



US to redeploy nuclear weapons to UK – Telegraph

JOHANNESBURG (Agencies): The United States is planning to deploy nuclear weapons to the UK for the first time in 15 years, The Telegraph reported Friday, citing Pentagon documents. The report comes amid heightened tensions between NATO and Russia over the Ukraine conflict, and calls from some Western politicians to prepare for a potential armed clash with Moscow. The British newspaper cited procurement contracts for a new facility at the Royal Air Force station at Lakenheath in Suffolk, which point to Washington's intention to bring nuclear weapons to the base. RAF Lakenheath is expected to house B61-12 bombs that are three times more powerful than those dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, the Telegraph said. The US sent F-35 nuclear-capable fighters to the base last year. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman



Maria Zakharova said last year that Moscow would be compelled to enact "compensatory countermeasures" if American nuclear warheads were to return to Britain. Russia has accused the West of stoking tensions in Europe and maintains that the eastward expansion of NATO is one of the root causes of the Ukraine conflict. High-ranking European officials, including German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, have spoken of the

need to brace for a potential war with Russia. Last week the chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, urged the bloc to be "readier across the whole spectrum" for direct confrontation. The head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergey Naryshkin, dismissed the claims that Moscow was planning an offensive against NATO as "information warfare" aimed at justifying "hybrid aggression."

China firmly opposes double standards on counterterrorism: Wang Wenbin

BEIJING (Agencies): China firmly opposes double standards on counterterrorism and stands ready to step up cooperation with other countries and jointly combat all forms of terrorism, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said on Friday. Spokesperson Wang Wenbin made the remarks at a daily press briefing in response to a question regarding evidences of Indian support to terror-

ist forces in some areas of Pakistan such as Balochistan province. He said that terrorism was the common enemy of mankind, adding "China firmly opposes double standards on counterterrorism. Such practices will only backfire." "China stands ready to step up cooperation with other countries and jointly combat all forms of terrorism," he added. Earlier this week, Global Times published a compre-

hensive investigative report, exposing Indian support to terrorist forces in Balochistan province. Quoting sources and views of various experts, the newspaper reported that while continually suppressing some of its rivals and neighbours in the international community with the excuse of anti-terrorism, India has secretly funded terrorist forces in Pakistani areas like Balochistan province.

Argentina's Milei to visit Israel, denounces Hamas



BUENOS AIRES (Agencies): Argentina's new President Javier Milei, who has recently embraced Orthodox Judaism, said Friday he would visit Israel as he condemned Hamas' actions in an address to the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. "In the coming weeks, I will be traveling to the Holy Land," Milei said in a speech at the Holocaust Museum in Argentina's capital, evoking a "new chapter in the brotherhood of our two nations." He condemned as "atrocious and unforgivable," the October 7 attack by Islamist group Hamas on Israel which resulted in the deaths of some 1,140 people, most of them civilians according to an AFP tally based on official figures. Israel has vowed to crush the militant group and launched a military offensive that the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza says has killed at least 26,083 people, about 70 percent of them women and children. Milei was speaking on the eve of International Holocaust Memorial Day, and on the same day the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that Israel must prevent genocide in its retaliatory war with Hamas and allow aid into Gaza. He urged the liberation of 11 Argentines among the more than 100 hostages still held in Gaza after being captured during the Hamas attack. Self-described anarcho-capitalist Milei was raised in a Catholic family but has spoken of his more recent study of the Torah, the book of Jewish scripture. Right after his November election, he visited the tomb of a revered rabbi in New York, a popular spiritual pilgrimage destination for some Jews.

TEPCO further delays removal of melted fuel debris from Fukushima nuclear plant

TOKYO (Agencies): The operator of the tsunami-hit nuclear plant in Fukushima, TEPCO, has announced a delay of several more months before launching a test to remove melted fuel debris from inside one of the reactors. The debris cleanup initially was supposed to be started by 2021, but it has been plagued with delays, underscoring the difficulty of recovering from the plant's meltdown after a magnitude 9.0 quake and tsunami in March 2011. The government and TEPCO initially committed to start removing the melted fuel from inside one of the three damaged reactors within 10 years of the disaster. In 2019, the government and TEPCO decided to start removing melted fuel debris by the end of 2021 from the No. 2 reactor after a remote-controlled robot successfully clipped and lifted

a granule of melted fuel during an internal probe. But the coronavirus pandemic delayed development of the robotic arm, and the plan was pushed to 2022. Then, glitches with the arm repeatedly have delayed the project since then. On Thursday, TEPCO officials pushed back the planned start from March to October of this year. TEPCO officials said that the inside of a planned entryway for the robotic arm is filled with deposits believed to be melted equipment, cables and other debris from the meltdown, and their harder-than-expected removal has delayed the plan. TEPCO now is considering using a slimmer, telescope-shaped kind of robot to start the debris removal. About 880 tons of highly radioactive melted nuclear fuel remain inside the three damaged reactors.

US approves F-16 fighter jet sale to Turkiye, F-35s to Greece after Turkiye OKs Sweden's entry to NATO



WASHINGTON (Agencies): The Biden administration has approved the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkiye following the Turkish government's ratification this week of Sweden's membership in NATO. The move is a significant development in the expansion of the alliance, which has taken on additional importance since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The State Department notified Congress of its approval of the \$23 billion F-16 sale to Turkiye, along with a companion \$8.6 billion sale of advanced F-35 fighter jets to Greece, late Friday. The move came just hours after Turkiye deposited its "instrument of ratification" for Sweden's accession to NATO with Washington, which is the repository for alliance documents and after several key members of Congress lifted their objections. The sale to Turkiye includes 40 new F-16s and equipment to modernize 79 of its

existing F-16 fleet. The sale to Greece includes 40 F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters and related equipment. NATO ally Turkiye has long sought to upgrade its F-16 fleet and had made its ratification of Sweden's membership contingent on the approval of the sale of the new planes. The Biden administration had supported the sale, but several lawmakers had expressed objections due to human rights concerns. Those objections, including from the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sens. Ben Cardin, D-Md., and Jim Risch, R-Idaho, have now been overcome, officials said. Cardin said in statement Friday that he had still had concerns about Turkiye's rights record, but had agreed to the sale based on commitments Turkiye has made to improve it. "I look forward to beginning this new chapter in our relationship with Turkiye, expanding the NATO alliance, and working with our global allies in standing up to ongoing Russian aggression against its peaceful neighbors," he said.

NASA's Mars Helicopter Permanently Grounded After Damaging Its Rotor

The initially designed technology demonstration spacecraft has transformed into a surveillance helicopter supporting a rover, demonstrating the feasibility of powered flight in Mars' atmosphere. NASA's mini-chopper has ended its mission on Mars, the US space agency declared on Thursday. Despite Ingenuity maintaining an upright position and staying in contact with ground controllers, recent images transmitted to Earth showed damage to its rotor blades from its January 18 flight, per NASA's official statement. Permanently grounded due to its damaged rotor, the space agency has chalked the breakdown up to a hard landing, suggesting the craft lost control when it broke off contact at the end of flight. Initially invented as a tech demo with a short-



term goal, the helicopter successfully executed 72 flights over its three-year span on the red planet. Throughout this period, it logged over two hours of flight time and traversed a distance of 18 kilometers. The mini-helicopter landed on Mars on Feb. 18, 2021, with NASA's Perseverance rover. It concluded the first controlled flight on Mars a few months later, on April 19. Soon after it transitioned to demo-operations, performing aerial surveillance for Perseverance scientists and rover controllers.

Airplane-Sized Asteroid Will Fly Between Earth & Moon Over Weekend

Though asteroid 2024 BJ will fly just 220,000 miles from Earth, it poses no threat to our planet. An airplane-sized asteroid is predicted to sail between Earth and the Moon on January 27. Asteroid 2024 BJ was detected earlier this month, and will come within 220,000 miles (354,000 kilometers) of Earth tomorrow—about 92% of the average distance from Earth to the Moon. The asteroid, believed to be 82 feet across (25 meters) was first detected on January 17. According to one report, the asteroid will fly close to the moon at about 9 AM EST before it passes Earth three to four hours later, traveling at 14,200 miles per hour (22,850 km/h). It will reach its closest point to Earth at 12:30 PM EST, according to NASA. And viewing the spectacle will be available on a Virtual Telescope Project live feed at 12:15 PM EST. Asteroid 2024 BJ is an Apollo type asteroid which are "near-earth asteroids" and make up a majority of the meteorites that occasionally fall to



earth. According to an online map, the asteroid's location at the time of this article's publication was in the constellation of Auriga—about 241,996 miles (389,456 kilometers) from Earth. Auriga neighbors Gemini and Taurus and is visible in the northern hemisphere during the winter months. This chariot is often depicted holding a female goat with her kits as well as the reins of a chariot. In finding Auriga, using the constellation Orion as a guide can be helpful—above Orion is Taurus and above that is a shape of stars that look like a pentagons which is actually Auriga.

Texas Governor Says Will Continue to Defend Border Amid Dispute With Biden Administration

WASHINGTON (Agencies): The state of Texas will continue to defend its portion of the US border with Mexico amid a standoff with the Biden administration over the use of razor wire barriers, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement. "Texas will continue to exercise its constitutional right to protect and defend our southern border," Abbott said on Friday via social media platform X (formerly Twitter). "In President Biden's absence, we will hold the line to keep Texans - and Americans - safe." On Monday, the US Supreme Court issued a temporary order to allow Border Patrol agents to remove the barriers placed by Texas. The following day, Department of Homeland Security

General Counsel Jonathan Meyer sent a letter to Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton requesting that the state confirm federal access to border sites by Friday. However, Abbott maintains that Texas has a constitutional right to protect the border due to the Biden administration's failure to address the record flow of illegal immigrants into the United States from Mexico. Texas' border security effort, dubbed Operation Lone Star, has led to nearly half a million illegal immigrant apprehensions and more than 38,700 criminal arrests, Abbott's office said in a statement on Friday. Operation Lone Star continues to fill gaps created by the Biden administration's refusal to secure the border, the statement said.

Russia and Iran Finalize 20-Year Deal that will Change the Middle East Forever

TEHRAN (Agencies): Iran and Russia have signed a new 20-year comprehensive cooperation deal, which will replace the 10-year-deal signed in March 2001. The new agreement, called 'The Treaty on the Basis of Mutual Relations and Principles of Cooperation between Iran and Russia', was presented to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, for his consideration on 11 December 2023 and was approved on 18 January 2024. The new deal has been expanded not only in duration but also in scope and scale, particularly in the defense and energy sectors. In

the energy sector, the new deal gives Russia the first right of extraction in the Iranian section of the Caspian Sea, including the potentially huge Chalus field. The wider Caspian basins area, including both onshore and offshore fields, is conservatively estimated to have around 48 billion barrels of oil and 292 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas in proven and probable reserves. It is worth noting that the new deal additionally complements key elements of the all-encompassing 'Iran-China 25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement'.

About Khyber Mail The Khyber mail was first published in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1932. A newspaper in English by the eminent journalist Sheikh Sana Ullah. From 1932 to 1989 it has survived as leading English newspaper in the region by the sons of Sana Ullah i.e. Sheikh Zaka Ullah, Sheikh Inayat Ullah and Sheikh Saleem Ullah.

The publication was shut down in 1989 due to various reasons. The current owner Rizwan Inayat son of Sheikh Inayat Ullah and grandson of Sheikh Sana Ullah, has restarted the family heritage but meeting with the requirement of the century, by giving the readers current happenings around the world with one touch anywhere any time and updating the reader to pace up with the world.

Rs 5bln provincial budget needed for 4-month in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): A request has been made to the Finance Division, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), for the release of Rs 5 billion for the provincial budget for four months for 36 government sector departments, with Rs 900 million recommended for the health department and Rs 600 million for the construction of roads. According to a letter addressed to the Finance Division, Government of KP, a detailed budget is needed for 36 government sector departments, including Rs 500 million for multi-sectoral development, Rs 500 million for the water

sector, and Rs 350 million for the Department of Primary, Secondary, and Higher Secondary Education. Likewise, Rs 250 million has been released for drinking water and sewage drainage projects, while it has been requested to release Rs 250 million immediately for energy and power. Similarly, it is recommended to release Rs 350 million for the Higher Education Department, Rs 200 million for Livestock and Dairy Development and Urban Development, Rs 50 million for sports, Rs 100 million for agriculture, tourism, forests, and local governments, and

Rs 60.10 million has been requested for industries, Rs 55 million for the department of interior and tribal affairs, Rs 45 million for relief and rehabilitation, and Rs 40 million each for the Urban Policy Unit, Lion Justice, and Board of Revenue. The finance department has been requested to give money immediately to the rest of the departments through the letter, while it has been demanded to release a total of five billion rupees. However, the Finance Department has not yet given any response regarding the proposal of the Planning and Development Department.

46 children died of pneumonia in three hospitals in city so far

PESHAWAR (Agencies): With the increase in the severity of the cold, the infection is becoming viral, and so far, 46 children have died of pneumonia in three major hospitals in the city. Hospital officials told mediamen here on Friday that pneumonia was affecting children with low immunity, and a total of 46 children died of pneumonia in three hospitals in the city, including 20 patients

each in Lady Reading and Khyber Teaching Hospitals and six in Hayatabad Medical Complex. The hospital's officials said that more than 700 children affected by pneumonia are being brought to OPD on a daily basis, and more than capacity children are being treated at Lady Reading Hospital. "Most of the affected children belong to adjoining areas," the officials confirmed.

KP Health Deptt sacked 12 doctors for absenteeism

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Health Department dismissed 12 doctors for absenteeism on Friday and issued a separate notification in that regard. According to the separate notification, "Six female doctors are also among those dismissed." Director General Health has declared non-joining duty even

on the notices of absent doctors. Those doctors were dismissed from the services included Dr Faiza Gohar, Dr Farah Gul, Dr Jahangir, Dr Javidullah, Dr Muhammad Uzair, Dr Muhammad Saeed Ilyas, Dr Mehreen Akhtar, Dr Kafayat Ali, Dr Roheela Gul, Dr Sohail Ahmed, Dr Taimur Zeib, Dr Uzmi Ehsan.

KP govt commitment in banning of e-cigarettes, vapes in province highly acclaimed

PESHAWAR (Agencies): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's commitment to banning e-cigarettes and vapes in the province has been highly acclaimed, terming the decision as very beneficial in the longer run for ensuring better public health. The appreciation came from a 'Public Health Stakeholders Consultation' organized by Blue Veins organization to discuss the regulations around e-cigarettes and vapes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It merits an insertion here that in a landmark development, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government on 16th January 2024 issued a notification for

imposition of Section 144 for 60 days on the storage sale and use of e-cigarettes and vapes in the province. In the notification, a ban on the sale of e-cigarettes and vapes to individuals below the age of 21 years was imposed. Similarly, the ban is also imposed on the sale, storage and use of e-cigarettes and vapes within a 50-meter radius of all the education institutions in the province. The stakeholder consultation was participated by people from different walks of life including district administration, public health, tobacco control programme, police, media and others.

FBR Chairman praises Customs Department KP for increasing tax revenue

PESHAWAR (APP): Chairman of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Malik Amjad Zubair Tiwana here Friday highly praised Pakistan Customs Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for increasing tax revenue besides countering illegal trade and contraband goods. Addressing as a chief guest in a function organized by Pakistan Customs Peshawar in connection with International Customs Day, Chairman FBR said the theme of this year of the International Customs Day was "customs engaging traditional and new partners with purpose". Malik Amjad Tiwana said

that the International Day of customs was a testament to the essential role customs plays in fostering global trade, ensuring financial security and upholding legitimate economic trade in the world. This year's theme highlighted the important role of partnership within the customs community, emphasizing collaborative efforts for the progress of international trade and ensuring enhanced cooperation in the global customs arena. Malik Amjad said that technological advancement has created extra challenges such as the menace of money laundering

and great responsibilities rest on Pakistan Customs officials to utilize technology effectively for countering all kinds of smuggling and illicit trade besides promoting better service delivery and increasing tax revenue for Govt kitty. He thanked Pakistan Customs Peshawar for organizing an impressive function in connection with International Customs Day. The smartly turned-out contingent presented a salute to Chairman FBR Malik Amjad Tiwana who also paid a visit to Yagdar Shuhada at Customs House Peshawar where he laid a floral wreath.

Construction of run-of-the river dams imperative to avert looming water crisis By Fakhar Alam

PESHAWAR (APP): Highly vulnerable to climate change and desertification, Pakistan is being faced with looming water crisis due to lack of rains and snowfalls besides fast melting of glaciers putting lives of millions people at risk due to emerging food security challenges. Being the most water stressed country in world due to shortage of dams and runner of the river (ROR) projects despite plenty of suitable sites for construction of water reservoirs in northern parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan, the country's water availability has been consistently declining due to mismanagement of water resources, unchecked car washing stations, deforestation and climate change. "Pakistan is mostly relying on glaciers for its water needs. However, the lack of rains and snow falls this year in winter signified the country's water vulnerability that may create food security challenges besides energy crisis in years ahead if we do not construct run of the river dams being cost and time efficient", said Tauheedul Haq, former Conservator of Forests while

talking to APP. Referring to the National Water Policy 2018, he said that per capita surface water availability has declined from 5,260 cubic meter per annum in 1951 to a significant 1000 cubic meters in 2016 and feared that this quantity would likely to further decrease by about 860 cubic meter in next few years if deforestation and population bulge continued and water of rivers were not stored through better water management. With glaciers retreat, he said more glacial lakes would be formed especially in Chitral and Swat besides Gilgit-Baltistan with high chances of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GOLF) as evident at Attabad lake GOLF that necessitated more runner of the river dams in Rivers Swat, Kunhar at Kaghan, Naran and Punjokora Dir Upper most suited for these kinds of hydel projects besides averting flash floods. Dr Professor Zilakat Malik, former Chairman Economics Department, University of Peshawar said that climate change, 240.954 million population bulge and technological advancement started exerting

pressure on energy resources in the country that was already facing about 7,000 megawatts (MW) shortfall affecting GDP growth. He said the promotion of run-of-the-river (ROR) hydroelectricity would be required to bridge the widening demand-supply gap of electricity besides fulfilling the pressing demands of affordable energy of the consumers increasing with each passing day in the wake of mushroom growth of IT and agriculture sectors. He said that the energy consumption share of industries has increased by 28 percent during July-April 2022 from 26.3 percent recorded in July-April 2021 while the share of the agriculture sector jacked up to nine percent from 8.9 percent during the same period. The 2022 devastating floods have adversely affected the country's agriculture, economy, livestock, and energy sectors as scores of mini micro-hydel stations were swept away by the gushing water that inflicted over USD 40 billion in economic losses to the government kitty. "We need to adopt the culture of construction of small water res-

ervoirs and ROR projects being cost and time-efficient and is very popular in developed countries to avert water crisis", he said. Dr Zilakat Malik said China had constructed about 98,000 dams, India 5,324 dams and only 150 dams by Pakistan. He said despite the huge 30,000 MW hydel potential of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, not a single dam was constructed in Pakistan after the Tarbela dam was built on River Indus in 1984 with an estimated cost of USD1.49 billion. Citing examples of ROR dams in the world, he said that Canada is generating about USD 140 million annual revenues from Niagara ROR dams attracting over one million tourists every year. Similarly, Hoover RoR dam on the Colorado River generates about USD 250 annual revenue for the USA and the Three Gorges ROR Dam on Yangtze River contributed USD 1.5 billion in tourism revenue in 2019 to the economy of China. Engr Zahoor Hussain, Director of Projects Wapda said that ROR hydroelectricity is a type of hydroelectric generation plant whereby little or no water storage is provided

for electricity generation. He said ROR hydroelectricity was considered ideal for rivers and streams that could sustain a minimum flow or those regulated by a lake or reservoir upstream. He said a small dam was usually built to create a head pond ensuring that there is enough water entering the penstock pipes that lead to the turbines which are at lower elevations. Engr Zahoor said ROR was a prime source of renewable energy that does not produce greenhouse gases and can easily be located in remote areas where other forms of energy generation were not feasible besides these could be built quickly and required less investment than conventional dams. He said Chitral, Kohistan, Upper Mansehra, Dir, and Swat in KP, Northern Punjab, Azad Kashmir, and Gilgit Baltistan (GB) rivers were most suited for ROR dams. He said the Grand Coulee dam at Washington USA and the Itaipu dam on River Parana between Brazil and Paraguay were the world's largest ROR projects that generate electricity from the natural flow of the rivers.

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Pakistan's non-resident envoy presents credentials to Panamanian president

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Ambassador of Pakistan to Mexico Shozab Abbas presented his Letters of Credentials, as non-resident Ambassador — Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary — of Pakistan to Panama to Panamanian President Laurentino Cortizo Cohen. The ambassador, who would be residing in Mexico, presented his diplomatic credentials in a ceremony held at the Presidential Palace of Panama, said a press



release on Friday. In a subsequent meeting with President Laurentino Cortizo, Ambassador Shozab Abbas conveyed greetings of the

President of Pakistan Arif Alvi and expressed his commitment to make endeavours to strengthen the bilateral relations between the two countries. President Laurentino Cortizo extended all possible support of his government to Ambassador Shozab Abbas in his endeavours to strengthen bilateral relations. Ambassador Shozab Abbas also met Foreign Minister of Panama Janaina Tewaney Mencomo.

Drug peddler held, hashish recovered

Dera Ismail Khan (Agencies): Dera police, during the crackdown against narcotics on Friday, arrested the drug peddler and recovered hashish in the jurisdiction of Kirri Khasor Police Station. According to the police spokesman, following the directions of District Police Officer (DPO) Dera Abdul Rauf Babar Qaisrani, SHO Kirri Khasor Police Station Saleem Abbas and the police team during the operation arrested the drug peddler, namely Abdul Lateef, the son of Malik Jumma, a resident of Zamirabad, and recovered 1080 grams of hashish from his possession. Police have registered a case against the drug peddler and started a further probe.

3 injured in road accident

ISLAMABAD (APP): At least three people, including a woman, sustained injuries after a head-on collision between two bikes near Minchinabad, a city in Bahawalnagar District, Friday morning. According to details, rescue 1122 said that an overspeeding bike coming from the opposite side knocked down another motorcycle carrying two people, a private news channel reported. The injured person was rescued by officials, who shifted them to a local hospital for medical treatment. The cause of the accident was overspeeding, rescue officials informed.

Injured teenager succumbed to injuries

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): A teenager succumbed to injuries after being shot by the accused hailing from an opponent group over a land dispute late Thursday. According to a police spokesman, Mohammed Rashid, 17, son of Muhammad Latif, a resident of Khan Garh, got critically injured by hitting a bullet at his forehead. He was then moved immediately to the ruler health center in critical condition, but he couldn't survive for long and died today's morning. Khan Garh Police Station has registered a case against the unidentified accused and started a further probe.

Two dacoits held during police encounter

MULTAN (APP): Two dacoits who were wanted by police in dozens of cases, including the murder of a security guard and shop robbery, were arrested in injured condition during a police encounter near Basti Nau in the jurisdiction of Gulgasht police station. According to a police spokesman, New Multan police received a call that four armed robbers committed a robbery at M.A. Jinnah Road and fled from the scene. SHO New Multan Ali Hassan Gillani, along with his team, started to chase the fleeing dacoits. SHO Gulgasht Rao Zia-ur-Rehman tried to stop two motorcycles during a police picket near Basti Nau. The bandits opened fire on the police team.

PO among 13 suspects held

KOHAT (APP): The district police on Friday held 13 suspects including a proclaimed offender during search and strike operations. The spokesman of district police said that the search operations were carried out in Ghorzandi, Samari, Darmaluk and adjacent hilly areas. The police recovered three pistols, five chargers, dozens of cartridges, 2,715 kg of hashish and 670 grams of opium from the detained persons. DPO Kohat Farhan Khan supervised all the search operations which were conducted by DSP Lachi Yousaf Jan, SHO Lachi Jaber Khan and heavy contingent of police and elite force.

Qawwali evening at Pakistan's France embassy mesmerises audience

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Embassy of Pakistan in Paris arranged a Qawwali evening where guests were treated to a captivating performance of soulful Sufi poetry by renowned Pakistani Qawwal Bakhtyar Ali Santoo and his team. Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, in his welcome address, highlighted that Qawwali had been in practice since the 13th century and the credit for popularizing it rested mostly with Hazrat Amir Khusrau, according to a Pakistan embassy's press release received Friday. He noted that there was a time when Qawwali was sung only at shrines of Sufi saints but now this form of music was appreciated widely including formal and informal



occasions, movies and other events. Giving an insight into how the transformation of Qawwali took shape from a ritual function to one of entertainment; from a traditional community event to an international commercial one – the ambassador credited it to a generation of famous Qawwals from Sabri brothers to Aziz Mian and most prominently the supreme Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

Easypaisa empowers women with first-ever audio Nikahnama in country

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): In a historic move that shatters taboos and empowers women, Pakistan's leading digital financial services platform has unveiled the "Easypaisa Audio Nikahnama", a groundbreaking initiative that provides women unprecedented access to their crucial matrimonial rights. Easypaisa has just created ripples across the financial services industry, said a news release issued here on Friday. This first-of-its-kind innovation in Pakistan leverages the power of technology to overcome literacy barriers and ensure education of the most important contract of life's most significant moments. According to the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women, two-thirds of Pakistani women cannot comprehend their Nikahnama due to literacy limitations, and the remaining 1/3 do not get timely access to the document. Easypaisa Audio Nikahnama tackles this head-on by

offering a free, simple, and accessible solution. Women can access this audio tool through a free helpline by giving a missed call on the dedicated number (0341-1171222) or download the Easypaisa App and listen to the Nikahnama in seven different languages. In addition to this, there is a sign language option available in the app to ensure accessibility by all. This empowers women, regardless of their socio-economic class or digital divide to access this information, to understand their rights and obligations within the marriage contract. Commenting on the development, Rifah Qadri, Head of Marketing & Communications at Easypaisa, said; "For decades, countless Pakistani women have entered marriages without fully understanding the terms of their Nikahnama. This vital document, outlining their rights and responsibilities within the marriage, often remains inaccessible due to illiteracy or lack of awareness.

Haripur police conduct training sessions for security personnel ahead of general elections 2024

HARIPUR (APP): In preparation for the upcoming general elections in 2024, the Haripur Police organized a comprehensive training session on Friday aimed at equipping police officers, youths, and female police officials who were assigned to security duties. The sessions focused on imparting detailed briefings and instructions regarding the election code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for polling stations. On the occasion, District Police Officer (DPO) Haripur, Muhammad Omar Khan, reaffirmed the commitment of the

police to uphold peace and security during the electoral process. He emphasized the utilization of all available resources to ensure a safe environment. Police officers and jawans deputed at polling stations were instructed to maintain alertness and vigilance throughout their duties. Special attention was directed towards monitoring any suspicious activities or individuals in the vicinity of polling stations. Compliance with the code of conduct prescribed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was highlighted as a crucial aspect of their responsibilities.

CPSP approves upgradation of DHQ Haripur to teaching hospital

HARIPUR (APP): The College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (CPSP) has sanctioned the elevation of the District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital of Haripur to the status of a teaching hospital. This decision marks a significant milestone in healthcare provision in the region. According to the details, "Initially, the hospital will establish medical and surgical wards, with plans to incorporate specialized departments including gynecology, pediatrics, orthopedics, and cardiology by June 2024." The Provincial Doctors Association of Haripur has lauded this development, extending gratitude

to the Chief Minister, Governor, and local administration for their collaborative efforts. With its upgraded status, DHQ Haripur is prepared to serve the community more effectively, like renowned institutions in the province such as Ayub Teaching Hospital and Lady Reading Hospital. During a ceremony organized by the PDAs, Surgeon Dr Javaid Iqbal, Dr Safdar Khan, Dr Atiq, Dr Tahir Inayat, Dr Akhtar Zaman, President of the Haripur Press Club Zakir Husain Tanoli, and District Health Officer Dr Naseer Shah expressed their appreciation for this transformative initiative.

'Pakistan effectively highlighting Ram temple issue at every global forum': Ambassador

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, Ambassador Munir Akram Friday strongly condemned the recent consecration of 'Ram Temple' on the demolished Babri Mosque's site and expressed commitment for effectively highlighting the gross rights violations in IIOJK and temple issue at every global forum. Talking to a private news channel, he said that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries were supporting the efforts for preserving universally recognized and regionally important sacred sites, meetings with high level UN representatives were also being conducting to highlight the issue. The ambassador said that Pakistan

urged the top official for the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations to play their active role for the protection of Islamic sites in India. The OIC Ambassadors had also acknowledged the importance of the issue, he said, adding, we were writing letters to seek urgent intervention for the protection of religious sites in India. He further said "We are also demanding action plan over protection of religious sites," adding, Indian friendly countries also needed to mobilize more diplomatic efforts to control Hindu-like policies in India. He said UN officials were encouraging Pakistan efforts for raising Kashmir cause at world forums, adding, the right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination had been acknowledged.

Notorious drug peddler held, drugs recovered

MULTAN (APP): Police claimed to have arrested a notorious drug peddler and recovered over one kilogram of hashish and illegal weapons from his possession. According to a police spokesman, a notorious drug peddler, namely Babar Alamgir Qureshi, was an ice addict involved in drug dealing and lawlessness who always remained armed to avoid arrest. Earlier, he had failed his arrest attempt by suddenly drawing his weapon. He used to escape from the roof of the house through

other adjacent roofs while raiding a five-story building. Police, on report of his presence at home along with drugs, cordoned off the house through a strategy, made a quick entry by breaking the windows of the fifth and second floors of the house, and attempted to escape on the stairs of the second and third floors without giving him a chance to use the weapon, overpowering him. Police also recovered a pistol with 30 bores, 12 bullets, and 1440 grams of hashish from his possession.

AIOU-sponsored 02-Day Open EXPO and Career Counseling Event concludes in Mirpur Campus

MIRPUR-AJK (Agencies): Allama Iqbal Open University Regional Campus Mirpur on Friday concluded its highly anticipated 02-day Open Expo and Career Counseling Event, leaving students well-equipped with valuable recommendations for their academic and professional endeavors. According to Regional Director AIOU Mirpur, the event, organized under the theme of "Empowering Future Leaders," attracted a diverse audience of students and parents, all seeking guidance for higher education and career paths. He further said that Allama Iqbal Open University Regional

Campus Mirpur always stood steadfast in its commitment to fostering academic and career development opportunities, empowering individuals to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society. The event garnered widespread participation, attracting a substantial number of students from the three districts of Mirpur division and accompanied by their parents and members of the public. With a variety of informative stalls and engaging activities, the event proved to be a one-stop destination for students' educational and vocational aspirations.

Electioneering gears up as stalwarts eye Multan slots By Salman Raza

MULTAN (APP): After a lukewarm response in initial days electioneering gears up in Multan Division, the power castle of South Punjab with political bigwigs eying maximum seats for their parties in February 8 polls. Gilanis, Quereshis, Bosans, Dogars, Mehars, Tareens and many more are in the run to secure National Assembly seats as campaign finally picks up steam with massive campaigning, holding rallies and processions and door to door contacts. Like other parts of the country where political parties are toiling hard to attract people through new slogans and commitments, activity also gears up in Multan to lure masses in whatever way the candidates can. With each party claiming to be the only rescuer of masses from menaces like poverty, inflation and unemployment, once again the multiparty system holds sway in the country. Therefore, campaigning by two big players, the PPP and the PML-N enters the final phase as independent candidates

claiming to be backed by PTI are also flexing muscles. Despite internal and external challenges faced by the country, its political landscape is bustling with election activities and people, braving the odds of chilling cold weather, were making their voices loud and clear on a steady course to national balloting. Specifically speaking of Multan district, it is divided into six National Assembly (NA) and 13 Punjab Provincial Assembly (PA) seats. The city is home to several political heavyweights like Yousaf Raza Gilani, former Prime Minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi former Foreign Minister, Sikandar Bosan former Food Minister and former Chief Whip in National Assembly Amir Dogar. Although feudal, businessmen and the upper classes influence district's politics, yet the battle among candidates remains fierce owing to effects of family influence, party vote bank and most importantly the young voters who dominate the population.

Pakistan envoy meets Maldivian defence minister; discusses enhancing cooperation

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): High Commissioner of Pakistan in Maldives Vice Admiral (R) Muhammad Fayyaz Gilani on Friday met with Defence Minister of Maldives Mohamed Ghasan Maumoon and held "productive" discussions on matters of mutual interest. "High Commissioner held productive discussions with Mohamed Ghasan Maumoon and team. Look-

ing forward to working closely for further enhancing the cooperation and strengthening the bilateral ties," the high commission said on its X account. "The discussions centered around enhancing bilateral engagements between the Maldives and Pakistan in areas of mutual interest," the Maldivian defence ministry said on the social media platform.

Pakistan elevated to CITES Category-I for wildlife conservation efforts

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan, as a committed signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), proudly announced its significant elevation to CITES Category I, a testament to the nation's unwavering dedication to wildlife conservation. CITES, an intergovernmental treaty under the United Nations, serves to prevent the unsustainable exploitation of wild fauna and flora in international trade, a news release on Friday said. In line with this commitment, Pakistan has diligently regulated the imports and exports of wild fauna and flora through collaborative efforts led by the Ministry

of Climate Change & Environmental Coordination, in conjunction with the Wildlife Departments of Provinces, and Pakistan Customs. A pivotal aspect of Pakistan's conservation efforts is the exclusive legislation in place for the meticulous implementation of CITES, the Pakistan Trade Control of Wild Fauna and Flora Act, 2012. This legislation underscores Pakistan's commitment to sustainable and responsible trade practices, ensuring the well-being of endangered species. CITES classifies its parties into three categories (Category I, Category II, and Category III) based on the consistency of their national legislation for implementing the Convention.

Energy Ministry to organize national-level career expo

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division), in collaboration with prominent Oil, Gas, and Mineral companies, is set to organize a national-level career expo scheduled for January 31 and February 1. Themed “Fuelling Futures,” the Career Expo 2024 aimed to foster awareness and bridge the gap between students and companies in the Oil, Gas, and Mineral sectors. The expo will provide a platform for meaningful interactions and access to career development resources. Senior management and Human Resource representatives from leading companies will be present, offering attending undergraduates and graduates a unique opportunity to explore exciting career prospects in the energy and mineral sector. Minister for

Energy Muhammad Ali expressed high expectations for the upcoming event, highlighting its reflection of the government’s commitment to talent development and innovation in the workforce. He said that investing in youth and skills development is crucial for the future energy roadmap, enabling the harnessing of the true potential of young engineers, subject specialists, and experts. Muhammad Ali encouraged students to seize the opportunity to network with leading companies, explore diverse sectors, and gain insights from professionals at the forefront of their field. The expo aimed to host over 5000 students from diverse disciplines of Engineering and Business Management, representing leading universities from across Pakistan.

People of Pakistan reject negative politics: PML-N candidate

ISLAMABAD (APP): The people of Pakistan have consistently rejected those engaging in negative politics, said the nominated candidate of Pakistan Muslim League (N) for National Assembly constituency NA-51, Raja Osama Ashfaq. Speaking at a gathering of local leaders hosted by Major (Rtd) Zulfiqar Abbasi in Rawalpindi, he emphasized that the Pakistani public has exposed politicians engaged in negative practices by rejecting their politics of abuse, false accusations, and lies. Osama Ashfaq, expressed confidence in achieving significant success in the 2024 general elections. He attributed the current situation in Pakistan to the alleged electoral theft of 2018 and underscored the PML-N’s commitment to the development and

prosperity of the country. He stated that the PML-N successfully navigated the country through every crisis, propelling it towards development. Additionally, he mentioned that Pakistan could have joined the ranks of developed nations but unfortunately, Nawaz government was ousted in 1999. Speaking on the occasion Raja Sagheer Ahmed, a PP-7 candidate for Punjab Assembly, said that in 2013, the country grappled with 22 hours of load shedding and terrorism. Upon assuming power, PML-N illuminated the country and eradicated terrorism. The passionate and intelligent residents of the Kohsar and Kahuta region have great affection for Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, and reciprocally, Nawaz Sharif holds deep regard for the people of the Kohsar region.

Helmets only way for motorcyclists to prevent head injuries in an accident

FAISALABAD (Agencies): A traffic awareness seminar was held at a school here under the aegis of city traffic police, on Friday. In-charge Education Unit, Traffic Police Irm Naz, said that accidents could be avoided by following the traffic rules, adding that more than 70 per cent of injuries, caused to motorcyclists, are head injuries during accidents, and the use of helmets is the only way to prevent it. She said that conducting traffic awareness seminars was a need of the hour, which the traffic police are continuing in schools and colleges regularly. Women should also be aware of traffic rules like

other skills, she said and added that traffic police had made it possible to issue driving licences 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the convenience of citizens to get a driving licence. Dr. Mubashar Bajwa said it was very important for women as well as men to be aware of traffic rules. A mother is the only one who plays a fundamental role in the education of society, she seed. He said that women should not allow their underage children to drive a car or ride a motorcycle. General Secretary Sarwary Rafique Handicraft School, Muhammad Arshad Qasmi and others also spoke.

ANF recovers huge quantity of weapons

RAWALPINDI (Agencies): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in an operation managed to recover huge quantity of weapons and other items, an ANF spokesman said here on Friday. He informed that a large number of weapons were recovered during a targeted operation conducted against drug trafficking. The operation was conducted in Padizar area of Gwadar’s coastal belt. The ANF team during the operation spotted a

point near the shore where some persons were unloading goods. Despite quick action of the team, the accused managed to escape while taking advantage of the darkness. On inspection of the shipment, the team found that the goods contained modern weapons including 259, 9-mm Glock pistols. The operation is a reflection of the ANF’s determination to tackle threats to national security, apart from counter-narcotics, he added.

NDMA organizes two-day workshop on Resilient Urban Planning

KARACHI (APP): The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has conducted a two-day workshop on “Resilient Urban Planning in Climate Extremes” at Karachi NDMA’s National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), in collaboration with the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Sindh and UN-HABITAT. The two-day workshop on comprehensive “Resilient Urban Planning in Climate Extremes” was held from January 23-24, a news release said. The event witnessed active participation from a diverse range of stakeholders, bringing together key players in disaster management and urban planning. Chief Coordinator NIDM, Tanveer Piracha inaugurated the workshop and briefed about proactive disaster management in Pakistan. The workshop served as a collaborative platform, engaging participants from federal and provincial government departments, UN agencies, International NGOs, national humanitarian organizations, disaster management authorities, Rescue 1122, as well as representa-

tives from academia, and civil society organizations. The primary objective of the workshop was to enhance the understanding of resilient urban planning strategies in the face of climate extremes. Attendees had the opportunity to share insights, best practices, and lessons learned from their respective domains. The collaborative nature of the event fostered valuable discussions and laid the groundwork for future initiatives aimed at building resilient urban landscapes. Key topics covered during the workshop included risk-sensitive spatial planning, climate change adaptation measures, community participation, and the integration of technology in urban planning to mitigate the impact of climate-related challenges. The event underscored the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach in addressing the complexities of urban resilience. The interactive intellectual discourse among the participants will contribute to informing decision-making processes and the development of more effective policies for sustainable urban development.

Wafaqi Mohtasib tremes inquiry report on delay in issuance of Passport as unsatisfactory

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Wafaqi Mohtasib Ejaz Ahmed Qureshi has expressed his dissatisfaction over the inquiry report submitted by the Passport Office in compliance of his earlier directions in response to a large number of complaints regarding inordinate delay in the issuance of passports, said in a press release issued here on Friday. Terming the report as unsatisfactory and lacking in substance, he directed the senior officials concerned of the Passport Office to address the issue expedi-



tiously. The people pay for provision of these services directly to the Passport Office but unfortunately,

they are not getting what they have expected in return, he observed and added, the exhaustion of lamination paper, ink etc were petty issues and the Passport Office should have foreseen its precise requirements much earlier to cater to the needs of growing number of passport seekers. It may be recalled that taking suo motto notice of very large number of complaints against delay in issuance of passports, an Inspection Team of the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat had visited the Passport Office.

Man axed to death amid funeral rituals

BOUREWALA (Agencies): A man was axed to death at the funnel rituals of his grandmother by unquantified persons here Friday. The victim, namely Mohammad Sarfaraz Vaseer, reached out to the rituals of the deceased lady in suburban village 48/K when the unidentified number of the accused approached suddenly. They killed the person in a cold-blooded manner amid rituals performed and fled from the scene, said the sources. The murder incident was reported to the local Fatehpur police station, and the officials rushed and shifted the body to THQ Hospital for an autopsy. The police have registered a case before starting a formal inquiry into the heinous incident. Apparently, it was not surfaced as a reason for the crime before the police, the sources added.

Polling stations, polling booths set up in Kundian

SARGODHA (Agencies): Preparations for upcoming General Election 2024 have been finalised in Kundian and two lists for PP-88 and four lists for NA-90 for polling stations and polling booths have been formed in this regard. A spokesman for the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) told the media on Friday that 33 polling stations and 337 polling booths have been established for male voters in PP-88 constituency, whereas 33 polling stations and 289 polling booths have been set up for female voters. The spokesman said that for NA-90 constituency, 72 polling stations for male voters and 634 polling booths have been established, whereas 72 polling stations and 563 polling booths have been set up for female voters.

Man killed during dacoity

FAISALABAD (APP): A young man was shot dead by unidentified dacoits in Saddar police limits on Friday. According to police, the victim was identified as Shahid Latif (40), who was killed on resistance during dacoity near a graveyard on Jaranwala Road. The body was removed to the mortuary. Police have collected forensic evidence from the site.

International Customs Day marks in Sukkur

SUKKUR (Agencies): Sukkur Customs organised on Friday a ceremony to commemorate International Customs Day at their office. They burned drugs and contraband items and bulldozed thousands of cigarettes, pan parag and Indian gutka worth millions of rupees during the ceremony, Customs officials said that the destruction of these goods was not only an effective mechanism for disposal but also a good method to send a strong message to the smugglers, that the business they are dealing in is heinous and the civil society despises it.

Two killed in a bus-bike collision

RAWALPINDI (APP): Two people here on Friday were killed and one severely injured in a road accident at IJ Principal Road. According to a spokesman Rescue-1122, the rescue teams reached the spot near Carriage Factory and shifted the injured and bodies to a nearby hospital. The spokesman informed that according to an eye witness, the misfortune incident occurred when a speedy passenger bus hit a bike.

GB governor calls on president; wheat subsidy, other issues discussed

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Governor of Gilgit-Baltistan Syed Mehdi Shah on Friday called on President Dr Arif Alvi and discussed the overall situation in the region including wheat subsidy and other issues. In the meeting, they also deliberated over the matters related to Baltistan University and Skardu, a President House statement said. The president told the governor that he had taken up the matter of wheat subsidy with the caretaker prime minister and finance minister and expressed the hope that the problems would be



resolved soon. The elected members of the GB Council had also called on the president on Thursday to discuss the wheat subsidy and other matters. President Alvi had assured the delegation to take up their issues at the relevant forums.

Much awaited-rain to bring respite to citizens; reduce fog

ISLAMABAD (APP): After the prolonged dry period, the much-awaited rain with snowfall over the hills in upper parts of the country during the coming days, as per weather experts forecast, will weaken dense foggy conditions and provide relief to the citizens by improving air quality. According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), rain of light to moderate intensity with snowfall over the hills will lash upper parts of the country with occasional gaps. The rain will also reduce travel hazards in the fog bearing areas of the country and prove as a sigh of relief for those suffering from viral diseases especially allergy patients. A westerly wave was likely to enter western parts of the country on January 27 (night), and

may persist over upper parts till January 31. Under the influence of this weather system, light to moderate rain with snowfall over the hills is expected in Gilgit- Baltistan including Diamir, Astore, Ghizer, Skardu, Hunza, Gilgit, Ghanche, Shigar while in Kashmir including Neelum valley, Muzaffarabad, Poonch, Hattian, Bagh, Haveli, Sudhanoti, Kotli, Bhimber, Mirpur from January 27-31. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, light to moderate rain with snowfall over the hills is expected in Chitral, Dir, Swat, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Haripur, Kohistan, Shangla, Buner, Karak, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Buner, Bajaur, Kurram, Waziristan, Bannu and Kohat from January 27(night) to January 31 with occasional gaps.

SPL is a welcome initiative: Aseefa Bhutto Zardari

KARACHI (Agencies): Former President Asif Ali Zardari’s daughter Aseefa Bhutto Zardari has said that Sindh Premier League (SPL) will not only convey the potential possessed by the youngsters of Sindh to the nation, but also the entire world. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the SPL here as a chief guest on Friday night, she said that the Sindh Premier League is a welcome initiative in the province. The youth of Sindh were capable of reaching new heights in all walks of life. The nation will elect the right people this time around. Aseefa said that Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto taught the nation that Pakistan belongs to everyone. Through him, we learned that sports unify the masses, and cricket runs in the blood of every Pakistani. There is no shortage of talent in Sindh. If only

the same sportsman spirit was witnessed in politics as well, the country could have truly prospered. She said that the Sindh government was taking these initiatives for the people of Sindh. She extended her best wishes to all the participating teams. She said that the people of Pakistan will opt for a new viewpoint this time. Earlier, Sindh Premier League President, Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab, caretaker provincial ministers Dr Junaid Ali Shah and Ahmed Shah also addressed the opening ceremony. Former national cricket team players Javed Miandad, Shahid Afridi and Abdul Razzaq also participated in the event. Aseefa Bhutto Zardari was accompanied by Pakistan Peoples Party leader, Senator Sherry Rehman. The teams of all six divisions of Sindh are participating in the Sindh Premier League.

934 candidates to contest for 13 NA seats, 26 Punjab Assembly seats in Rawalpindi Division

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): In the upcoming general election scheduled for February 8, a total of 934 candidates are contesting for 13 National Assembly and 26 Punjab Assembly seats of Rawalpindi Division. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) approximately 729,617 voters will use their right to franchise in electing 93 representatives for both national and provincial assemblies. Several prominent political figures, including Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf, former Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, former Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Sheikh Aftab Ahmed, Ghulam Sarwar Khan, Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed, and Haneef Abbasi, are among the seasoned politicians vying for seats in the assemblies. According to available data, 284 candidates from various political parties, including independents, are contesting for the

13 seats in the National Assembly. eanwhile, for the 26 constituencies of the Punjab Assembly, 650 candidates are competing to represent these constituents in the assembly. The Attock district, with 1349,040 voters, will elect representatives for 2 seats in the National Assembly and 5 seats in the Punjab Assembly. For NA-49 Attock-I, 14 candidates are contesting, and 20 candidates are competing for NA-50 Attock-II. Similarly, there are 16 candidates for PP1 Attock, 17 for PP2 Attock-II, 15 for PP3 Attock-III, 17 for PP4 Attock IV, and 14 for PP5 Attock-V. In the Murree district, 295,163 voters will elect representatives for one constituency in the National Assembly and two constituencies in the Provincial Assembly. For NA-51 Murree, 27 candidates are in contention, and there are 32 candidates for PP6 Murree and 23 for PP7 Kahuta.

Saudi Arabia launches national biotechnology strategy to lead global innovation

RIYADH (Agencies): Localizing vaccine manufacturing and improving the health of Saudi citizens are among the key goals of a new national biotechnology strategy, launched by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Thursday. The new initiative also aims to safeguard the environment, achieve food and water security, and solidify the Kingdom's position as a global leader in the sector, according to the Saudi Press Agency. One of the major focuses of the initiative is localizing vaccine manufacturing to increase the Kingdom's self-sufficiency and



ensure timely access to these medicines for its citizens. Furthermore, the program targets a 3 percent contribution of the biotechnology sector to the non-oil gross domestic product by 2040, with a cumulative impact of SR130 billion (\$34.66 bil-

lion), in addition to providing thousands of high-quality opportunities and jobs. These initiatives are aligned with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 objectives. "Localization and biomanufacturing play a vital role in driving the strategy forward, as Saudi Arabia aims to establish itself as the primary biotechnology hub in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region," said the SPA report, adding: "Developing advanced biopharma manufacturing capabilities and establishing a cutting-edge local end-to-end bio-manufacturing platform are crucial steps."

Apple modifies European services to comply with new antitrust laws

PARIS (Agencies): Apple has announced major changes to its services in Europe that will allow iPhone users to download alternative app stores for the first time, as the US tech giant yields to new European Union antitrust regulations. The overhaul, which will take place in March when the EU's sweeping Digital Markets Act comes into force, will curtail the dominance of the App Store, which has been a mainstay of the iPhone since 2008. Users will for the first time be able to download software from outside



the App Store and they will be given new options to process payments. Other changes include giving users the option to download an alternative web browser when they first open Safari in the latest version

of the iOS operating system. Until now, users had to go into the settings to change the default browser. In its announcement yesterday, Apple said the Digital Markets Act has created "privacy and security risks" and that the company is installing safeguards to reduce them. Apple said the new options for processing payments and downloading apps "open new avenues for malware, fraud and scams, illicit and harmful content". "Even with these safeguards in place, many risks remain," it said.

Salesforce to lay off around 700 employees

SAN FRANCISCO (Agencies): Salesforce is laying off about 700 employees, or roughly 1% of its global workforce, the Wall Street Journal reported today, in the latest round of job cuts to hit the tech industry. However, the report added that Salesforce still has 1,000 jobs open across the company, implying that the move could be more of a routine adjusting of the company's workforce, the report said, citing a source. The job cuts follow a wave of US tech layoffs after the industry



hired heavily during the pandemic, including among behemoths such as Amazon and Google. Salesforce did not respond to a Reuters request for comment on the report. Earlier this week, eBay announced it would

cut about 1,000 roles, or an estimated 9% of its current workforce, while Microsoft said it would let go of 1,900 employees at Activision Blizzard and Xbox. Salesforce has already trimmed its workforce last year, when it cut jobs by 10% and closed some offices, after rapid pandemic hiring left it with a bloated workforce. The workforce trimming helped the company's earnings, leading it to report a rise in second and third-quarter revenue and raising its annual profit forecast.

Dubai's property boom shows signs of fizzling out

DUBAI (Agencies): As cranes speckle the Dubai skyline and ultra-luxury homes change hands at record prices, signs that the city-state's property boom is fizzling out are coming into view. Developers, investors and brokers are privately asking how quickly one of last year's hottest real estate markets could turn and whether a painful correction akin to the slump that rocked the emirate in 2008 can be ruled out. Since then Dubai has pursued an economic reboot an-



chored on what it hopes is sustainable growth, including a 10-year plan known as D33, to double output and become one of the world's top four financial centres. Still, the real-estate

industry remains a key barometer of its success, accounting for 8.9% of the economy. "Dubai's vulnerability to correction lies in its dependence on foreign capital, particularly from China and Russia," Ronan Hannan, principal at consultancy Proven Partners, told Reuters. Massive infrastructure spending, generous income tax policies and an 'open-door' approach to immigration reinforced after the pandemic have attracted thousands of foreigners.

China grants over 100 video game licences as crackdown wanes

BELJING (Agencies): China has granted more than 100 new video game licences in January, regulators said Friday, the highest number of monthly approvals since Beijing lifted a freeze imposed during a sweeping state crackdown on the sector. The world's second largest economy is also one of its biggest markets for video games, worth some US\$42.2 billion, according to official figures. Beijing moved against the sector in 2021 as part of a sprawling crackdown on Big Tech, placing a



strict cap on the amount of time children could spend playing online. But an end to a freeze in gaming licences in 2022 raised hopes that the worst might be over. In January, 115 video games

were given the green light, the National Press and Publication Administration said Friday — the second-highest number since July 2022, when 135 licences were issued. But the sector is still reeling from a law proposed in December aimed at limiting online game purchases and preventing addictive behaviour that wiped tens of billions of dollars from the industry. The text proposed by the authorities is this month no longer accessible on the regulator's website — suggesting it may have been dropped.

Oil Updates – crude set for weekly gain on US economic growth, Mideast supply concerns

HOUSTON (Agencies): Oil prices eased on Friday after rising to their highest since December in the previous session, but were set for their biggest weekly gain since October as positive US economic growth and signs of Chinese stimulus boosted fuel demand sentiment, according to Reuters. Brent crude futures were down 38 cents, or 0.46 percent, to \$82.05 a barrel by 7:45 a.m. Saudi time. US West Texas Intermediate crude fell 50 cents, or 0.65 percent,



to \$76.86. The Brent benchmark was set to close 4.5 percent higher for the week, while the US benchmark was set to rise 4.8 percent.

US antitrust regulator probes AI investments by tech giants

WASHINGTON (Agencies): A top US antitrust regulator on Thursday said it was probing investments made by Microsoft, Google and Amazon into generative AI startups OpenAI and Anthropic. The move is part of efforts by authorities to make sure regulatory oversight can keep up with developments in artificial intelligence and stop major players shutting out competitors in a field promising upheaval in multiple sectors. "Our study will shed light on whether investments



and partnerships pursued by dominant companies risk distorting innovation and undermining fair competition," said Lina Khan, head of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), in a statement. One major concern is that generative AI,

which allows for human-level content to be produced by software in just seconds, requires a massive amount of computing power, something that big tech companies are almost uniquely capable of delivering. Amazon — through its Amazon Web Services (AWS) arm — Microsoft and Google are the world's biggest providers of cloud-based data centers, which store and process data on a vast scale, in addition to being some of the world's richest companies.

Fashion retailer Superdry announces widening losses

CHELTENHAM (Agencies): Superdry PLC reported widening losses after Christmas sales failed to revive performance at the struggling fashion retailer. The British brand, known for its logo T-shirts and bright colours, said mild weather and heavy discounting in the sector hit sales. Superdry, which also announced the departure of its chief financial officer, already said in September that it expects no revenue growth in the current year. The stock, which had fallen 89% in a year, rose 2.5% in early trading after the retailer avoided another downgrade. The company issued a profit warning last month, saying that performance was "signifi-



cantly below" management expectations after a mild autumn and a late start to its end-of-season summer sale. Superdry is said to have hired advisers at PricewaterhouseCoopers to seek out debt-raising options. The business already has expensive borrowing from lenders of last resort including Bantry Bay Capital and Hilco Capital Ltd.

China announces fresh bailouts for ailing property sector

BEIJING (Agencies): China will offer more bailout loans for its struggling real estate sector with the first funds expected to become available in the coming days, its housing ministry said today, in the latest move to help kickstart stuttering growth. Troubles in the property industry have been one of the main headwinds facing the world's second-largest economy, with a government clampdown on excessive borrowing in 2020 leaving several developers grappling with massive debt and flagging demand. "In view of the current financing difficulties of some real estate projects," the official newspaper of Beijing's



housing ministry quoted officials as saying, local governments would "propose a list of real estate projects that can be given financing support". "It is understood that loans will be available for the first batch of project lists before the end of the month," it added. A national body will be set up to oversee the loans, the report said.

Singapore set to hold monetary policy as inflation persists

SINGAPORE (Agencies): Singapore's central bank will likely keep its tight monetary policy settings for a third straight review while retaining its sharp focus on still-elevated inflation. All 19 economists surveyed by Bloomberg expect the Monetary Authority of Singapore, which uses the exchange rate rather than interest rates to stabilise prices, to maintain its overall policy settings on Jan 29. The central bank tightened five times since October 2021 before opting to pause in 2023. The Monetary Authority of Singapore is expected to keep its statement relatively unchanged at the

first of its four-times-a-year decision, according to nine of 13 economists who responded to the question. Three, including Bank of America Corp. and Barclays Plc, expect the tone to be hawkish while Oxford Economics was alone in predicting a dovish tilt. This will be the first policy statement under new managing director Chia Der Jun and since the Monetary Authority of Singapore shifted to a quarterly schedule from biannual reviews previously. The Bloomberg survey was conducted before the city-state reported on Tuesday that core inflation quickened to 3.3% in December.

PIF completes pricing of bond offering worth \$5bn

RIYADH (Agencies): Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund has completed the pricing of a bond offering worth \$5 billion. The offering was more than five times oversubscribed, with order books reaching \$27 billion, it announced in a statement. It comprises three tranches — one valued at \$1.75bn with 5-year coupon maturing in 2029, another for the same amount with a 10-year coupon, and the final valued at \$1.5bn over a 30-year period. Fahad Al-Saif, head of PIF's Global Capital Finance Division, said: "Continued strong demand from international institutional investors is testament



to the ongoing success of PIF's medium-term capital raising strategy. "It is also reflective of PIF's strong credit profile and financial strength, highlighting its role as one of the key drivers of Saudi Arabia's economic transformation and as one of the largest and most impactful sovereign wealth funds globally."

UN reports 42% drop in Suez traffic following Houthi attacks

CAIRO (Agencies): The volume of commercial traffic passing through the Suez Canal has fallen more than 40% in the last two months after attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels, according to the United Nations, raising concerns for global trade. The Iran-backed Houthis say they are targeting what they consider Israeli-linked commercial and military shipping in the region in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, pushing some cargo carriers to take longer and more expensive routes to avoid attack. "We are very concerned that

the attacks on Red Sea shipping are adding tensions to global trade, exacerbating (existing) trade disruptions due to geopolitics and climate change," UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) head Jan Hoffman told reporters Thursday. According to the UNCTAD, ships diverting from the Red Sea — sailing instead around South Africa's Cape of Good Hope — has led to a 42% drop in transit through the Suez Canal in the last two months. The Suez Canal, in Egypt, connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea.

Global economy outlook at odds with aggressive rate cut bets

HONG KONG (Agencies): Global growth is set to stay resilient this year and only pick up pace a bit in 2025, according to a Reuters poll of economists, a stable outlook at odds with still-relatively aggressive interest rate cut bets in financial markets. Growth among leading economies is not forecast to be consistent, with relative strength in the US and India, and sluggishness expected from the Eurozone, as well as No 2 economy China. Economists more broadly are

optimistic, however, there will not be a resurgence in inflation now most central banks have got price pressures down close to where they want them. The Jan 3-25 Reuters polls covering 48 economies showed economists forecasting global growth at an average 2.6% in 2024: not boom times, but not recession either. This year's view is only slightly weaker than an expected 3.0% rate for 2023 despite a rapid series of central bank rate hikes.

Formula E CEO eyes further growth,success for all-electric series ahead of Diriyah E-Prix

Riyadh (Agencies): Formula E may be only in its 10th year, but it is no longer motorsport's new kid on the block. Ahead of the Diriyah E-Prix double-header of night races, Formula E CEO Jeff Dodds told Arab News that the all-electric series was set to grow even more in the coming years, having already amassed a global following of 350 million fans. The action in north Riyadh represents rounds two and three of Season 10, the second in which the Gen3 car will be employed on the track. The novelty of the fastest and most efficient Formula E car yet saw a significant number of podium win-



ners last season. Dodds said: "I think we had eight different winners last season, which was pretty incredible. So, I wouldn't be surprised to see as many different winners this season. "What we saw in the first race in Mexico, is that the performances are getting closer together, the different

teams are working out how to optimize the performance of the Gen3 car. I think in qualification there was a 10th of a second between the top four qualifiers. "So tiny, tiny margins here. Clearly, we love the racing to be competitive. I expect the racing to be competitive. They're beginning to work out the Gen3 a bit better in the second season. "The challenge will be, from next season, we're into Gen3.5, because we have the evolutionary change of the car. I think we'll see much tighter racing this season, but I also think we'll still see a number of different winners," he added.

Edo Mortara lauds Diriyah as 'one of my favorite racing tracks' of Formula E season

DIRIYAH (Agencies): Street-circuit specialist Edo Mortara has praised Diriyah's course as "one of my favorite racing tracks of the entire Formula E season" ahead of this weekend's races, and loves the beauty of the At-Turaif UNESCO World Heritage Site setting. The 37-year-old Mahindra Racing driver is relishing the next stage of the ABB FIA Formula E World Championship in Diriyah on Friday and Saturday, after the opening race of the season in Mexico two weeks ago. With Diriyah a doubleheader, and both races taking place at night, Mortara feels the Riyadh street circuit is the ideal location to shine. "Diriyah is a very special racing



track," he said. "I am kind of considered a street-course specialist because I've won many times in Macau and other street-racing courses, and I actually feel that Diriyah is quite similar. This is why I like it so much. "Here, you need to have a nice flow through the corners. And it's also very important in

a street-racing course to be extremely precise, to go very close to the walls. I think that for racing drivers here it's extremely demanding, it's very challenging, but I like it." The track flows past Diriyah's 15th century At-Turaif UNESCO World Heritage Site, which showcases Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage. "I like actually to see the various historical sites that we have here, and I did visit them when I came on Tuesday. I also visited them last year, and it's always a pleasure to be here racing in such a historical site. It's lovely. Obviously when we are getting closer to the race weekend, then we need to be more focused on the racing."

Jannik Sinner ends 10-time champion Novak Djokovic's unbeaten streak in Australian Open semifinals

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Jannik Sinner has upset Novak Djokovic to reach the Australian Open men's final, ending the 10-time champion's career unbeaten semifinal streak at Melbourne Park. The 22-year-old Italian broke Djokovic's serve twice in each of the first two sets but missed a match point in the third set of a 6-1, 6-2, 6-7 (6), 6-3 victory Friday that earned him a place in a Grand Slam singles final for the first time. On his second match point, 55 minutes later, he made no mistake and completed his third win in four head-to-head encounters since a straight-set loss to Djokovic in last year's Wimbledon semifinals. "It's always nice to have this kind of player



who you can learn from," Sinner said in his on-court TV interview. "I lost last year in the semifinals in Wimbledon and I learned a lot from that. The confidence from the end of last year has for sure kept the belief that I can play the best players in the world." The youngest player to reach the men's final in Australia since Djokovic's first

title in 2008, Sinner will play either third-seeded Daniil Medvedev or No. 6 Alexander Zverev for the championship on Sunday. Djokovic's bid for a record-extending 11th Australian and 25th major title overall will have to wait. He hadn't lost a match at Melbourne Park since 2018 and was on a 33-match winning streak at the season's first major. Every previous time he'd won a quarterfinal in Australia, Djokovic had gone on to win the hard-court title. "He's deservedly in the finals. He outplayed me completely," Djokovic said. "Look, I was, in a way, shocked with my level - in a bad way. There was not much I was doing right in the first two sets.

Pascal Wehrlein recalls 'special' double win in Diriyah, but no guarantees this year

DIRIYAH (Agencies): Pascal Wehrlein of TAG Heuer Porsche has described his successes in Riyadh last season as "special," but insists there are no guarantees for this year's events in the ABB FIA World Formula E World Championship. The 29-year-old German driver made the perfect start to season 10 of the all-electric racing competition with a win at Mexico's Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez two weeks ago. Having led for 30 of the 37 laps, the fifth victory of his Formula E career propels Wehrlein — who finished fourth overall last campaign — into a good position for



this year's doubleheader in Riyadh on Friday and Saturday. Aiming for a repeat of last season's double triumph, Wehrlein said: "Last year was pretty special, especially the first day. I was starting the race from P9 (position nine) and you're always hoping for

a win and you always try your best, but I think it was pretty special to win the race from P9. Wehrlein admitted that the wins were unexpected as the team had not looked strong during the winter training, and were not in the top 10 over three days of testing in Valencia. "Winning the races in Riyadh was great," he said. "I would say the second day win was a bit more expected because we started from P5, and I knew from the day before that if I could win from P9 then I could do the same in the second race from P5 if everything went well. And it did, so that was a nice feeling.

LeBron James makes NBA All-Star team for record 20th time, Kevin Durant for 14th time

LOS ANGELES (Agencies): LeBron James joined yet another exclusive club, and he'll have plenty of familiar faces alongside him at the NBA All-Star Game. James is an All-Star — and an All-Star starter — for the 20th time, with the league unveiling the results of this season's starter balloting on Thursday night. James is the first 20-time All-Star in NBA history. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, whose career scoring record was broken by James last season, was a 19-time selection. The game is Feb. 18 in Indianapolis. Joining James in the Western Con-



ference starting lineup: Phoenix's Kevin Durant, Denver's Nikola Jokic, Dallas' Luka Doncic and Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, the league's leader in 30-point games this season who edged perennial All-Star

starter Stephen Curry of Golden State for the final West backcourt spot. Durant is a 14-time selection, one of only 11 players in NBA history to be picked that many times. In the Eastern Conference, Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo will be joined by Boston's Jayson Tatum and Philadelphia's Joel Embiid — the reigning NBA MVP, two-time defending scoring champion and current NBA scoring leader — in the frontcourt. Tatum set an All-Star Game record last season, scoring 55 points in Salt Lake City on the way to MVP honors.

Jaeger eagles final hole for an 8-under 64 and a 1-shot lead in the Farmers Insurance Open

SAN DIEGO (Agencies): Stephan Jaeger of Germany made a 35-foot eagle putt on his final hole for an 8-under 64 and a one-shot lead over Nicolai Hojgaard of Denmark after the second round of the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines on Thursday. Jaeger was at 12 under halfway through the tournament on the blufftop layout overlooking the Pacific Ocean. He started on



the back nine of the easier North Course and leapfrogged Hojgaard with his eagle on the par-5 ninth to sit atop a crowded leaderboard.

"Finishing like that, yeah, it was exciting," said Jaeger, who birdied five of his first eight holes and had just one bogey. He said he hit a good drive into the wind on his closing hole and then tugged his approach shot a bit. "I wanted it to kind of go middle of the green and I went right at it. It ended up landing just short of the pin and scooting kind of back fringe," he said.

Juergen Klopp to leave Liverpool at end of the season

Manager Juergen Klopp has decided to leave Liverpool at the end of the season, the Premier League club said on Friday. Klopp, who led Liverpool into the final of the League Cup on Wednesday, had informed the club's hierarchy that he would end his eight-and-a-half years at Anfield at the end of the current campaign. Assistant managers Pepijn Lijnders and Peter Krawietz are also leaving the club at the same time, Liverpool said. "It is that I am, how can I say it, running out of energy," Klopp, 56, said on Liverpool's website. "I can understand that it's a shock for a lot of people in this moment, when you hear it for the first time, but obviously I can explain it - or at least try to explain it.



"I love absolutely everything about this club, I love everything about the city, I love everything about our supporters, I love the team, I love the staff. "I love everything. But that I still take this decision shows you that I am convinced it is the one I have to take. "I have no problem now, obviously, I knew it already for longer that I will have to announce it at one point, but I am absolutely fine now.

Messi-led Inter Miami arrive to face Nassr, Hilal in Riyadh Season Cup

RIYADH (Agencies): Lionel Messi and his Inter Miami teammates have landed in Saudi Arabia ahead of matchups against Al-Nassr and Al-Hilal in the Riyadh Season Cup. Images of the Major League Soccer side arriving in Riyadh appeared on social media early on Friday, with the club sharing a short video of the team being welcomed with flowers and Arab coffee at King Khalid International Airport. Miami will play Hilal on Monday and Nassr on Thursday, a match being dubbed as "The Last Dance," a nod to the enduring rivalry between Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. Messi, who joined Inter in June, is one of the most decorated footballers in the sport. He led his side to World Cup



victory in 2022 and recently scored his 100th goal for Argentina, his 800th overall. Miami are on a global preseason tour ahead of their first match of the MLS season on Feb. 21 against Salt Lake City. On Jan. 19, Nassr medical staff said Ronaldo would be out for two weeks due to a hamstring injury. Subsequently, a pair of Nassr fixtures in China were postponed.

Saudi Arabia's Al-Ahli set for inaugural Dubai Challenge Cup that seeks football's 'growth'

DUBAI (Agencies): The inaugural edition of the Dubai Challenge Cup 2024 kicking off on Friday night would continue to feature some of the best teams in the world in years to come, the organizers said on Thursday. This year's tournament has Saudi Arabia's Al-Ahli, Morocco's Raja Casablanca, China's Wuhan Three Towns, and Egypt's Zamalek SC taking part at Al-Maktoum Stadium. A collaboration between the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism, the Dubai Sports Council, and Gallop Global, the event will run until Jan. 28. Friday's opening match pits 14-time Egyptian champions Zamalek against Raja, the three-time African Champions and eight-time winners of the Moroccan Cup, while the following evening will see Al-Ahli take on Wuhan. Sunday will start with a third-place



play-off at 4 p.m. (UAE time) followed by the final at 8 p.m. In his address at the pre-tournament news conference on Thursday, which had former Liverpool star and current Al-Ahli forward Roberto Firmino among the attendees, Saeed Hareb, secretary-general of the Dubai Sports Council, remarked: "Dubai has solidified its status as a preferred destination for leading international teams, attracting them for training camps and participation in tournaments of this caliber annually.

DAILY HOROSCOPE: JANUARY 27, 2024



– It's a general reading which may differ from person to person because of time date and year.
– **ARIES**: You're tempted to skip ahead of yourself, but that could bring trouble. Make sure that you're not pushing yourself too hard. In a few days, you ought to be able to handle almost anything!
– **TAURUS**: You find some new part of yourself blossoming. It's remarkable, and you are happier than ever with the new quality or idea. See if you can get your friends and family to help nurture it.
– **GEMINI**: Your energy is intensely practical today, which might be a bit less fun, but it should help make your life considerably more manageable. You may find that you start to move faster tomorrow.
– **CANCER**: The small stuff captures your attention today. It's all so amazing to you that you might start to wonder how you could have missed it for so long. Don't worry too much about the past, though.
– **LEO**: Let someone else take the lead socially. You're just not feeling it. If you can hang back and take care of personal issues (mundane

as they may be), you should swing back with a vengeance soon.
– **VIRGO**: You need to try to stretch yourself out somewhat -- it's a good time to see if you can sneak away from work or wherever you feel too pressed for time. It may be a good time for a mental health day.
– **LIBRA**: Someone showers you with praise, and you feel that the time is right for you to show off a little. See if you can get your friends or coworkers to support your latest ambitions. It's not so hard!
– **SCORPIO**: One good friend is a key player in today's drama, which may turn into a comedy by evening! Have fun with them, and make sure that you are no more serious than the situation really deserves.
– **SAGITTARIUS**: Now is not the time to try to get anything special from coworkers or friends. They are all wrapped up in their own business and can't help you. Tread water for a bit and things will get much better.
– **CAPRICORN**: Try to get your family to reunite online or find some other creative way to get together. Your great energy today is perfect for making connections happen that would never manifest otherwise.
– **ACQUARIUS**: People are holding their cards close to their chest today, everyone except you, that is. You might have to play a guessing game to figure out what everyone is up to, but it's worth a try.
– **PISCES**: Your connections are even more important than usual today. It's a good time to build new bridges and strengthen ones you already have. You should be able to make a breakthrough soon!

First Boeing 737 Max 9 with passengers flies after three-week grounding, Alaska Airlines COO sits next to door plug

Boeing's 737 Max 9 model returned to service Friday afternoon when Alaska Airlines flight 1146 departed Seattle at approximately 3:51pm local time (6:51pm ET) bound for San Diego. It is the first revenue flight for this model since the Federal Aviation Administration grounded the Boeing jets three weeks ago following a door plug blowout on Alaska Airlines flight 1282. Alaska Airlines COO Constance von Muehlen took the flight and sat in the seat next to the door plug, telling CNN she has full confidence in the aircraft. Sarah Edgbert was not aware that the flight she was taking was on a 737 Max



9 plane until she got to her gate and saw news crews. She said she felt anxious at first. "But then realizing it's probably the safest plane out there right now, it's been through lots of tests since then," Edgbert said. "I am not going to stop doing what I do," Kent, who did not want to give his last name, said. "I am not going to

change my habits for it, and I am going to be hoping that something bad doesn't happen." Doug Bowman didn't know that he'd be boarding a Max 9 plane until he was informed by CNN, but said he had "important things, engagements to get back to" in San Diego. The flight left with a delay because the plane itself — tail number N929AK — was late arriving in Seattle. It is expected to land in San Diego around 9pm ET. Alaska and United Airlines — the two US carriers operating this version of Boeing's latest 737 generation — have been canceling hundreds of flights daily since the Max 9 was grounded.

Astronomers make unprecedented discovery in search for water in space

Astronomers using the Hubble Space Telescope have detected water molecules in the atmosphere of a small, blazing-hot exoplanet 97 light-years from Earth. The planet, named GJ 9827d, is about twice Earth's diameter, and it's the smallest exoplanet found to have water vapor in its atmosphere, according to a new study. Water is essential for life as we know it, but the planet is unlikely to host any type of life due to searing temperatures that would turn a water-rich atmosphere into scorching steam. The astronomers have yet to uncover the true nature of this unusual world's atmosphere, but the revelation paves the way for further investigation as they seek to understand the origins of planets beyond our solar system. The findings appeared in a report published Thursday in The Astrophysical Journal Letters. "Water on a planet this small is a landmark discovery," said study coauthor Laura Kreidberg, managing director of the atmospheric physics of exoplanets department at the Max Planck Institute for As-



tronomy in Heidelberg, Germany, in a statement. "It pushes closer than ever to characterizing truly Earth-like worlds." Yet the planet reaches temperatures of 800 degrees Fahrenheit (427 degrees Celsius), making it a steamy, inhospitable world that's as hot as Venus. "This would be the first time that we can directly show through an atmospheric detection, that these planets with water-rich atmospheres can actually exist around other stars," said study coauthor Björn Benneke, professor at the University of Montreal's Trottier Institute for Research on Exoplanets, in a statement. "This is an important step toward determining the prevalence and diversity of atmospheres on rocky planets."

S.Africa hails 'decisive victory' at UN court

JOHANNESBURG (Agencies): South Africa on Friday hailed a ruling by the United Nations' top court that Israel should do everything it can to prevent any acts of genocide in Gaza. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague handed down its verdict in a landmark case brought by Pretoria also ordering Israel to allow humanitarian access to the Palestinian territory. "Today marks a decisive victory for the international rule of law and a significant milestone in the search for justice for the Palestinian people," South Africa's ministry of foreign affairs said. "The decision is a momentous one," it added, thanking the court for its "swift ruling". South Africa has accused Israel of breaching the 1948 UN Genocide Convention — set up in the aftermath of World War II and the



Holocaust — during its military campaign in Gaza, sparked by the October 7 attacks by Hamas. The court did not pass judgement on whether or not Israel is actually committing genocide but handed down emergency orders while it considers the wider accusation — a process that is likely to take years. "Third States are now on notice of the existence of a serious risk of genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza," the ministry of foreign affairs said.

India to deliver BrahMos missiles to Philippines

New Delhi (Agencies): India is gearing up to export BrahMos — a long-range supersonic missile jointly developed with Russia — to the Philippines, a top government official disclosed on Thursday. The move comes amid New Delhi's push to boost domestic arms production and increase exports to other nations. The \$375 million deal, signed in January 2022, will involve sending missiles to the country shortly, Samir Kamat, the chief of the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), told news outlet ANI. "[The BrahMos] ground systems should be sent very soon, in the next ten days," he said, suggesting that the rest of the components would be transported in March. Kamat added that BrahMos missiles are "getting a lot of interest" from potential buyers. According to media reports, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia have also expressed interest in acquiring the missiles. The DRDO chief also mentioned that foreign countries have indicated they would like to purchase other India-made defense hardware, including 'Akash', a missile system that can target aircraft up to 45km (27 miles) away. "I am sure over the coming years, exports are going to become a very important part of our portfolio," he added. The BrahMos is a joint collaboration between New Delhi and Moscow that



began in the late 1990s. The powerful long-range supersonic cruise missile system can be launched from submarines, ships, and aircraft or from land. The missiles originally had a range of 290 kilometers (180 miles), which was subsequently extended to between 450 and 500 kilometers through upgrades. The BrahMos is widely used by the Indian Navy. Warships currently patrolling the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden amid tensions in the Red Sea, where Houthi rebels are attacking the passing merchant vessels, are believed to be equipped with these missiles. BrahMos will also form the crux of India's planned Integrated Rocket Force (IRF), aimed at non-contact conventional warfare to counter China's rapidly expanding missile and nuclear forces. On Friday, India's Uttar Pradesh state will display the BrahMos as a part of its tableau at the Republic Day parade in New Delhi, as a new manufacturing unit for production of these missiles is under construction in the state's capital, Lucknow.

Vince McMahon, WWE founder, resigns amid sex trafficking allegations



Vince McMahon has resigned from his role as executive chairman of TKO, the parent company of WWE, following disturbing allegations of sexual assault, trafficking and physical abuse. The allegations came to light in a lawsuit filed by a former WWE staffer, Janel Grant, who worked at the headquarters of the wrestling behemoth McMahon founded. McMahon has denied the allegations, and said he is prepared to defend himself in court. But, in a statement Friday, McMahon said that he has resigned. "Out of respect for the WWE Universe, the extraordinary TKO business and its board members and shareholders, partners and constituents, and all of the employees and Superstars who helped make WWE into the global leader it is today, I have decided to resign from my executive chairmanship and the TKO board of directors, effective immediately," McMahon said in a statement. Reports that McMahon had paid out settlements to multiple women while serving as WWE's CEO and chairman

have been circulating since at least 2022, but the lawsuit, filed by Grant Thursday, sheds new light on the extent of McMahon's alleged misconduct. In the lawsuit, Grant alleged that McMahon dangled a job offer at WWE — and later promotions — in exchange for sex. Grant's lawsuit also alleges that McMahon trafficked her to other men inside and outside the company, including John Laurinaitis, who worked in the company's talent relations department and is also named as a defendant in the suit. McMahon engaged in acts of "extreme cruelty and degradation" toward Grant during her time at WWE, the lawsuit alleged.

Mining giants told to pay \$9.7bn over Brazil dam disaster

A federal judge in Brazil has ordered mining giants BHP, Vale and their Samarco iron ore joint venture to pay 47.6bn reais (\$9.67bn) in damages over a deadly dam burst in 2015. The collapse of the Fundão dam in the south-east of the country caused a giant mudslide that killed 19 people. It also severely polluted the Rio Doce river, compromising the waterway to its outlet in the Atlantic Ocean. It was not immediately clear how much each company is required to pay. Judge Vinicius Cobucci said the companies were liable for "moral damages", or non-material harm, such as emotional distress suffered by those affected by the incident. He added that the money, which will be adjusted for inflation since 2015, will be put into a state fund and used for projects and initiatives in the area impacted by the dam collapse. The ruling came in

response to a civil action brought by state and federal public prosecutors. Vale told the BBC that it had not yet been informed about the ruling. The company also said that as of December last year, the Renova Foundation, which the firms have been using to make compensation payments, has so far paid out 34.7bn reais. BHP did not immediately respond to requests for comment from the BBC. Samarco declined to comment. The ruling allows for the companies to appeal the decision. Samarco is a 50-50 joint venture between Australian mining group BHP and Brazil's Vale. The disaster in Minas Gerais state, which also displaced 700 people, is considered to be one of the country's worst environmental disasters. When the dam burst, it unleashed a deluge of thick, red toxic mud that wiped out the village of Bento Rodrigues.

Nearly a third of Gen Z Americans are LGBTQ — survey


More than one in four (28%) Americans between the ages of 18 and 25, known as Generation Z, identified as LGBTQ in a survey published earlier this week by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI). The figure was the largest percentage recorded for any generation by the pollster, which conducted its research during August and September on a sample of over 6,600 people. Nearly half of the non-heterosexual Gen Zers said they were bisexual, amounting to 15% of all Gen Z adults. Gays and lesbians (5% of total) were outnumbered by "other" (8%). Generation Z was far more likely to identify as something other than straight than previous generations. Among millennials, 16% said they were some form of LGBTQ, with gays and lesbians nearly as common as bisexuals (5% vs 7%). Among Generation X, gays and lesbians actually outnumbered bisexuals (3% vs 2%) among the 7% of the total age group who said they weren't heterosexual.

Covid has exhausted itself — top Russian epidemiologist

Covid-19 has lost its pandemic potential in the years since it was flagged by the World Health Organization, Russia's former chief health inspector Gennady Onishchenko has said. Onishchenko's statement comes after the Russian consumer rights and wellbeing watchdog Rospotrebnadzor stated earlier this month that the peak of Covid-19 infections had passed in Russia and that new mass vaccination campaigns were no longer necessary. It was noted, however, that people should nevertheless remain vigilant, as coronavirus cases still grow seasonally. In an interview with RIA Novosti published on Thursday, Onishchenko, who is currently the deputy president of the Russian Academy of Education, acknowledged that over the years of the pandemic, up until the announcement of its conclusion by the WHO, the coronavirus had mutated and caused several serious waves of infections, including fatal ones.

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