfew as fears mute HNY celebrations

AGENCIES

British medics yesterday warned that hospitals around the country face a perilous few weeks amid surging new coronavirus infections that have been blamed on a new variant of the virus.

The coronavirus has killed at least 1,818,946 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally yesterday based on official sources. More than 83 million cases have been registered.

Amid surging global cases, fireworks above eerily quiet landmarks from Sydney Harbour Bridge to Copacabana beach welcomed the New Year.

A day after the United Kingdom posted a record 55,892 new infections and another 964 coronavirus-related deaths, concerns are mounting

about the effect on the overstretched National Health Service (NHS).

Field hospitals that were constructed in the early days of the pandemic but were subsequently mothballed are being reactivated.

The Royal College of Nursing's England director, Mike Adams, told Sky News that the UK was in the "eye of the storm" and that it was "infuriating" to see people not following the social distancing guidance or wearing masks.

New infections have more than doubled in recent weeks after a new variant that is said to be around 70 percent more contagious was found to be behind a big spike in cases around London and South East England.

In a joint statement on Thursday, the chief medical officers for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland,

said the first vaccine dose offers "substantial" protection.

Currently, two vaccines have been approved for use in the UK.

Just under one million people have received the first dose of the vaccine developed by American pharmaceutical firm Pfizer and German biotechnology company BioNTech, with a small minority also getting the second dose as planned after 21 days.

The French government yesterday announced that it was bringing forward by two hours a nighttime curfew in 15 regions to help combat the coronavirus, as infections remain high.

The measure had been urged by mayors increasingly concerned that their local health systems are being overburdened by an influx of new cases.

Trump extends US immigration bans

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump on Thursday extended a pair of immigration bans that block many "green card" applicants and temporary foreign workers from entering the country, measures he says are needed to protect US workers amid the pandemic-battered economy.

The bans, which were issued in April and June, were set to expire on Dec. 31, but will be extended until March 31, 2021, the latest in a series of last-gasp immigration moves by the outgoing Trump administration. A broad range of businesses oppose the ban on certain foreign workers.

President-elect Joe Biden, who takes office on Jan 20, has criticized the restrictions, but has not yet said whether he would immediately reverse them. Trump issued the bans in the form of presidential proclamations that could be swiftly undone.

At least 20 million people remain on unemployment benefits in the United States as the novel coronavirus continues to spread nationwide.

In October, a federal judge in California blocked Trump's ban on foreign guest workers as it applied to hundreds of thousands of US businesses that fought the policy in court. The judge found the ban would cause "irreparable harm" to the businesses by interfering with their operations and leading them to lay off employees and close open positions. The US Department of Justice appealed the decision to the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals, which is scheduled to hear arguments on Jan. 19.



Demonstrators march during a protest against racism and police brutality near the site where police officers shot and killed Somali-American Dolal Idd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US on Thursday night. Police shot Idd dead during a traffic stop on Wednesday, seven months after the killing of George Floyd by an officer in the same US city.

PHOTO: AFP

'Keep the light on'

With Brexit, independence drive gathers pace in Scotland

REUTERS, London

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon told Europe that Scotland would be back soon, just as the United Kingdom completed its transition period out of the bloc.

"Scotland will be back soon, Europe," she said on Twitter at 2300 GMT. "Keep the light on."

Her statement came as the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP), which Sturgeon leads, is keen to seize the political initiative and capitalise on frustrations after January 1.

The SNP makes no secret of its desire to hold a new referendum on independence after losing a previous one in 2014.

The party is widely tipped to win Scottish parliamentary elections next May, and victory would increase the pressure on the UK government in London to agree to a second vote.

According to a poll conducted by Savanta ComRes for The Scotsman newspaper in mid-December, 58 percent of Scots now support a break with the UK - an all-time high.

The streets of Scotland's capital are normally packed at Hogmanay, as people from across the country and around the world flock to see in the New Year in raucous style.



EU membership.

"Scotland didn't vote for Brexit and we certainly didn't vote for the UK government that is pushing this through," said Morag Williamson, a retired university teacher.

As Britain leaves Europe's single market and customs union, one local resident, Zoe Stewart, said she has never felt so out of touch with the rest of the country.

"I think it's really sad that we're leaving. I don't want to leave the EU," Stewart, who was one of the 62 percent of Scots who voted against Brexit, told AFP.

"I think we should go for it, independence," she said, raising a fist and smiling. "Just to be independent. Just to have our own choices and not follow England all the time."

Under a portrait of Sturgeon, Mike Blackshaw is already running an online campaign for a hypothetical referendum from his Yes Cafe, a hub for local pro-independence activists.

The badges and T-shirts are ready to go, combining the blue-and-white Saltire flag of Scotland and the stars of the EU.

"I think 2021 is going to be a busy year for the independence movement," says the veteran campaigner with a long white beard.

TEMPLE DEMOLITION

Pak province to pay for rebuilding

AFP, Peshawar

A Hindu temple in Pakistan destroyed by a Muslim mob last week will be rebuilt using provincial government funds, its information minister said yesterday.

Around 1,500 people descended on the temple - in a remote village of northeast Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province - after protesting against renovations being made to an adjoining building owned by a Hindu group.

They used sledgehammers to knock down walls before setting the building ablaze.

"We regret the damage caused by the attack," said Kamran Bangash, the provincial information minister.

Construction will start as soon as possible with the support of the Hindu community, he said, adding security would be provided at the site.

Pakistan's top court has ordered authorities to submit a report on the temple's destruction.

Discrimination and violence against religious minorities are common in Pakistan, where Muslims make up 97 percent of the population and Hindus around two percent.

The temple, which was destroyed in similar circumstances in 1997 and then rebuilt, is located some 160 kilometres southeast of Peshawar.

District police chief Irfanullah Khan told AFP around 45 people had been detained in connection with the incident - including a local cleric, Maulana Sharif, who is accused of inciting the mob.

Khan added police are also looking for Maulana Mirza Aqeem, the district leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), one of Pakistan's largest Islamist parties.

Last year, the United States placed Pakistan on a list of "countries of particular concern" for religious freedom violations.

TMC FOUNDATION DAY

Mamata vows to fight for people

THE HINDU ONLINE

The Trinamool Congress yesterday celebrated its 23rd Foundation Day across West Bengal with Chief Minister and party supremo Mamata Banerjee asserting that she will fight and work for the people.

"As Trinamool turns 23 today, I look back at the journey we began on January 1st, 1998. Our years have been of immense struggle, but throughout this time, we have continued to achieve our objective of being committed to the cause of only the people," Ms. Banerjee said on Twitter.

As West Bengal steps into the election year and the party is set to complete a decade in power, Banerjee vowed to carry on her fight to make the state better.

"On #TMCFoundationDay, I extend my sincere gratitude to our Maa-Mati-Manush

and all our workers who continue to fight with us in making Bengal better and stronger each day.

"The Trinamool family will carry on with this resolve for times to come!" she said on the microblogging site.

The TMC had issued instructions to its workers to conduct various programmes across the State to mark the occasion.

Banerjee broke away from the Congress and formed the TMC on January 1, 1998 with an objective to oust the then Left Front regime from power. The party achieved its goal in May 2011 after forging an alliance with the Congress.

The party faces a challenge in the next assembly elections, as the resurgent BJP has pulled out all the stops to defeat the TMC dispensation in the polls, slated to be held in April-May this year.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Memo No. 1748

Date: 31/12/2020

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the below works.

Tender ID No.	Package No.	Name of work/package description	Last selling date & time	Opening date & time	Remarks
531065	e-GP/15/EE/SRD/2020-2021	Construction of Boundary wall at RHD Office Compound under Shariatpur Road Division, during the year-2020-2021.	17/01/2021 16:00am	18/01/2021 14:00pm	Only online tender
531143	e-GP/16/EE/SRD/2020-2021	Providing and Installation of Single Side Cantilever (12x6) Road Sign & Reflecting Road Studs at Different Chainage of Sheikh Hasina Highway Road (R-860) and Monohar Bazar More-Shariatpur (Premtola) Road (R-861) under Shariatpur Road Division, during the year-2020-2021.	17/01/2021 16:00am	18/01/2021 14:30pm	Only online tender
531648	e-GP/18/EE/SRD/2020-2021	Providing and Installation of Single Side Cantilever (12x6) Road Sign & Reflecting Road Studs at Different Chainage of Shariatpur-Naria Road (Z-8602) & Naria-Pathanbari-Nayan Madbar Kandil-Dogri-Shawra Road (Z-8607) under Shariatpur Road Division, during the year-2020-2021.	17/01/2021 16:00am	18/01/2021 15:00pm	Only online tender

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and e-GP help desk (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

Bhuiya Redwanur Rahman
ID No. 602254
Executive Engineer (c.c.), RHD
Road Division, Shariatpur

GD-08