

Quick Read

Attacker stabs five at rabbi's home in New York then flees



**NEW YORK:** An attacker stabbed five people late on Saturday at a rabbi's home in New York state before fleeing, a Jewish organization said, in a rampage that came after days of increased tensions over anti-Semitic assaults.

The Orthodox Jewish Public Affairs Council said on Twitter an attacker wearing a scarf stabbed the victims at a house in Monsey, Rockland County, about 30 miles north of New York City.

All five victims were taken to local hospitals, the council said, adding that two of the victims were critical, with one of them stabbed at least six times. New York Attorney General Letitia James said she was "deeply disturbed" by the situation in Monsey. "There is zero tolerance for acts of hate of any kind and we will continue to monitor this horrific situation," she said in a Twitter post.

CBS New York reported that a man brandishing a machete went into the rabbi's property in Monsey, New York State, an area with a large Jewish population, during a Hanukkah celebration and knifed at least three people before fleeing. "The house had many dozens of people in there," Gestetner said. "It was a Hanukkah celebration."

Police in the US have been battling a rash of attacks against Jewish targets in recent years.

Saturday's stabbing follows a shooting earlier this month at a kosher deli in a New York suburb that authorities said was fueled in part by anti-Semitism.

Six people were killed in the Jersey City attack, including the two suspects. —AFP

Teenager dies in skateboarding incident in Australia



**KUALA LUMPUR:** A Malaysian teenager, Mohamad Farhan Fudhail Mohammad Farid, died in a skateboarding incident in Townsville, Queensland, Australia.

The mother of the 16-year-old boy, known as Natasha, confirmed the incident when Malaysian news agency Bernama contacted her on Sunday.

She said they were now in the middle of bringing home the remains. Australian media reported that Mohamad Farhan Fudhail from Kuantan, Pahang, was skateboarding downhill with friends before crashing into a pole.

According to the report which quoted Queensland police, the teenager who was wearing a helmet during the incident, was in a critical condition when paramedics arrived at the scene at Jezzine Barracks, North Ward. The teenager was in the country for holidays with his family.

Meanwhile, foreign ministry secretary-general Muhammad Shahrul Ikram Yaakob said Wisma Putra had contacted Natasha and efforts to bring back the body to Malaysia were being carried out by the High Commission of Malaysia in Canberra. "The victim's mother is still waiting for the post-mortem results, and the body is expected to be brought back to Malaysia via Malaysia Airlines flight," he said when contacted by Bernama. —Bernama

Riyadh signs deal with Raytheon Saudi Arabia to localize Patriot maintenance

**DUBAI:** Saudi Arabia signed a deal with the local unit of US weapons maker Raytheon on Saturday to localise maintenance of its Patriot missile defence system, as part of efforts to boost Saudi's defence industries and its broader economy. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman plans to diversify the kingdom away from its reliance on oil exports and wants Riyadh to produce or assemble half its defence equipment locally, aiming to create 40,000 jobs for Saudis by 2030. Saudi Arabia is among the top five defence spenders in the world. It is one of several US allies to use Patriot, a ground to air missile system giving defence against ballistic missiles and other threats. Ahmed al-Ohali, governor of Saudi Arabia's General Authority for Military Industries (GAMI), said the agreement with Raytheon reflected the authority's efforts to develop Saudi's military industries and its research and technology capabilities, state news agency SPA reported. —AFP



French govt offers concessions to striking dancers of Paris Opera

**PARIS:** With France gripped by strike action crippling the transport system in a dispute over pensions reform, news emerged of the latest government concessions - to striking ballet dancers at the Paris Opera.

News of the offer added to a series of concessions made to striking workers in different sectors, as the strike entered its 24th day.

But the government is still insisting it will maintain the main thrust of the reform - to replace more than 40 separate pension schemes with a single points-based system.

Financial daily Les Echos revealed Saturday that Culture Minister Franck Riester and Laurent Pietraszewski, the junior minister leading the pensions reform project, had written to the head of the Paris Opera.

They proposed that the pensions reforms only come into force for dancers recruited after Jan 1, 2022, according to a document, dated Dec 23, consulted by AFP.

The government, in its letter to the dancers, also proposed a professional conversion plan



for dancers reaching the end of their career. Footage of the striking dancers and their orchestra performing extracts from "Swan Lake" in front of the historic venue on Tuesday, Dec 24, went viral this week.

The dancers and musicians are on strike alongside other workers protesting the gov-

ernment's planned pensions reform.

The special retirement plan for the Paris Opera, which allows dancers to bow out at age 42, was introduced in 1698 by king Louis XIV - making it among the oldest in France.

The government has also written to the Comedie Francaise, France's most prestigious

theatre company, and the directors of both companies have been invited to talks from early next year.

Both the dancers of the Paris Opera and the actors at the Comedie Francaise have already cancelled performances as part of their industrial action. The dancers' strike action alone has led to more than eight million euros in losses, according to figures provided by the company at the beginning of the week.

SATURDAY PROTESTS

Action by transport workers hit rail services across the country and commuter routes serving the capital on Saturday, complicating matters for those returning from Christmas breaks or leaving for holidays over the new year. But thousands turned out across France on Saturday to demonstrate their support for the strikers. Demonstrators turned out across France Saturday to show their support for the strikes against Demonstrators turned out across France Saturday to show their support for the strikes against pensions reform. —AFP



CAIRO: A handout picture shows paramedics transporting one of the victims who were injured in a bus crash on the road to the Ain Sokhna resort east of the Egyptian capital Cairo. —AFP

Egypt road accidents kill 28 including 2 Malaysians

**CAIRO:** At least 28 people including textile workers and several Asian tourists were killed on Saturday in two separate road crashes in Egypt, official media and other sources said.

The deadliest accident occurred when a bus transporting textile workers collided with a car on the road between the cities of Port Said and Damietta in northern Egypt, state-run Al-Ahram newspaper said on its website.

At least 22 men and women who worked for a clothing factory were

killed and eight others injured, the report said.

The accident came only hours after two buses carrying tourists collided with a truck east of Cairo on the road to the Ain Sokhna resort on the Red Sea, according to a security official. A medical source said two Malaysian women and an Indian man were killed along with three Egyptians - a bus driver, a tour guide and a security guard.

At least 24 others were injured, several of them tourists and some left in serious condition, the med-

ical source said without giving further details.

A handout picture released by the Suez Governorate Media Office on Dec 28, 2019 shows paramedics transporting one of the victims who were injured in a bus crash on the road to the Ain Sokhna resort east of the Egyptian capital Cairo. Traffic accidents are common in Egypt where many roads are poorly maintained and regulations are laxly enforced. But efforts by authorities to crack down on traffic violations, including speeding, appear to have

borne fruit in recent years, with official figures showing a decline in road deaths. In 2018 there were 8,480 road accidents compared with 11,098 the previous year, according to the bureau of statistics.

Deaths from traffic accidents fell from more than 5,000 in 2016 to 3,747 the following year and 3,087 in 2018, official figures show.

Ain Sokhna is a popular seaside resort town in the Suez governorate southeast of Cairo. It is also home to several petrochemical, ceramics and steel factories. —AFP

Bolivia says Spain 'tried to extract' wanted aide from Mexico embassy

**LA PAZ:** Bolivia accused Spain of an abortive attempt to extract a wanted former government aide from Mexico's embassy in La Paz, prompting a sharp denial from Madrid. It was the latest twist in a murky incident on Friday involving embassy personnel in the Bolivian capital that has sparked a bitter diplomatic spat.

Several hours later, Bolivia's top diplomat accused Spanish embassy staff of trying to infiltrate the Mexican mission with a group of masked men in what it said was a violation of Bolivian sovereignty.

"We believe it was aimed at extracting the criminal Juan Ramon Quintana," said Interior Minister Arturo Murillo on Saturday, referring to a former aide to ousted Bolivian president Evo Morales who stands accused of sedition and terrorism. The embassy in La Paz became the center of the diplomatic row after it sheltered nine or more officials from Morales's former government, some of them charged by the interim government in Bolivia with "sedition" or "terrorism" over the deaths of 36 people in violently quashed protests.

Both Spain and Mexico said the incident occurred on Friday when Spain's charge d'affaires Cristina Borroguero paid a brief visit to Mexican Ambassador Maria Teresa Mercado. "The ministry wishes to clarify that the charge d'affaires was purely making a courtesy visit and vehemently denies there was any aim to facilitate the exit of people holed up inside the building," a foreign ministry statement said.

Madrid said it would send a team of investigators to La Paz "in coming days." It would not confirm or deny reports an official had already left for Bolivia.

Murillo said he would ask interim Bolivian president Jeanine Anez and Foreign Minister Karen Longaric to order the expulsion of Spanish diplomats. "They cannot do whatever they want," he said.

On Friday, Longaric said "people identified as staff members at Spain's embassy in Bolivia, accompanied by people with their faces covered, tried in a secretive and underhanded manner to enter Mexico's diplomatic residence in La Paz." Bolivian Foreign Minister Karen Longaric, speaking to reporters in La Paz, on Dec 27, 2019, Bolivian Foreign Minister Karen Longaric, speaking to reporters in La Paz, on Dec 27, 2019, said unauthorized Spanish embassy staff tried to enter Mexico's diplomatic residence in that city. —AFP

Iran blasts France for 'interference' over jailed academic

**TEHRAN:** Iran accused France on Sunday of "interference" in the case of an Iranian-French academic held in the Islamic republic, saying she is considered an Iranian national and faces security charges.

France said Friday it summoned Iran's ambassador to protest the imprisonment of Fariba Adelkhah and another academic, Roland Marchal of France, saying their detention was "intolerable".

Their imprisonment has added to distrust between Tehran and Paris at a time when French President Emmanuel Macron is seeking to play a leading role in defusing tensions between Iran and its arch-foe the United States.

"The statement by France's foreign ministry regarding an Iranian national is an act of interference and we see their request to have no legal basis," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said in a statement.

"The individual in question



(Adelkhah) is an Iranian national and has been arrested over 'acts of espionage'," he said, adding that her lawyer had knowledge about the details of the case which is being investigated.

Iran does not recognise dual nationality and has repeatedly rebuffed calls from foreign governments for consular access to those it has detained during legal proceedings.

In its statement on Friday, the French foreign ministry reiterated its call for the release of Adelkhah and Marchal.

It also reaffirmed France's demand for consular access.

In response, Mousavi said Marchal was detained for "conspiring against national security", that he has had "consular access multiple times" and that his lawyer was in touch with the judiciary.

A specialist in Shiite Islam and a research director at Sciences Po University in Paris, Adelkhah's arrest for suspected "espionage" was confirmed in

July.

Her colleague Marchal was arrested while visiting Adelkhah, according to his lawyer.

The university and supporters said this week that Adelkhah and another detained academic, Australian Kylie Moore-Gilbert, had started an indefinite hunger strike just before Christmas.

The French statement said the ministry had made clear to the ambassador "our grave concern over the situation of Mrs Fariba Adelkhah, who has stopped taking food". "Creating hype cannot stop Iran's judiciary from handling the case, especially considering the security charges the two face," Mousavi said.

The latest tensions come after Xiyue Wang, an American scholar who had been serving 10 years on espionage charges, was released by Iran this month in exchange for Massoud Soleimani, an Iranian who had been held in the US for