

Seven killed in Pak accident

LAHORE: An overspeeding passenger van lost control and fell into a deep gorge in Pakistan's Punjab province on Monday, killing at least seven persons. The accident occurred near Rakhhi Gaj area of Dera Ghazi Khan, according to The Express Tribune. At least seven people, including a father and his son, were killed in the accident. The van was en-route from Fort Monroe to DG Khan and was travelling on a frail road when the accident occurred. Road accidents are quite frequent in Pakistan due to poor roads, poorly maintained vehicles and reckless driving.

News in Brief

Hundreds of inmates with COVID-19 moved from Seoul facility to Cheongsong prison

SEOUL: Hundreds of prisoners with COVID-19 at a Seoul Dongbu detention centre were moved to a Cheongsong prison in the southeastern region, prompting consternation among local residents wary of further spread of the virus, the media reported on Monday, citing the Ministry of Justice. According to the Yonhap news agency, 488 inmates and 21 prison officials were known to be infected with a new coronavirus disease, however, none of them have shown serious symptoms. Around 350 prisoners were transferred to a correctional facility in Cheongsong, where they will stay in solitary confinement cells and receive medical care. Those prisoners from risk groups, including elderly, were excluded from the transfer, and in case of severe symptoms will be transferred to hospitals. A few Cheongsong residents gathered in front of the prison protesting the prisoner transfer due to the potential risk of virus transmission in the community, according to the news outlet. Lee Jung-hwan, a county official in charge of safety and disaster control, said that his office promised to take strict measures to prevent the spread of infection, adding that those in contact with transferred prisoners would isolate for two-weeks at a separate facility, after three days of work.

Clashes in Southeastern Guinea leave 11 dead, 30 injured

NZEREKORE: Clash between two ethnic communities in the southeastern Guinean city of Macenta has left 11 people dead and 30 wounded, Mohamed Ghare, the governor of the administrative region of Nzerekore, has said. The unrest escalated on Saturday and carried on through Sunday between two local ethnic groups, Tomas and Manias, due to their long-standing dispute over claims to the city of Macenta. Security forces were deployed to end the hostilities, resulting in casualties. "The violence that took place in Macenta left 11 dead and 30 wounded," Ghare said, as cited by the Africa Guinee media outlet. The news outlet also cited eyewitnesses of the unrest, claiming that the number of victims of the clashes exceeds dozens of people. Meanwhile, many residents fled the city to the surrounding villages or forests.

Saudi women's rights activist sentenced to nearly 6 years

DUBAI: One of Saudi Arabia's most prominent women's rights activists was sentenced on Monday to nearly six years in prison under a vague and broadly-worded law aimed at combating terrorism, according to state-linked media. Loujain al-Hathloul's case, and her imprisonment for the past two-and-a-half years, have drawn international criticism from rights groups, members of the US Congress and European Union lawmakers. State-linked Saudi news outlet Sabq reported that al-Hathloul was found guilty by the kingdom's anti-terrorism court on charges including agitating for change, pursuing a foreign agenda and using the internet to harm public order. She has 30 days to appeal the verdict. Al-Hathloul was among a handful of Saudi women who openly called for the right to drive before it was granted in 2018 and for the removal of male guardianship laws that had long stifled women's freedom of movement and ability to travel abroad.

Germany opposes easing COVID-19 restrictions for vaccinated people

BERLIN: German Federal Minister of Health Jens Spahn has opposed on Monday the weakening of COVID-19-related restrictions for persons who have already been vaccinated against the virus. On Sunday, a vaccination campaign began in Germany. According to the national vaccination plan adopted on December 18, persons over 80 and care workers, as well as medical personnel of intensive care units and emergency rooms who are at a high risk of exposure to COVID-19, will be vaccinated first. "Some have a priority now to get vaccinated first because we have only a few vaccines available. Those who have not been vaccinated can expect those who have to show solidarity and not declare that they are no longer subject to something like wearing a face mask... We have confronted the pandemic until now in solidarity as a society, and we will confront it in the coming months the same way until everyone will be offered a vaccine," the minister told the German ZDF broadcaster. Earlier in December, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that the authorities in Germany had agreed on toughening the coronavirus-related restrictions ahead of the Christmas season until January 10, closing all non-essential businesses and banning alcohol consumption in public areas.

Moderate earthquake hits Croatia, damage reported

ZAGREB: A moderate earthquake hit Croatia near its capital of Zagreb early Monday, triggering panic and some damage to buildings south of the city. There were no immediate reports of injuries. Croatia's seismologists said the magnitude of the quake that struck around 7:30 a.m. (0630 GMT) was 5.0, with the epicenter near the towns of Petrinja and Sisak 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of the capital. Several smaller tremors were felt after the initial one. The mayor of Petrinja, Darinko Dumbovic, told state HRT television that "we have bricks and tiles in the streets and fallen chimneys." He said Croatia's president and prime minister will visit the town later Monday. The quake was also felt in neighboring Bosnia. The area was hit by a strong quake on March 22, causing substantial damage in Zagreb. One person died and at least 27 were injured then. Monday's quake appeared to be lighter.

NATO scrambled around 350 times for Russian jets in 2020

BRUSSELS: NATO says that Russian military activity in the alliance's airspace increased slightly this year as its jets across Europe scrambled more than 400 times to escort or shadow unknown aircraft. In a statement released Monday, NATO said almost 90%, or about 350 of these missions, were connected to flights by Russian military aircraft. "This is a moderate increase from 2019," NATO said. "Russian military aircraft often do not transmit a transponder code indicating their position and altitude, or do not file a flight plan, or do not communicate with air traffic controllers, posing a potential risk to civilian airliners." NATO has two air operations centers - one in Germany, covering northern Europe, and one in Spain covering the south - which together monitor all air movements across Europe.

Arzoo's case exposes stark light of forced conversions in Pakistan

HAMZA AMEER Lahore

Forced conversions of Hindu and Christians girls have been more or less a routine case as the matter continues to stay on the backburner of the current ruling government of Prime Minister Imran Khan, who instead, opts to claim success over Pakistan being a free for all religions country.

However, the recent case of the 13-year-old Arzoo Raja, the Christian girl who was forcibly kidnapped, converted to Islam and married off to a Muslim man, sheds a glaring light on the issue of forced conversions and child marriages.

Arzoo's case has attracted media glare, social media

debates and has been among the top and biggest stories of the year 2020, which has highlighted on the gaps in the system that continues to give leverage to such practices and keeps lives of young girls, at high risk.

Arzoo's case may be the last in the list of young Christian and Hindu girls who have gone through the ordeal. But there are many cases that are continuing in parallel to Arzoo's case and being heart in the Pakistani courts.

Neha Pervaiz, a young girl, who was abducted from Karachi's Ittehad town on April 28, 2019, was underage when she was forcibly converted and married off to a Muslim man Imran.

The Sindh High Court

(SHC) issued arrest warrants of cleric Qazi Mufti Ahmed Jaan Raheemi for performing the marriage, the husband Muhammad Imran and his relatives Muhammad Rehan Baloch, Sundus and Azra.

The court observed that the statement of the complainant was correct that the girl was underage at the time of the marriage, and was unwilling to go ahead with it, adding that the marriage was solemnized without Neha's consent, and under pressure, coercion and influence.

The mentioned cases are only two of the many that are pending before the Pakistani court. This indeed is a reminder that the issue of forced conversions of underage girls is evidential proof of why religious mi-

norities continue to feel unsafe in the country.

The issue of forced conversions is often seen taking different forms with ongoing practices, that continue unchecked. One reason for this is that the abductors are from the majority Muslim population, which is why they get easier access to power and influence.

A recent study by Ghulam Hussain, an anthropologist, concludes that "the forced conversions narrative has been developed, promoted and propagated without any justifiable basis and is working towards the Islamophobic political goal of maligning the state and society of Pakistan and more particularly the region and the religious characters in it".

Kazakhstan inks COVID-19 vaccine deal with Pfizer, says Health Ministry

AGENCIES Almaty [Kazakhstan]

Kazakhstan on Monday signed a deal with US pharmaceutical company Pfizer to begin receiving its vaccine against the coronavirus disease, the health ministry said.

"Today, we signed a non-disclosure agreement with company Pfizer and are ready to receive shipments of the vaccine in Kazakhstan by issuing special papers," First Vice Minister Marat Shoranov said at a briefing. According to the official, the timing will depend on manufacturing capacity and the company's shipping capabilities.

"We have come up with the rules that allow registering a vaccine based on interim reports of the Phase 3 trials. Regarding the Pfizer vaccine, apart from high demands for transportation and storage demands -

down to minus 70 degrees [Celsius, minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit] - it has a different price, it costs up to twice as much that the vaccine manufactured in the Russ-



ian Federation," Shoranov added.

In November, Pfizer and BioNTech announced that its vaccine had been tested to be 95 percent effective in preventing COVID-19, according to a preliminary analysis from a Phase 3 clinical study.

Kazakhstan already began producing the Russian-developed Sputnik V vaccine earlier in the month and is planning to register it by February 12.

Sydney's New Year's Eve fireworks to go ahead but no waterfront viewing



AGENCIES Sydney

from the NSW government read.

The iconic New Year's Eve fireworks display is set to go ahead as planned for Friday Night however, people would not be allowed to gather along the harbour unless they are in hospital-ity venues, said the New South Wales (NSW) Government.

"A short, seven-minute fireworks display will continue at midnight. Hospital-ity venues will remain open but must adhere to the one person per four square metres rule. Council events may continue but they must be controlled and seated with no mingling and record-keeping requirements must be strictly adhered to," the statement

According to CNN, the leader of the Australian state of New South Wales apologized for the restrictions during a news conference on Monday but said they were necessary to prevent a super spreading event.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian said, "My strong message to everyone in Greater Sydney this year is to watch the fireworks on TV... We are also asking for a little more time from residents to help us stamp out this outbreak, especially if they live on the Northern Beaches." "On New Year's Eve, we don't want any crowds on the foreshores around Sydney whatsoever, Berejiklian said.

SAUDI WOMENS RIGHTS ACTIVIST SENTENCED TO NEARLY 6 YEARS

AYA BATRAWY Dubai

One of Saudi Arabias most prominent womens rights activists was sentenced on Monday to nearly six years in prison under a vague and broadly-worded law aimed at combating terrorism, according to state-linked media.

Loujain al-Hathloul's case, and her imprisonment for the past two and a half years, have drawn criticism from rights groups, members of the U.S. Congress and European Union lawmakers.

Al-Hathloul was among a handful of Saudi women who openly called for the right to drive before it was granted in 2018 and for the removal of male guardianship laws that had long stifled womens freedom of movement and ability to travel abroad.

Each year 1,000 Pakistani girls forcibly converted to Islam

KATHY GANNON Karachi

Neha loved the hymns that filled her church with music. But she lost the chance to sing them last year when, at the age of 14, she was forcibly converted from Christianity to Islam and married to a 45-year-old man with children twice her age.

She tells her story in a voice so low it occasionally fades away. She all but disappears as she wraps a blue scarf tightly around her face and head. Neha's husband is in jail now facing charges of rape for the underage marriage, but she is in hiding, afraid after security guards confiscated a pistol from his brother in court. "He brought the gun to shoot me," said Neha, whose last name The Associated Press is not using for her safety.

Neha is one of nearly 1,000 girls from religious minorities who are forced to convert to Islam in Pakistan each year, largely to pave the way for marriages that

are under the legal age and non-consensual. Human rights activists say the practice has accelerated during lockdowns against the coronavirus, when girls are out of school and more visible, bride traffickers are more active on the Internet and families are more in debt.

The US State Department this month declared Pakistan "a country of particular concern" for violations of religious freedoms - a designation the Pakistani government rejects. The declaration was based in part on an appraisal by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom that underage girls in the minority Hindu, Christian, and Sikh communities were "kidnapped for forced conversion to Islam. forcibly married and subjected to rape."

While most of the converted girls are impoverished Hindus from southern Sindh province, two new cases involving Christians, including Neha's, have roiled the country in recent months.

Germany expects to get 15.5 million doses of Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, says Health Ministry

AGENCIES Berlin

Germany plans to receive 15.5 million doses of Moderna's coronavirus vaccine as soon as it is approved by the European Union's drug regulator, a health ministry spokeswoman said Monday.

"The Moderna vaccine has not been approved yet, but under an EU contract we would receive 15.5 million doses," a spokeswoman told reporters at a news briefing.

Germany began the vaccine rollout over the weekend, less than a week after the European Medicines Agency gave the conditional marketing authorization for a vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech.

The EU has concluded contracts with pharma companies to secure a combined 2 billion doses of vaccines developed by AstraZeneca, Sanofi and GSK, Johnson and Johnson, CureVac, Pfizer and BioNTech, and Moderna.

WESTERN RAILWAY TO EXTEND 3 FESTIVAL SPECIAL TRAINS WITH 46 ADDITIONAL TRIPS BETWEEN INDORE - PATNA & INDORE - JAIPUR

Table with 7 columns: Train No., Originating Station & Destination, Period of Additional Trips, Days of Service, Departure, Arrival, Trips. Lists train numbers 09313, 09314, 09321, 09322, 02983, 02984.

DETAILS OF PASSING TRAIN OVER WESTERN RAILWAY STATIONS. Table with 7 columns: Train No., Originating Station & Destination, Period of Additional Trips, Days of Service, Departure, Arrival, Trips. Lists train numbers 09601, 09602.

For detailed timings at halts of respective festival special trains please visit www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in. Only passengers having confirmed tickets will be permitted to board these festival special trains. The Booking of Train Nos. 09313 & 09321 will open on 29th December & Train No. 02983 will open from 30th December, 2020 at nominated PRS counters and on IRCTC website. All above trains will run as fully reserved trains on special fare.

Court of the District Magistrate Indore (Shri Mayank Agrawal, IAS, Additional Collector, Dist. Indore, Office No. 109) Case No. /38/B-121/2020-21 Sr. No/472/Akri-1/2020 Indore, Date: 16/12/2020

Online E - Auction Sale Of Asset KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK LIMITED Registered office: 27 BKC, C-27, G-Block, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai, Maharashtra, Pin Code-400 051, Branch Office: 5th Floor, Metro Tower, A.B. Road, Near Vijay Nagar Square, Indore- 452001