

South Korean investigators arrest impeached President Yoon in insurrection probe

Seoul (News Desk) South Korean authorities arrested impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol on Wednesday over insurrection allegations, with the embattled leader saying he agreed to comply with what he called an illegal probe to avoid "bloodshed". His arrest, the first ever for an incumbent South Korean president, is the latest head-spinning development for one of Asia's most vibrant democracies even though the country has a history of prosecuting and imprisoning former leaders. Since lawmakers voted to stand him down after his short-lived declaration of martial law on December 3, Yoon has been holed up at his hillside residence, guarded by a small army of personal security that blocked a previous arrest attempt. A defiant Yoon said he submitted himself for questioning to avoid any violence after more than 3,000 police officers marched on his residence to arrest him from the early hours of Wednesday. "I decided to respond to the CIO's investigation — despite it being an illegal investigation — to prevent unsavoury bloodshed," Yoon said in a statement, referring to the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) that is heading the criminal probe. Yoon's motorcade was later seen leaving his residence in an upscale area known as Seoul's Beverly Hills. It arrived at the investigators' office but was quickly surrounded by security and moved to the back of the building, where Yoon slipped in, evading the waiting media.

Devastating LA fires prompt 2028 Olympics debate

LOS ANGELES: (News Desk) The Los Angeles wild-fire disaster has cast a shadow over preparations for the 2028 Olympics, raising questions over whether the city can deliver a safe and successful Games. So far, none of the more than 80 venues due to stage Olympic competition in Los Angeles have been directly affected by the infernos that have left at least 24 people dead and reduced entire neighbourhoods to smouldering ruins. But experts say the ongoing disaster has underscored the challenges of staging the world's largest sporting event in a region increasingly under threat of wildfires. "The situation is clearly grave and given the prospect of significant climate change, you do have to wonder whether the current situation might be repeated, possibly even during the Games," Simon Chadwick, professor of sport and geopolitical economy at Skema Business School in Paris told British daily The iPaper. "This raises very serious questions, not least about insurance, and whether Los Angeles' big-ticket 2028 attraction might be about to become an uninsurable mega-event." While the flames that razed Pacific Palisades came uncomfortably close to the Riviera Country Club — which will host 2028's Olympic golf tournament — the overwhelming majority of venues are situated outside what would be regarded as high-risk fire zones. Historical data, meanwhile, indicates that the chances of a similar disaster erupting during the 2028 Olympics are highly unlikely.

Kyiv claims 'biggest-ever aerial strike' on Russia

KYIV: (News Desk) Ukraine carried out its largest aerial attack on Russian territory of the nearly three-year war overnight, Kyiv said on Tuesday, hitting factories and energy hubs hundreds of miles from the frontline. The Russian military accused Kyiv of using US — and British — supplied missiles for one of the strikes and promised it would "not go unanswered". The barrage forced schools in the southwestern Saratov region to close, while at least nine airports in central and western Russia temporarily halted traffic, according to Russian officials. Moscow and Kyiv have upped strikes on each other ahead of US President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration next week, as both sides seek to gain the upper hand in potential negotiations aimed at settling the nearly three-year war. "The Ukrainian defence forces carried out the most massive strike against the occupiers' military facilities, at a distance of 200km to 1,100km deep into the territory of the Russian Federation," Ukraine's General Staff said in a post on social media. Facilities "in the Bryansk, Saratov, Tula regions and the Republic of Tatarstan were hit," it added. Russia's defence ministry said it shot down six US-supplied ATACMS missiles and six British Storm Shadow cruise missiles that Ukraine had fired in the attack on the Bryansk region. The overnight Ukrainian attacks come at a difficult moment for Kyiv's forces along the front line Kyiv have upped strikes on each other ahead of US President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration next week, as both sides seek to gain the upper hand in potential negotiations aimed at settling the nearly three-year war.



Rescued miners are seen as they are processed by police after the mine shaft where operations are ongoing to rescue illegal miners who have been underground for months in Stilfontein, South Africa on January 14.

Iran 'never' plotted to kill Donald Trump, Iranian president tells US media

Kazan (News Desk) Just days before Donald Trump is set to return to the White House, Iran's president has reiterated his country's categorical denial of being part of a plot to kill Trump during his election campaign last year. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian made the remarks in his first interview with a US media outlet

since Trump survived an assassination attempt last July, and also after the US Justice Department in November charged an Iranian man in connection with a plot to kill Trump the previous month. Trump won the election on November 5 and is set to take office next Monday. "We have never attempted this to begin with, and

we never will," Pezeshkian told NBC News in an interview in Tehran on Tuesday. He went on to say that accusations that Iran tried to assassinate Trump are part of "schemes by foreigners" — referring to Israel and other countries — to "feed into Iranophobia." On relations with the US and the tension with the Western countries

over the Iranian nuclear issue, along with the recent threats by Trump to increase sanctions and put more pressure on Iran, Pezeshkian charged that the US had "attempted to topple Iran." "I do hope that Trump will work for peace in the region and the world, not conversely contribute to bloodshed or war," he also said.

South Africa accused of 'horrific' crackdown as 78 corpses pulled from besieged mine

Capetown (News Desk) At least 78 illegal miners have been pulled out dead from a South African mine where police blocked food and water supplies for months in what trade unions described as a "horrific" state crackdown on desperate people trying to eke out a living. A total of 78 bodies and 166 survivors — some of them emaciated and disorientated

— have been hauled out so far in a court-ordered rescue operation that began on Monday, with hundreds more men still stuck two kilometres below the surface in a gold mine at Stilfontein, southwest of Johannesburg. Police had stopped food and water supplies from being taken into the mine since August until a court ruled in December that

volunteers could send down essential aid for the miners, known locally as "zama zamas". "Our mandate was to combat criminality and that is exactly what we've been doing," said Athlenda Mathe, national spokesperson for the South African police, speaking at the site. "By providing food, water and necessities to these illegal miners it would be the po-

lice entertaining and allowing criminality to thrive," she said. The death toll makes the crackdown on the Stilfontein mine one of the deadliest on miners in recent South African history. As the toll has mounted, so has criticism of the police and of the government, which says the siege was part of a much-needed crackdown on illegal mining.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during a plenary session at the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia in this file photo from October 2024.

Thousands to be evacuated after Mount Ibu eruption in Indonesia

Halmahera (News Desk) Thousands of islanders are set to be evacuated after a volcano erupted in eastern Indonesia, spewing a towering column of smoke and ash into the atmosphere, officials said on Wednesday. Mount Ibu, located on the remote island of Halmahera, erupted for a fifth time this year on Wednesday,

sending a column of smoke four kilometres into the sky. Indonesia's Geological Agency subsequently raised the volcano's alert status to the highest level. "Following the increase in Mount Ibu's (alert) level, today we will evacuate residents in five villages," said local disaster management head Wawan Gunawan

Ali. He added that local authorities were planning to evacuate approximately 3,000 residents from nearby villages on Wednesday evening. An AFP reporter on the ground reported that many residents had already gathered in a village hall, ready for evacuation. Mount Ibu has shown a significant increase in volcanic activity since last June,

following a series of earthquakes. In the first weeks of January alone, the volcano, which is one of Indonesia's most active, erupted four times. Residents living near Mount Ibu and tourists have been advised to avoid a five- to six-kilometre exclusion zone around the volcano's peak and to wear face masks in case of falling ash.

Questions remain over India's participation in Champions Trophy opening ceremony

LAHORE: (News Desk) Amid the Bharatiya Janata Party government's staunch stance of not sending its national cricket team to Pakistan, questions are arising about whether the Indian side or their captain Rohit Sharma will come to the neighbouring country to attend the opening ceremony of the Champions Trophy which is an ICC event. The Champions Trophy will be held in Pakistan from Feb 19 to March 9.

India, due to political strains with Pakistan, has not played any bilateral cricket with Pakistan since 2012-13 when a Misbah-ul-Haq-led squad toured India for a white-ball series. While no Indian team has toured Pakistan after the 2008 Asia Cup, Pakistan teams in the meantime have been travelling to India for different ICC events. To accommodate India in the eight-nation Champions Trophy, a two-way hybrid model has been adopted recently by the ICC with the consent of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to hold all the Champions Trophy matches involving India in Dubai.

Saudi Al-Rajhi takes Dakar lead as Al-Attiyah wins stage nine

HARADH: (News Desk) Qatari Nasser Al-Attiyah hit the gas on Tuesday to win stage nine of the Dakar Rally as Saudi Yazeed Al-Rajhi took the lead in the drivers' standings. South African Henk Lategan was dethroned having dominated the standings since stage two and is now 7min 09sec behind the Saudi driver with three days to go.

"It was a messy, messy, messy day for us but it's not the end of the world, we're still in it," said Lategan. Five-time champion Al-Attiyah covered the 357km special between Riyadh and Haradh in 2hr 52min 59sec, to keep in touch with a sixth Dakar title. "It was a good stage. I can be happy with the result. There are three days left, we really have to focus, everything is open," said Dacia driver Al-Attiyah, who is fourth over 25 minutes behind Al-Rajhi. The Qatari finished 2min 47sec ahead of Belgian Guillaume de Mevius' Mini and 3min 12sec ahead of Al-Rajhi's Overdrive. "We did a great job like we planned to," said Al-Rajhi. "It won't be easy, but we will fight to the end. Everything is going well for us." Having had to open the road following his victory in stage eight, Lategan crossed in his Toyota 11th on the day, 16min 2sec off the pace.

Final details of Gaza truce deal being worked out

DOHA: (News Desk) Negotiators met in Qatar on Tuesday hoping to hammer out final details of a ceasefire in Gaza, with mediators and the warring sides all describing a deal as closer than ever. More than six hours after talks began, but there was still no official word on an outcome. Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson Majed Al-Ansari told a news conference that talks on the final details were underway after both sides were presented with a text. US President Joe Biden, whose administration has been taking part alongside an envoy of president-elect Donald Trump, said a deal was close. Hamas said the talks had reached the final steps and that it hoped this round of negotiations would lead to a deal after mediation by Qatar, Egypt and the United States. An Israeli official said talks had reached a critical phase although some details needed to be hammered out. "We are close, we are not there yet." Palestinian group Islamic Jihad, which is separate from Hamas and also holds Israeli prisoners in Gaza, said it was sending a senior delegation that would arrive in Doha on Tuesday night to take part in final arrangements for a ceasefire deal.

Saudi looking into \$100m investment in Pakistan's mining sector with focus on Reko Diq: minister

Ryadh (News Desk) Saudi Mining Minister Bandar Alkhorayef told Reuters on Wednesday that Saudi Arabian mining company Manara Minerals was looking at investing in Balochistan's Reko Diq mine. He added that the Saudi Development Fund could contribute over \$100 million to Pakistan's mining infrastructure. "Part of what we are looking at is how we can help Pakistan also in some infrastructure," Alkhorayef said in an interview on the sidelines of the Future Minerals Forum in Riyadh. "Without that infrastructure, the economics of the deal are not attractive, so through the Saudi Development Fund we are thinking about how we can finance it." Manara, a joint venture between state-controlled Ma'aden and the \$925 billion Public Investment Fund (PIF), was set up as part of the kingdom's efforts to diversify its economy away from oil, including by buying minority stakes in assets overseas. Executives from Manara visited Pakistan in May last year for talks about buying a stake in the Reko Diq mine, considered one of the world's largest underdeveloped copper-gold areas by global mining company Barrick Gold, which owns the project jointly with Pakistan. Separately, Alkhorayef also said that Saudi state oil giant Aramco's project to extract lithium was "promising, but not yet commercially viable." Aramco has partnered with the King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) for the pilot, he said. Lithium Infinity, also known as Lihytech, a start-up launched out of KAUST, is leading the extraction project with cooperation from Aramco and Saudi mining company Ma'aden. Lithium is a key component in the batteries of electric cars, laptops, and smartphones. Reuters previously reported that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates' national oil companies planned to extract the mineral from oil runoffs.

Trump nominee Pete Hegseth weathers Democrats' grilling to emerge largely unscathed

Washington (News Desk) President-elect Donald Trump's pick to lead the Pentagon, Pete Hegseth, endured fierce Democratic grilling over everything from his inexperience, alleged drinking and his past opposition to women in combat to emerge largely unscathed among Republicans at his confirmation hearing on Tuesday. Hegseth, a former Fox News host and decorated

veteran, is one of the most controversial figures ever nominated to be Secretary of Defence and any vote to confirm him is expected to be very close. But he weathered the four-hour hearing without making any major gaffe that might have alienated Republicans and even won critical backing from Republican Senator Joni Ernst, who holds sway in her party. Several other committee

Republicans, to laughter from a friendly audience packed with supporters wearing Hegseth hats, praised the 44-year-old, who has slammed diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in the military, and, in his latest book, questioned whether the top US general has the job because he's Black. Asked if he would fire the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Charles Q. Brown, if he takes over

the military, a possibility first reported by Reuters, Hegseth declined to rule it out, saying he would be carrying out a broad review. "Every single senior officer will be reviewed based on meritocracy, standards, lethality and commitment to lawful orders they will be given," Hegseth said. Hegseth had strongly opposed women in combat roles but walked back that stance during the hearing.

"Mr Hegseth, I do not believe that you are qualified to meet the overwhelming demands of this job," said Senator Jack Reed, ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. A number of episodes have sparked concern, including a 2017 sexual assault allegation against Hegseth that did not result in charges and which he denies. He has also been accused of exces-

sive drinking and financial mismanagement at veterans' organisations. Hegseth has vowed to abstain from alcohol if confirmed and said he made financial errors but denied wrongdoing. Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand slammed Hegseth's past remarks about women, saying he would have to fundamentally change how he sees women who constitute 18 per cent of the US military.