

International

Protests as Montenegro new Orthodox head inaugurated

Decision to anoint Bishop Joanikije aggravates ethnic tension

CETINJE: The new head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro was inaugurated yesterday, arriving by helicopter under the protection of police who dispersed protesters with tear gas. The decision to anoint Bishop Joanikije as the new Metropolitan of Montenegro at the historic monastery of Cetinje has aggravated ethnic tension in the tiny Balkan state. Protesters had blocked roads since Saturday in a bid to prevent access to the small town, both the headquarters of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) and a symbol of sovereignty for some Montenegrins.

Montenegro broke away from Serbia in 2006, but a third of its 620,000 inhabitants identify as Serbs and some deny Montenegro should be a separate entity. The SPC is the dominant religion in the small state but its opponents accuse it of serving Belgrade's interests. And the government that assumed power at the end of 2020 is accused by its opponents of being too close to the church. According to images released by the SPC, Joanikije and Patriarch Porfirije were dropped off by helicopter on the monastery's lawn and rushed in under the sound of bells.

'Defending our dignity'

A security perimeter had been set up by police around the 15th century building to protect the brief enthronement ceremony. Police fired tear gas

and sound bombs to clear the protesters from the monastery. On Saturday, thousands of protesters used cars or piled up rocks to block roads, with many spending the night huddled around fires set to keep warm, an AFP correspondent said. "I am here to show my love for the country," said one protester, Saska Brajovic, 50.

"We are not asking for anything from anyone else, but we are dismissed by the occupying Serbian Church. We are here defending our dignity." The protesters are backed by the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) of President Milo Djukanovic. The president accused neighboring Serbia and the SPC of "dismissing Montenegro and the integrity" of his country. Djukanovic had been eager to curb the SPC's clout in Montenegro and build up an independent Orthodox church.

Police fire tear gas and sound bombs

'Benefits and privileges'

But in August 2020 elections the DPS lost - for the first time in three decades - to an opposition bloc led by SPC allies. Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic, who is close to the Serbian Orthodox Church, has accused Djukanovic of having deliberately stoked the recent tensions for political purposes. Krivokapic called on Montenegrins "not to give in to the manipulation" of those willing to risk conflict "in order to keep their benefits and privileges".



CETINJE: A man walks past burning tires at a barricade set up to block access roads to the historic city of Cetinje during a protest against the inauguration of the new head of the Serbian Orthodox Church yesterday in Montenegro. —AFP

The monastery, where Montenegrin leaders sat for centuries until the end of World War I, is considered by SPC opponents the property of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, which remains a small minority and is not recognized by the

Orthodox world. Metropolitan Joanikije was named to his new post in May, after the death of his predecessor Metropolitan Amfilohije from COVID-19. The protesters abandoned the blockades as the enthronement ceremony began. —AFP

Salah Abdeslam, the '10th man' of the Paris attacks

PARIS: The sole surviving member of the terror cell that massacred 130 people in Paris in November 2015 was a pot-smoking party man who dabbled in petty crime before falling in thrall to the Islamic State group. All eyes will be on Salah Abdeslam on Wednesday when he goes on trial in Paris along with 19 others over the worst terror attack in France's history. But those hoping that the so-called 10th man of the Islamic State attacks will tell all about what drove him to be part of the macabre plot risk being disappointed.

Since his arrest after a massive four-month manhunt that ended in a shootout with police in Belgium, Abdeslam has maintained near-total silence on his role in the bloodshed. Nine other gunmen and suicide bombers died in the carnage, including Abdeslam's brother Brahim, who blew himself up in a bar. Like Brahim he was equipped with a suicide belt, but he did not activate the device, which was found in a rubbish bin in southern Paris several days after the killings.

The 31-year-old, who has French citizenship but grew up in Belgium, is accused of playing a key logistical role in the attacks. He drove the three suicide bombers who blew themselves up outside the Stade de France to their destination. Abdeslam also rented cars and hideouts and drove across Europe in the months before the attacks to collect jihadists who had slipped into the continent unnoticed among masses of migrants. He told police shortly after his arrest that he too had been primed to carry out a suicide attack at Stade de France, one of six venues targeted in the Paris attacks, but that he had backed out at the last minute. Investigators have cast doubt on that claim, saying they believe he was intent on seeing through his mission but was hamstrung by a faulty explosive belt. Whatever the outcome of the trial he is likely to spend many years behind bars, being just three years into a 20-year sentence for attempted murder over the firefight with Belgian police.

Dope-smoking clubber

One of the world's most-wanted spent the immediate aftermath of the Paris attacks eating fries and chatting with two unsuspecting teenagers in the stairwell of a Paris high-rise while waiting to be driven across the border to Belgium. It was only when his mugshot was released by police days later that the pair realized the man who was looking over their shoulder at a news item about the attacks was one of the chief suspects. In the Brussels suburb of Molenbeek, where he grew up, Abdeslam was known for his bad-boy lifestyle of petty crime, smoking weed and gambling. An inveterate clubber, he also had a reputation as a womanizer.

His multiple brushes with the law included a conviction for attempted robbery in 2010 with a childhood friend, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the coordinator of the Paris attacks who was shot dead by French police in a siege a week later. Abdeslam, who grew up in a family of five children, worked as a technician for the Brussels tram network but was fired for skipping work in 2011. In later years, he spent much of his time hanging out in a cafe run by Brahim. Friends of the brothers say they became hooked on the Islamic State after the Sunni radical group proclaimed a caliphate in Iraq and Syria in 2014. They say they stopped drinking, showed a new-found interest in Islam and huddled with other would-be jihadists to imbibe IS propaganda. In February 2015, Belgian police summoned Salah Abdeslam to discuss Abaaoud who had appeared in a gruesome video from Syria, showing him driving a pick-up that was dragging mutilated bodies to a mass grave. —AFP

NASA's tiny Mars copter still flying high

WASHINGTON: It was only supposed to fly five times. And yet NASA's helicopter on Mars, Ingenuity, has completed 12 flights and it isn't ready to retire. Given its stunning and unexpected success, the US space agency has extended Ingenuity's mission indefinitely. The tiny helicopter has become the regular travel companion of the rover Perseverance, whose core mission is to seek signs of ancient life on Mars.

"Everything is working so well," said Josh Ravich, the head of Ingenuity's mechanical engineering team. "We're doing better on the surface than we had expected." Hundreds of people contributed to the project, though only about a dozen currently retain day-to-day roles. Ravich joined the team five years ago. "When I got the opportunity to come work on the helicopter project, I think I had the same reaction as anybody else: 'Is that even possible?'" His initial doubts were understand-

France's biggest trial to open over 2015 attacks

PARIS: The biggest trial in France's modern legal history begins on Wednesday over the November 2015 attacks on Paris that saw 130 people slaughtered at bars, restaurants and the Bataclan concert hall. The suicide bombing and gun assault by three teams of jihadists, later claimed by the Islamic State group, was France's worst post-war atrocity. A purpose-built facility at the historic court of justice on the Ile de la Cite in central Paris will host the trial, with 14 of the 20 defendants present, including the only surviving attacker, Salah Abdeslam.

"Everyone has their own expectations, but we know that this is an important milestone for our future lives," said Arthur Denouveaux, a survivor of the Bataclan music venue attack and president of the Life for Paris victims' association. The trial over the traumatic jihadist killings, which were planned from Syria,

Guns for hire: New abortion law sparks debate

WASHINGTON: The phrase "bounty hunter" conjures images of "wanted" posters and gunslinging cowboys hunting fugitives in the Wild West - but the controversial profession is very much alive in modern-day America. The industry, almost unique to the United States, came under a renewed spotlight this week as the Supreme Court refused to block a Texas law giving ordinary citizens the green light to sue anyone helping women access abortions.

Activists and politicians from street level campaigns

able: The air on Mars has a density equivalent to only one percent that of Earth's atmosphere. By way of comparison, flying a helicopter on Mars would be like flying one in the thin air nearly 30 km above Earth. Nor was it easy getting to Mars in the first place. Ingenuity had to withstand the initial shock of takeoff from Earth, and then of the Feb 18 landing on the red planet following a seven-month voyage through space, strapped to the rover's belly.

Once in its new surroundings, the tiny (1.8 kilogram) copter has had to survive the glacial cold of Martian nights, drawing warmth from the solar panels that charge its batteries during the day. And its flights are guided using an array of sensors, since the 15-minute lag in communications from Earth makes real-time guidance impossible.

On April 19, Ingenuity carried out its maiden flight, making history as the first motorized craft to fly on another planet. Exceeding all expectations, it has gone on to fly 11 more times. "We've actually been able to handle winds greater than we had expected," Ravich told AFP. "I think by flight three we had actually accomplished all of our engineering goals ... (and) got all the information we had hoped to get," said

is on a scale unmatched in recent times. It will last nine months until late May 2022, with 145 days for hearings involving about 330 lawyers, 300 victims and former president Francois Hollande who will testify in November. The case file runs to a million pages in 542 volumes, measuring 53 meters across.

Security alert

Surviving gunman Abdeslam, a Belgium-born French-Moroccan, fled the scene of the carnage after abandoning his suicide belt, which investigators found to be defective. Abdeslam, now 31, was later captured in Brussels, hiding in a building close to his family home, after four months on the run. He has resolutely refused to cooperate with the French investigation and remained largely silent throughout a separate trial in Belgium in 2018 that saw him declare only that he put his "trust in Allah" and that the court was biased. A major question is whether he will speak at his scheduled testimony in mid-January 2022.

Another focus of the trial will be on how the squad of killers managed to come undetected into France, allegedly using the flow of migrants from Islamic



IN SPACE: This file NASA photo shows NASA's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter (right) captured by Mars Perseverance rover using its Left Mastcam-Z Camera. —AFP

Ravich, who works for NASA's famed Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), which developed the helicopter.

Since then, Ingenuity has flown as high as 12 m, and its last flight lasted two minutes and 49 seconds. In all, it has covered a distance of 2.5 km. In May, Ingenuity flew its first one-way mission, landing outside the relatively flat "airfield" that had been carefully selected as its initial home. But not all

has gone smoothly. Its sixth flight brought some excitement.

After being knocked dangerously off-balance by a malfunction affecting the photos taken in flight to help it stabilize, the tiny craft was able to recover. It landed, safe and sound, and the problem was resolved. Ingenuity is now being sent out to scout the way for Perseverance, using its high-resolution color camera. —AFP



PARIS: A man looks at the memorial plaque near the Bataclan theatre and Cafe in Paris where jihadists attacked and killed 90 people. —AFP

State-controlled regions of Syria as cover. Fourteen of the accused - who face a range of charges from providing logistical support, to planning and weapons offences - are expected to be present in court. Six more suspects are being tried in absentia. Five of them are presumed

dead, mainly in air strikes in Syria, including French jihadist brothers Fabien and Jean-Michel Clain. The alleged coordinator, Belgian national Abdelhamid Abaaoud, was killed by French police northeast of Paris five days after the attacks. —AFP

to the White House have voiced alarm at the high court's break with 50 years of precedent in protecting nationwide access to abortion. "In effect, (Texas) has deputized the state's citizens as bounty hunters, offering them cash prizes for civilly prosecuting their neighbors' medical procedures," Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote in a stinging dissent.

Activists who fear the reform will metastasize saw the writing on the wall when the Texas Right to Life campaign, which has tip lines for people to anonymously report violators, said it hoped to "replicate our success across the nation." Their concerns were confirmed when South Dakota's Republican governor Kristi Noem was among the first to suggest adopting the idea in her own state.

Bounty hunting spread across the globe from the Middle Ages but is found almost exclusively today in the United States and the Philippines. Tristan Cabello, a historian specializing in US culture and politics, told

AFP bounty hunting was a profession "deeply embedded in the American psyche... that speaks to the most conservative of US citizens." The vast majority of bounty hunters make their living by rounding up fugitives who have skipped town in return for a share of the bail. They argue that they provide a public service at no public expense.

But the Texas abortion law has reignited debate on a job that can unleash freelance law enforcement personnel whose methods are often protected from local oversight. President Joe Biden told reporters at the White House on Friday the Texas law amounted to "vigilante" justice that "sounds ridiculous, almost un-American." In one of the most high profile recent incidents of citizen law enforcement gone wrong in 2017, two bounty hunters died in a shootout in a Greenville, Texas car dealership, along with the fugitive they were hired to apprehend. —AFP