

News in brief

Brazil's jailed ex-president
Bolsonaro undergoes surgery



◆ **Former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving a 27-year prison sentence for an attempted coup, went into surgery yesterday for an inguinal hernia, his wife said.** The 70-year-old former president left prison on Wednesday for the first time since late November to undergo the procedure at the DF Star hospital in Brasilia. "My love has just gone to the operating room," Bolsonaro's wife, Michelle Bolsonaro, said in an Instagram post. Bolsonaro has grappled with health issues since being stabbed in the stomach during the 2018 presidential campaign, undergoing multiple surgeries related to his wounds. He was also recently diagnosed with skin cancer.

◆ **The tiny Pacific island nation of Palau has agreed to accept up to 75 non-American migrants from the United States under a deal worth \$7.5 million, the two countries have said.**

President Donald Trump, who campaigned on a promise to expel undocumented migrants, has accelerated deportations and cracked down on border crossings since returning to power this year. Under a new memorandum of understanding, Palau will let up to 75 third-country nationals from the United States live and work on the sparsely populated archipelago, officials said Wednesday. In return, the United States will grant \$7.5 million to Palau for public service and infrastructure needs.

Pacific archipelago Palau agrees to take migrants from US



Trump-backed Nasry Asfura declared winner of Honduras presidency



◆ **The national electoral council CNE said the 67-year-old son of Palestinian immigrants defeated fellow conservative TV personality Salvador Nasralla by less than one percentage point.** Asfura's victory marks the return of the right wing to power in one of Latin America's poorest countries after four years of leftist Xiomara Castro's presidency. It also aligns Honduras with a rise of conservative governments in the region following shifts in Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Argentina. "Honduras: I'm ready to govern. I won't let you down," Asfura posted to X after the win was declared, thanking election officials for validating his victory.

◆ **The national electoral council CNE said the**

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

US Justice Dept says may have a million more Epstein documents



A court document from the investigation into the Jeffrey Epstein
AFP | Washington

The US Department of Justice said Wednesday that more than a million more documents potentially related to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein have been discovered and are being reviewed for release. The DOJ began releasing records last week from the investigation into Epstein, a wealthy financier who died in a New York jail in 2019 while awaiting trial for sex trafficking underage girls. The Epstein Files Transparency Act passed nearly unanimously by Congress last month and signed into law by President Donald Trump mandated the release of all of the Epstein files by December 19. The Justice Department failed to meet that deadline,

however, with Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche blaming the delay on the need to painstakingly redact the identities of Epstein's victims from the files. The DOJ said Wednesday it would need a "few more weeks" to sort and redact the new material. It said the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York and the FBI had "uncovered over a million more documents potentially related to the Jeffrey Epstein case." "We have lawyers working around the clock to review and make the legally required redactions to protect victims, and we will release the documents as soon as possible," the DOJ said on X. "Due to the mass volume of material, this process may take a few more weeks."

Prime minister hopeful **Rahman** returns from exile ahead of polls

Opposition leader, poised to be prime minister, returns after 17 years abroad

● **Thousands gather in Dhaka for homecoming**

● **Rahman to lead BNP in February election**

AFP | Dhaka

Aspiring prime minister and political heavyweight Tarique Rahman was welcomed back to Bangladesh yesterday by huge crowds of joyous supporters after 17 years in self-imposed exile. Rahman, the son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia and heir apparent of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), shook hands with party leaders after touching down at the Dhaka airport.

Accompanied by his wife and daughter, a visibly emotional Rahman took off his shoes, stood on the grass outside the airport and scooped up the soil as a mark of reverence. He waved to supporters before ducking into a convoy under tight security, video posted by his party showed. Since early yesterday, BNP backers started gathering in the capital, plastering the streets with banners and festoons bearing images of Rahman. Patriotic songs blared from loudspeakers while cut-outs depicted the 60-year-old politician riding a stallion. Alamgir Hossain, a BNP supporter, said the country was in a "dire situation" and that only Rahman "can fix it". Rahman left Bangladesh for London in 2008 after what he has described as political persecution.



Acting chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Tarique Rahman waving to supporters upon his arrival in Dhaka

As acting chairman of the BNP, Rahman will lead the party through the February 12 general election, the first polls since ex-premier Sheikh Hasina's exit following a student-led uprising last year. The BNP is widely seen as an election frontrunner, with Rahman expected to be put forward as prime minister if his party wins a majority. Rahman's ailing mother, 80-year-old former leader Zia, is undergoing treatment at a hospital in Dhaka. Despite years of ill health and imprisonment, Zia vowed in November to campaign in the upcoming elections. 'Symbol of hope' But she was hospitalised soon after making that pledge, and has

Arriving barefoot, Rahman knelt on the grass outside Dhaka airport and scooped up soil in his hands – a symbolic gesture marking his emotional return to Bangladesh after nearly two decades in exile

popular student leader Sharif Osman Hadi, a popular figure who took part in last year's mass uprising. Hadi, 32, was shot by masked assailants this month in Dhaka, and later died of his wounds at a Singapore hospital. His death set off violent protests with mobs torching several buildings, including two major newspapers, as well as a prominent cultural institution. Mobs also pelted stones at the Indian High Commission in the port city of Chattogram, where India has since suspended visa services. Dhaka's diplomatic ties have worsened with its historical ally India, where Hasina has sought refuge since the uprising that ended her 15-year autocratic rule.

Heavy rain, flash floods hit southern California

AFP | Los Angeles

Torrential rains unleashed flash floods and warnings of debris flow across southern California, particularly in fire-scarred areas, with further downpours forecast for later yesterday as authorities declared a state of emergency in several counties. Driven by an atmospheric river known as "the Pineapple Express," which moves heavy moisture from the tropical climes of Hawaii to the US West Coast, the storm was expected to deliver months' worth of rain over a few days. Early yesterday, the National Weather Service (NWS) warned about the risk of excessive rainfall over parts of southern California, including in Los Angeles, the second-most populous city in the United States. The NWS warned of a "broad plume of moisture" producing heavy rain in California on Christmas Day, adding there was a "moderate risk" of excessive



A couple watches the high water level of the Los Angeles river after heavy rains

rainfall over southern parts of the state. "Numerous flash flooding events are possible. In addition, many streams may flood, potentially affecting larger rivers. The flooding may include debris flows in or near recently burned areas," the bulletin added, referring to areas affected by wildfires. The rain was forecast to con-

tinue on Friday, the service said. State authorities declared a state of emergency in several counties, including Los Angeles. Rescue work Heavy rain lashed southern California on Wednesday, spawning floods and debris flows. Some communities had already received 10 inches (25.4 centimeters) of rain in the first

storm, forecasters said. The Los Angeles Times reported that at least three people had died in storm-related incidents, including a San Diego man who was killed by a falling tree. On Wednesday, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works warned Angelenos to stay well away from waterways such as flood control channels, rivers, and streams -- even after the rain stopped. "Water from upstream communities can move quickly through channels with little warning. What may look shallow or calm can suddenly become fast-moving and dangerous," the agency warned in a post on X. In San Bernardino County, adjacent to Los Angeles, authorities said they were working to divert the flow of floodwater yesterday. Muddy water streamed through the town of Wrightwood a day earlier, trapping people in their homes, said Christopher Prater, spokesperson for the county fire department.