

Quick Read

Heatwave, high winds threaten to rekindle Australian wildfires

SYDNEY: Large swathes of southeast Australia were bracing for a days-long heatwave that threatens to stoke bushfires that have been burning for months. As firefighters and residents prepared for the heightened danger, the New South Wales (NSW) state government launched a six-month inquiry to examine both the causes of and response to this season's deadly wildfires. "We don't want to waste the opportunity to take on board any recommendations we need to adopt ahead of the bushfire season this year ... as we approach summer of 2021," said Gladys Berejiklian, the premier of NSW. NSW state has been one of the hardest hit by bushfires, which started earlier than usual in September. The blazes have burnt out more than 11.7 million hectares (117,000 sq kms) across Australia's most populous states, killing at least 33 people and about 1 billion animals, and destroying 2,500 homes. Fire danger warnings were issued on Thursday for several areas in South Australia state, where temperatures were forecast to exceed 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) and winds were expected to reach 35km (22 miles) per hour. Among them was Kangaroo Island, a popular tourist destination that has already been razed by fires that killed two people. The severe heat and high winds are forecast to hit NSW and Victoria states from Friday threatening to spark new life into some of the 120 fires burning across the three states or create new blaze. —Reuters

Cruise ship in Italy in lockdown over feared coronavirus case

CIVITAVECCHIA, ITALY: More than 6,000 tourists were blocked on a cruise ship in Italy after the vast liner was placed on lockdown over two suspected cases of the deadly coronavirus. Samples from a Chinese couple were sent for testing after three doctors and a nurse boarded the Costa Crociere ship in the port of Civitavecchia to tend to a woman running a fever, the local health authorities said. Costa Crociere confirmed the ship, carrying around 7,000 people including the crew, was in lockdown. It said that a 54-year old woman from Macau "was placed in solitary confinement" in the on-board hospital last night with her travel companion", and was following instructions from the health ministry. The Costa Smeralda, the company's flagship and the fifth-largest cruise ship in the world, "came from Palma de Mallorca and is currently engaged in one-week cruises in the western Mediterranean", it said. The couple flew in to Milan from Hong Kong on Jan 25, before getting on the cruise, according to Italian media reports. "The couple's cabin has been isolated and they are in with the doctors," an unnamed passenger was quoted as telling ANSA news agency. "We're a bit worried of course." —Reuters

US evacuees from Wuhan placed under 72-hour 'hold'

LOS ANGELES: Nearly 200 American citizens airlifted from China in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak arrived at a US military base in California, where they will remain isolated for at least 72 hours of medical evaluation, public health officials said. The group, mostly US diplomats and their families, were evacuated from Wuhan at the epicentre of the outbreak aboard a US government-chartered plane that stopped to refuel in Alaska on Tuesday night before flying on to March Air Reserve Base, about 60 miles (97km) east of Los Angeles. Foreign governments have begun flying their citizens out of Wuhan, as the death toll has risen and the city has entered into a virtual quarantine, with Chinese authorities trying to contain the virus. The 195 passengers at March air base were medically screened by Chinese government and US State Department officials before boarding the plane in Wuhan, and again in Alaska by a team from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC officials said. All the passengers have agreed to voluntarily remain in special housing at the military base, cordoned off from base personnel. —AFP



Muhammad Adnan have passed the secondary School Certificate Annual Examination 2018 under Roll No. 302989 from S.I.S.E. Sargodha. My father name is Muhammad Iam din whereas on certificate my father name has been mentioned as Muhammad Iam din which is incorrect. I want to get changed my father name from Muhammad Iam din To Iam din .if any person/Organizati on/agency has any object, then the same may be intimated in writing to the secretary, S.I.S.E Near 40-Tall , within Falselabed Road Sargodha With In 15 Day's.

Trump attacks Bolton as Senate impeachment enters new phase

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump lashed out at John Bolton, a potentially damaging witness at his Senate impeachment trial, amid White House efforts to block publication of an explosive book by the former national security advisor. The fight over whether Bolton should testify intensified as Trump's trial entered a new phase with senators who hold the 45th US president's fate in their hands directly questioning prosecutors and White House defense lawyers. The 100 members of the Senate have been sitting silently for six days listening to impassioned arguments for and against Trump's removal from office for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. They now have 16 hours over the next two days to submit written questions, which are being read aloud by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, presiding over just the third impeachment trial of a president in US history. Democrats have been pressing for the Senate to subpoena Bolton, who was fired by Trump in September, after reports that his upcoming White House tell-all book corroborates the abuse-of-power impeachment charge against the president over his dealings with Ukraine. Asked whether the 71-year-old Bolton

should appear, chief Democratic prosecutor Adam Schiff said his testimony was essential to conduct a "fair trial." "Don't wait for the book," the California lawmaker told the senators sitting as trial jurors. "This case is overwhelmingly clear without John Bolton but if you have any question about it you can erase all doubt. "When you have a witness who is as plainly relevant as John Bolton, who goes to the heart of the most serious and egregious of the president's misconduct, who has volunteered to come and testify - to turn him away, to look the other way, I think is deeply at odds with being an impartial juror," Schiff said. White House deputy counsel Patrick Philbin countered that the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives, which impeached the Republican president on Dec 18, had conducted their inquiry in a "half-baked partisan fashion" and had not issued their own subpoena for Bolton's testimony. Philbin said having Bolton testify would present "grave security issues." The White House would seek to prevent his testimony by citing executive privilege and the matter would end up in the courts, he said. "This institution will be effectively paralyzed for months on end." In his book, Bolton report-

edly writes that the president personally told him in August that a freeze in military aid to Ukraine was directly linked to his demand that Kiev investigate Joe Biden, the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination, and his son Hunter, who served on the board of a Ukrainian gas company. Trump, in an early-morning tweet, said Bolton had shown poor judgment in a job he had begged for and he hired the veteran diplomat and prominent "hawk" against the advice of others. Bolton "got fired because frankly, if I listened to him, we would be in World War Six by now," Trump said. "(He) goes out and IMMEDIATELY writes a nasty & untrue book. All Classified National Security. Who would do this?" The White House cited national security in a bid to block Bolton's book, saying it cannot be published because it breaks secrecy laws. The warning was made in a letter to Bolton's lawyer dated January 23 but only made public on Wednesday. The National Security Council said after preliminary review of the manuscript - a vetting process applied to any White House employees writing books - that it contained "significant amounts of classified information." "Some of this information is at the TOP

SECRET level," the NSC said in a letter to Bolton's lawyer, adding that "the manuscript may not be published or otherwise disclosed without the deletion of this classified information." Trump called on Republicans to reject a push for witnesses when the issue comes up for a vote on Friday. "Remember Republicans, the Democrats already had 17 witnesses, we were given NONE!" he wrote on Twitter. "Don't let the Dems play you!" A two-thirds majority - 67 senators - is needed to convict the president and remove him from office and the Republicans' 53-47 majority in the chamber virtually assures Trump will be acquitted. But only 51 senators are needed to call witnesses and Utah Senator Mitt Romney and several other Republicans have said they are leaning to having Bolton and others testify. Only two other presidents have been put on trial in the Senate - Andrew Johnson in 1868 and Bill Clinton in 1999, and neither was convicted and removed. Before the explosive revelations about what Bolton knew, the White House had assumed the trial could be wrapped up with no witnesses and an acquittal by this weekend, just in time for Trump's annual "State of the Union" address before Congress on Feb 4. —Reuters



WASHINGTON: House impeachment manager Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA) walks to the Senate floor during a brief recess of the day's Senate impeachment trial of President Donald Trump.

Russian strikes kill 10 civilians in Syria's Idlib: Monitor

ARIHA: Russian air strikes near a bakery and a medical clinic in Syria's rebel-held Idlib region killed 10 civilians as government forces kept up a ground offensive. The government and its allies have upped their deadly bombardment of the last major rebel bastion, slowly chipping away at it from the south. Rebel-held territory has shrunk to just over half of Idlib province, along with slivers of neighbouring Aleppo and Latakia, following a series of government gains, the latest of which saw Damascus loyalists retaking the strategic town of Maaret al-Numan on Wednesday. Early on Thursday, Russian air strikes hit the town of Ariha, between Maaret al-Numan and the city of Idlib to its north, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The strikes hit near a bakery and the Al-Shami clinic which is now out of service, AFP correspondents reported. A dust-covered doctor ran

out of the Al-Shami clinic screaming following the attack, which partially damaged the facility's walls. Nearby, three entire buildings had collapsed and several vehicles were reduced to mangled wrecks. The wailing of women and children rang out as rescue workers searched for corpses beneath the rubble. Toufic Saado, a paramedic, said he was inside the medical facility when three air strikes ravaged the area. "The wounded were lying on the floor outside the medical centre," he said. The latest deaths bring to 21 the number of civilians killed by Russian air strikes in Idlib since Wednesday, the Observatory said. Earlier this month, Russia denied launching any combat operations in the region since a ceasefire it agreed with rebel supporter Turkey went into effect on Jan 12. But the truce has since become a dead letter and the number of reported Russian raids has risen

sharply. Thousands of Russian troops are deployed across Syria in support of the army, while a contingent of Russian private security personnel also operates on the ground. Moscow's military intervention in 2015, four years into the Syrian conflict, helped keep President Bashar al-Assad in power and started a long, bloody reconquest of territory lost to rebels in the early stages of the war. Russian-backed regime forces on Thursday pushed north of the highway town of Maarat al-Numan, their latest conquest, said the Observatory. They are now moving towards the town of Saraqib, whose residents have mostly fled in recent days in the face of heavy bombardment, the war monitor added. Fighting is now within five kilometres of the town, said the Observatory. Both Maarat al-Numan and Saraqib lie on the key M5 highway connecting the capital Damascus to second city Aleppo.

The road has been in the sights of the government for some time as it seeks to revive a moribund economy ravaged by almost nine years of war. Some 50 kilometres of the M5 remain outside regime control, the Britain-based Observatory said. Tens of thousands of civilians have fled the government's advance, seeking safety closer to the Turkish border further north. The violence in the northwest has displaced more than 388,000 civilians since December, the United

Nations says. At least 20,000 of them have moved in the past two days, UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs Mark Lowcock said on Wednesday. "Unless the current hostilities stop, we will see an even greater humanitarian catastrophe," he told the UN Security Council. Aid groups have warned the latest violence is compounding one of the worst humanitarian disasters of the nine-year war. —AFP



NY Guardian Angels patrol Jewish neighbourhood on edge



NEW YORK: On a windy January night in Brooklyn, a young Jewish woman wary of rising anti-Semitism in her city threw a man who had confronted her to the sidewalk. It was Ariana Gold's first night of training with the Guardian Angels, a volunteer neighbourhood patrol group that has started patrolling the borough's Crown Heights section, where attacks against ultra-orthodox Jews have risen in recent months. "I think a lot of people are afraid and I think rightly so," Gold said. "We've seen a lot of attacks in the Jewish communities." Gold, 28, who lives in a different Brooklyn neighbourhood and is not ultra-orthodox, is among the first group of local Jewish women to sign up with the Guardian Angels, which was born in New York during the high-crime late 1970s and now has branches in dozens of cities across the country and around the world. The defence techniques she was shown on her first night are designed to "bring a person into submission without really hurting them," said

martial arts master Milton Oliver, 51, a construction supervisor and Guardian Angel since 1982. Gold, a New York native who has been boxing for exercise for five years, found her way to the Guardian Angels after spotting a recruitment poster in the subway. "I believe in community engagement and working with communities, I believe in martial arts and self-defence, I believe in volunteerism and taking care of the people around you," said Gold, who works at a non-profit organisation. "So, this kind of combined all of those traits." The Guardian Angel patrols in Crown Heights, home to the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic movement and many of its followers, come after high-profile mass shootings at synagogues in Pittsburgh and San Diego in the past 16 months. In New York, police reported a 26 per cent jump in anti-Semitic hate-crimes last year. While most of the city's 234 incidents involved graffiti, they also included attacks on Lubavitchers in Crown Heights, which has a history of occasionally strained rela-

tions between Jews and blacks that flared into rioting in 1991. Guardian Angels founder Curtis Sliwa said community leaders asked his group to resume patrols for the first time since the riots after a mass stabbing attack on Hanukkah celebrants last month in suburban Monsey, New York, about 40 miles (64km) away, as well as several assaults in Crown Heights. Patrols were also launched in some other ultra-orthodox Brooklyn neighbourhoods, he said. Although the incidents prompted an increased police presence, Sliwa said residents still need to take charge of their own safety. "You can't depend on a political figure or the police," he said. "You've got to self-help, you have to use self-defence, you have to fight back, you have to be aggressive." The Guardian Angels have started training 40 to 50 mostly ultra-orthodox Jews to defend themselves and make citizens' arrests, Sliwa said. By late summer or early fall, he said they should be able to staff their own neighbourhood patrols. —AFP