

## Malaysia's PM defends criticism of India despite palm oil backlash

Agencies

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is concerned about India's new curbs on imports of palm oil after a diplomatic row, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said on Tuesday, but indicated he would continue to speak out



As Malaysian palm refiners stare at a massive loss of business, Mr. Mahathir said his government would find a solution.

"We are concerned of course because we sell a lot of palm oil to India, but on the other hand we need to be frank and see that if something goes wrong, we will have to say it," he told reporters. "If we allow things to go wrong and think only about the money involved, then I think a lot of wrong things will be done, by us and by other people."

The benchmark palm oil contract for March delivery was down 0.9% in afternoon trade.

Reuters reported on Monday the Indian government had informally instructed traders to stay away from Malaysian palm oil. Indian traders are instead buying Indonesian crude palm oil at a premium of \$10 tonne over Malaysian prices.

India's foreign ministry said on Thursday the palm curbs were not country specific but that "for any commercial trading, the status of relationship between any two countries" is something a business would consider.

India was Malaysia's biggest buyer of palm oil in 2019, with 4.4 million tonnes of purchases. In 2020, purchases could fall below 1 million tonnes if relations don't improve, Indian traders say.

against "wrong things" even if it costs his country financially.

India, the world's biggest buyer of edible oils, last week changed rules that traders say effectively ban imports of refined palm oil from Malaysia, the world's second-biggest producer and exporter of palm oil after Indonesia.

The move came after New Delhi objected to Mr. Mahathir's criticism of India's new religion-based citizenship law. The 94-year-old premier, whose outspoken nature has soured ties with both India and Saudi Arabia in recent months, earlier accused India of invading the disputed Muslim-majority region of Kashmir.

## Australia brings 'megablaze' under control

Agencies

SYDNEY: Exhausted firefighters said they had finally brought Australia's largest "megablaze" under control on Monday, as wet weather promised to deliver much-needed respite for countryside ravaged by bushfires.

New South Wales firefighters said they finally had the upper hand in the fight against the vast Gopfers Mountain fire on Sydney's northwestern outskirts, which has been burning for almost three months.

Visiting the area on Monday, New South Wales Rural Fire Service commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said there was a "small area of burning still to complete" but the "containment prognosis looks promising".

The fire seared an area of national park three times the size of Greater London and lit several connected blazes totaling over 800,000 hectares.

As residents and authorities continued to come to grips with the sheer scale of the devastation, the Bureau of Meteorology forecast some fire-grounds areas could get up to 50 millimetres (two inches) of rain in the next week, a relief after a prolonged drought.

If that forecast bears out, the New South Wales Rural

Fire Service said it would be "all of our Christmas, birthday, engagement, anniversary, wedding and graduation presents rolled into one. Fingers crossed." Dozens of other fires are yet to be controlled.

The climate-change-fueled fires have prompted an international outpouring and donations from around the world to help communities and animal populations. Australia's unique flora and fauna has taken a catastrophic hit, with an estimated one billion animals killed, and countless trees and shrubs burned away.

The country's environment minister Sussan Ley has warned that in some areas, koalas may have to be reclassified as endangered.

The government has earmarked an initial \$50 million (US\$35 million) to spend on helping with the wildlife recovery.

"This has been an ecological disaster, a disaster that is still unfolding," Treasurer Josh Frydenberg announcing the emergency fund.

This weekend, Sydney will host a charity gig to benefit fire services, the Red Cross and animal welfare organisations. Headliners include Alice Cooper, Olivia Newton-John and Queen. The political impact of the bushfires is also coming into sharper relief.



## US Senate To Begin Impeachment Trial Against Trump On Jan 21

Press Trust Of India

Washington : The US Senate is likely to begin the impeachment trial against President Donald Trump on January 21 after the House of Representatives last month impeached him for pressuring Ukraine to investigate a political rival, a top Republican Senator has said.

The 435-member House of Representatives, where Democrats enjoy a majority, last month charged Trump with high crimes and misdemeanours" and impeached in vote that was based on bitter political divide. Now, the 100-member Senate, where the Republicans are in majority, needs to put Trump on trial before he can be removed from the White House.

After holding it on for weeks, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is expected to send its impeachment to the Senate sometime this week and that could be as early as Tuesday. The impeachment in the Senate is unlikely to pass through given that GOP has majority in the 100-member Senate.

Top Republican Senator John Cornyn, who is also Co-Chair of the Senate India Caucus, on Monday told reporters that the Senate is likely to start the impeachment trial next Tuesday, January 21.

Tuesday (January 21) is what it's feeling like, he said. "We'd actually be glued to our chair starting Tuesday, I think," he said in response to a question.

According to Cornyn, after House sends its articles of impeachment, the Senate will likely take a few days to deal with logistics of the trial.

Prominent among these include Chief Justice John Roberts and all Senators and sending summons to Trump's team. The Senate will also pass a resolution establishing the trial rules.

The New York Times reported that in the coming days, Pelosi is expected to choose half-a-dozen or so managers to argue on the Senate floor for Trump's removal from office.

Those managers, who will be selected at least partly from the House Judiciary and Intelligence committees, form just one element of a trial full

of complicated procedures, the report said. Cornyn on the Senate floor alleged that Pelosi delaying the impeachment is hurting the Democratic presidential candidates.

The only people who seem to gain anything from this are the Democrats who are running for president but who are not United States Senators, and thus aren't going to be tied up during the impeachment trial, he said.

Meanwhile Republican Senators Corny, Mike Lee, and Jerry Moran announced to cosponsor Senator Josh Hawley's resolution to allow for the dismissal of articles of impeachment against Trump for failure to prosecute.

It's been three weeks and counting since the House passed articles of impeachment, and Speaker Pelosi is still playing games after insisting the President's removal from office was urgent. This critical change will reinforce the Constitution and help prevent the House from using impeachment for personal political gain like the Speaker is sadly doing now, Cornyn said.

## Pak court annuls Musharraf's death penalty, calls it 'unconstitutional'

Press Trust Of India

ISLAMABAD - n a huge relief for Pakistan's self-exiled former dictator, a top court here on Monday declared Pervez Musharraf's trial in the high treason case as "unconstitutional", leading to the annulment of the death sentence against the ex-Army chief by a special tribunal.

The special court in Islamabad on December 17 last handed down the death penalty to the 74-year-old retired general, now based in Dubai, after six years of hearing the high-profile treason case against him.



The case was filed by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government headed by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in 2013.

A three-member full bench of the Lahore High Court comprising Justices Syed Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi, Mohammad Ameer Bhatti and Chaudhry Masood Jahangir unanimously declared the

formation of the special court against Musharraf as "unconstitutional".

The court also ruled that the treason case against Musharraf was not prepared in accordance with the law. The current government of Prime Minister Imran Khan had backed Musharraf in challenging the death penalty.

"The Lahore High Court has declared unconstitutional all actions right from initiation of complaint and its conclusion against General (ret.) Musharraf by the special court," Additional Attorney General of Pakistan Ishtiaq A Khan said.

## Trudeau: Plane Victims Would Be Alive If Not for US-Iran Tensions

Agencies

OTTAWA - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said the 176 people, including 57 Canadians, on board the Ukrainian aircraft shot down by a missile shortly after it took off from Tehran last week would still be alive if tensions in the region had not escalated.

Trudeau has been careful to avoid blaming US President Donald Trump for the deaths which followed in the wake of the US assassination of Qassem Soleimani, Iran's top general. "If there was no escalation recently in the region, those Canadians would be right now home with their families," Trudeau said in an interview with Global News Television on Monday. "This is something that happens when you have conflict and the war. Innocents bear the brunt of it."

Canada grieves for the dead after Iran aircraft tragedy (2:05)

Some Canadians including a leading corporate leader



blame Trump in part for the deaths. Trudeau said he had spoken to Trump.

"I've talked about the tremendous grief and loss that Canadians are feeling and the need for clear answers on how this happened and how we're going to make sure it never happens again," Trudeau said.

## US ousts 21 Saudi military trainees after army base shooting probe

Agencies

Washington: Twenty-one Saudi military cadets undergoing US training will be ousted following an investigation into the fatal shooting of three Americans by a Saudi officer at a Florida naval base that US Attorney General William Barr on Monday branded an act of terrorism.

The Dec. 6 attack brought fresh complications to US-Saudi relations at a time of heightened tensions between the United States and Iran, Saudi Arabia's regional rival. A deputy sheriff shot dead the gunman, Saudi Air Force Second Lieutenant Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani, in the Pensacola, Florida, incident.

Barr said 21 Saudi cadets were "disenrolled from their training curriculum" in the US military and would leave the United States later on Monday after an investigation showed they either had child pornography or social media accounts containing Islamic extremist or anti-American content.

During a news conference, Barr - the top US law enforcement official - said there was no evidence of assistance by other Saudi trainees or that any of them had knowledge in



advance of the attack.

"This was an act of terrorism," Barr said. "The evidence showed that the shooter was motivated by jihadist ideology. During the course of the investigation, we learned that the shooter posted a message on Sept. 11 of this year stating, 'The countdown has begun.'"

Barr added that Alshamrani also visited the New York City memorial to the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States and posted anti-American, anti-Israeli and jihadi messages on social media, including two hours before the attack.

Saudi Arabia provided "complete and total support" to the American investigation of the incident, Barr said.

Barr said one Saudi individual had "a significant number of such images," while 14 others "had one or two images, in most cases posted in a chat room by someone else or received over social media.

### NEWSMAKERS

## Pakistan: Pics of 'ailing' Nawaz Sharif in a London cafe leads to speculations, taunts



A viral image of former Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif in a London restaurant has led to speculations about his health, and taunts from ministers in the Imran Khan government. Science Minister Fawad Chaudhry posted the photo on his Twitter account, with a snide comment: "Treatment against looting is ongoing in London's intensive care unit, and patients are better." In the picture,

Nawaz's brother Shahbaz, his son Salman, and Nawaz's son Hasan can be seen. Nawaz's face is not immediately visible.

Nawaz was diagnosed with acute immune thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP), a bleeding disorder in which the immune system destroys platelets, before he was shifted to London for intensive care. Nawaz was in the Kot Lakhpat jail but last month he was sent to the custody of National Accountabil-

ity Bureau (NAB) which is probing the Sharif family in the Chaudhry Sugar Mills case. On December 24, 2018, an accountability court had sentenced Nawaz Sharif to seven years in prison in the Al-Azizia Steel Mills corruption case and acquitted him in the Flagship case. In a short verdict announced, the court said there was concrete evidence against the former premier in the Al-Azizia case and that he was unable to provide a money trail in the case.

However, the opposition PML-N rejected all allegations. A party leader told Dawn, "Doctors have advised Nawaz Sharif to go out for change of environment. They insist that staying indoors will not be good for his health. Therefore, Mr Sharif has started going out. On Sunday, Mr Sharif along with his family members had a walk to catch fresh air and had a tea in a restaurant."

## Queen agrees to transition period for Prince Harry and Meghan



QUEEN Elizabeth II on Monday agreed to offer Prince Harry and Meghan Markle a period of transition during which the couple can divide their time between the UK and Canada.

In a statement released by the Buckingham Palace after the crisis talks, it emerged that the details of their future roles will be fleshed out over time.

post, they said, "After many months of reflection and internal discussions, we have chosen to make a transition this year in starting to carve out a progressive new role within this institution. We intend to step back as 'senior' members of the Royal Family and work to become financially independent, while continuing to fully support Her Majesty The Queen."

## Japanese billionaire seeks girlfriend for Moon trip

TOKYO: A Japanese billionaire has launched an online wanted ad for a girlfriend who will fly around the Moon with him on a SpaceX rocket.

Yusaku Maezawa, who recently announced his break-up with a Japanese actress, is accepting applications from "single women aged 20 or over" who want to enjoy life to the fullest.

The matchmaking exercise is being turned into a TV show for a web streaming service.

The flamboyant entrepreneur said he agreed to the idea due to loneliness in middle age.

"I have lived exactly as I've wanted to until now," said Maezawa, who has three children with two women.

"I'm 44 now. As feelings of loneliness and emptiness slowly begin to surge upon me, there's one thing that I think about: Continuing to love one woman," he said in the ad.