

## Indonesia rescuers search for survivors as landslide kills at least 17

Java (News Desk) Hundreds of rescuers were searching through thick mud and debris to find survivors on Wednesday after a rain-triggered landslide in Indonesia killed at least 17 people and left nine missing. Intense rainfall in a mountainous area near Pekalongan city in Central Java province sparked the landslide on Monday, collapsing bridges and burying cars and houses.

Search and rescue agency Basarnas said in a statement on Wednesday that the toll remained unchanged from Tuesday at 17 dead, nine missing and 13 people injured. But another body was found, Mohammad Yulian Akbar, a local official told AFP later Wednesday, giving a higher toll of 18. Heavy machinery was deployed to clear road access for search teams and around 200 rescue personnel have been sent to help, Akbar said. "The focus is to search for the victims," he said, adding that the local government had declared an emergency in the district for two weeks. The worst hit area was Kasimpar village according to the local official, where the landslide struck a coffee shop and people who were trying to shelter from the rain. Police, soldiers and volunteers have joined the search alongside rescue workers, which is taking place around 90 kilometres west of the city of Semarang. But efforts were intermittently suspended on Tuesday as heavy rain continued to pound the area.

## Trump pardons Silk Road founder Ulbricht for online drug scheme

Washington (News Desk) US President Donald Trump on Tuesday pardoned Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht, who was sentenced to life in prison for running an underground online marketplace where drug dealers and others conducted over \$200 million in illicit trade using bitcoin.

The Republican president made good on a campaign pledge to free Ulbricht, 40, who was arrested in 2013 and sentenced in 2015 in what became a landmark US prosecution launched only a few years after the emergence of the popular cryptocurrency.

"The scum that worked to convict him were some of the same lunatics who were involved in the modern day weaponisation of government against me," Trump said in a post on his social media platform Truth Social.

Trump said the pardon was "full and unconditional", adding he called Ulbricht's mother to break the news to her on Tuesday.

Ulbricht has been imprisoned at a federal prison in Arizona, and his attorney said he was hopeful Ulbricht would be released shortly.

"After enduring over a decade of incarceration, this decision offers Ross the opportunity to begin anew, to rebuild his life, and to contribute positively to society," Brandon Sample, Ulbricht's clemency attorney, said in a statement.

## EU, China warn against trade friction after Trump's return

DAVOS (News Desk) European and Chinese leaders took turns defending global cooperation in Davos on Tuesday as the spectre of new trade wars looms following Donald Trump's return to the White House.

Trump will make an online appearance at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland this week, but he has been the elephant in the room for the executives and leaders hobnobbing at the annual conference in the Swiss Alps.

In their speeches, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz offered visions of the world that are mirror opposites to those of the self-professed tariff-loving Trump.

"Protectionism leads nowhere and there are no winners in a trade war," Ding said, without mentioning Trump directly.

Trump threatened on Monday to impose tariffs if Beijing rejected his proposal to keep Chinese-owned app TikTok online on condition that half of it is sold off.

Beijing, which is taking a cautious approach to Trump, said after the TikTok threat that it hoped the United States would provide a fair business environment for Chinese firms.

Meanwhile, von der Leyen took a conciliatory tone, saying the EU's "first priority will be to engage early, discuss common interests and be ready to negotiate" with Trump.

"We will be pragmatic but we will always stand by our principles, to protect our interests and uphold our values," she said.

The European Commission president also said that Europe "must engage constructively with China — to find solutions in our mutual interest" despite escalating trade tensions between the two.



US President Donald Trump holds a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi alongside the Asean Summit in Manila, Philippines

## Simmering anger as Turkiye begins burying 76 victims, detains 9 over ski resort hotel fire

Ankara (News desk) Turkiye was preparing to bury its dead on Wednesday a day after a huge fire killed 76 people at a ski resort hotel, as questions grew over safety measures at the luxury establishment. Nine people have been detained, including the owner of the hotel, Interior Minister Ali Yer-

likaya said. As the nation observed a day of mourning, dozens of families were preparing to bury their loved ones who died as the blaze ripped through the 12-storey hotel. But alongside the grief, there was anger, with many newspapers publishing allegations of negligence at

the mountaintop hotel in Kartalkaya, which lies about two hours northwest of Ankara. "It was not the fire but the negligence which was responsible for so many deaths," said the pro-government Hurriyet newspaper. The fire, which began in the dead of night, struck at peak season for the Grand

Kartal Hotel, which had 238 guests staying at the start of a two-week winter break. The hotel expressed deep sorrow in a statement on Wednesday and pledged full cooperation with the investigation. "We are cooperating with authorities to shed light on all aspects of this incident," the statement said.

## India and US trying to arrange Modi meeting with Trump next month

Washington (News Desk) Indian and American diplomats are trying to arrange a meeting in February between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump in Washington, two Indian sources familiar with the discussions told Reuters. India, a strategic partner of the United States in its efforts to counter China, is keen to enhance trade rela-

tions with the US and make it easier for its citizens to get skilled worker visas, two topics that will be on the agenda if the leaders meet, the sources said. Trump's return to the White House has raised worries among officials in New Delhi about the imposition of tariffs on India, which he has listed as one of the countries with high tariffs on US products and has in-

dicated that he favoured reciprocating them. However, the sources said New Delhi was willing to offer some concessions to Washington although it has not been officially informed of any plans by the US to impose reciprocal tariffs and was also open to offering incentives to attract more US investment in India. Officials hope that an early meeting between the pair will help

get ties off to a positive start in Trump's new term, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Trump visited India in February 2020 during his previous term in office. Then, he was cheered by more than 100,000 Indians at a cricket stadium in Modi's political homeland in Ahmedabad, where he promised India "an incredible trade deal".



Rescuers at the site of a landslide triggered by heavy rain two days ago in Kasimpar Village, near Pekalongan city in Central Java

## Chinese mine worker killed in north Afghanistan attack

Kabul (News Desk) A Chinese mine worker was killed in an attack in Afghanistan, police said on Wednesday, where the Taliban government is trying to project an image of security to encourage investment from Beijing. The Chinese citizen was travelling on Tuesday evening in northern Takhar

province bordering Tajikistan when he was killed by "unknown armed men", provincial police spokesman Mohammad Akbar Haqqani told AFP. He said the man was travelling "for an unknown reason" and without informing security officials, who typically accompany Chinese nationals on trips

in the country. A translator travelling with the man was unharmed, Haqqani added. Interior ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani confirmed the details of the killing and said the Chinese citizen was a business owner with a contract to mine in Afghanistan. China's embassy in Kabul did not respond to a

request for comment by AFP and no group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack. The Taliban government are touting Afghanistan's vast natural resources, untapped during two decades of war, as a lifeline for the ravaged economy and a lucrative opportunity for foreign speculators.

## Sri Lanka orders former leaders to move out of govt residences

COLOMBO: (News Desk) Sri Lanka's leftist government asked former presidents, including the once-powerful Rajapaksa brothers, on Tuesday to immediately vacate luxury government bungalows as part of a new austerity drive.

The government has decided to convert the stately homes into upmarket boutique hotels or museums, Information Minister Nalinda Jayatissa told reporters in Colombo.

He said the state would pay former leaders rent totalling \$107 a month, as they are entitled to under a 1986 law, instead of providing government housing.

Jayatissa noted that former president Mahinda Rajapaksa was occupying a government house with a monthly rental value of \$16,500 (4.6 million rupees), which is more than 150 times his official entitlement.

"The government will not provide housing for ex-presidents or their widows in future," Jayatissa said.

"They will only receive a rent allowance equivalent to one-third of their pension, which is 30,000 rupees." There was no immediate comment from Mahinda Rajapaksa, but a local media report said he was willing to vacate if given written notice.

## Gazans' joy at ceasefire dims as they visit ruined homes, dig for the dead

CAIRO: (News Desk) On foot or riding rickshaws, many Palestinians exhausted by conflict in Gaza began returning to the ruins of their homes on the third day of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, shocked by total destruction.

The truce took effect on Sunday after 15 months of conflict with the handover of the first three prisoners held by Hamas and the release of 90 Palestinians from Israeli jails.

Now attention is shifting to the rebuilding of the coastal enclave, which the Israeli military has reduced to vast tracts of rubble in its campaign to wipe out Hamas.

Some Gazans could not even recognise where they once lived and turned their back on shattered neighbourhoods to return to tents where they have sheltered for the past several months. Others began to clear debris to try to move back to the wreckage of their homes.

"We are cleaning the house, and removing the rubble, so we are able to return home. Those are the quilts, pillows, nothing was left at the house," said Palestinian woman Walea El-Err, pointing to her destroyed belongings at her bombed-out home in Nuseirat, a decades-old refugee camp in central Gaza.

## Nine Palestinians killed in Jenin

JENIN: (News Desk) The Israeli military said on Tuesday it had launched an operation in the occupied West Bank's Jenin, just days after a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took effect in the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian health ministry, based in Ramallah, said the operation had killed nine people.

In a joint statement, the military and the Shin Bet security agency said that, alongside the Israeli Border Police, they had launched an operation dubbed "Iron Wall" in Jenin. In a statement released shortly after the launch of the operation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the raid was part of a broader strategy to counter Iran "wherever it sends its arms — in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen" and the West Bank. The Palestinian Red Crescent said its first responders treated seven people injured by live ammunition and that Israeli forces were hindering their access to the area. Jenin governor Kamal Abu al-Rub told AFP the operation was "an invasion of the (refugee) camp". "It came quickly, Apache helicopters in the sky and Israeli military vehicles everywhere," he added.

## BCCI says will follow rules amid reports of ICC warning on refusal to print 'Pakistan' on team kits

Delhi (News Desk) The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Wednesday affirmed its compliance with all uniform-related rules amid reports of the International Cricket Council (ICC) warning the board against its alleged refusal to have 'Pakistan' printed on its team's Champions Trophy kits as part of the tournament logo.

The Champions Trophy will be held in Pakistan from Feb 19 to March 9.

"BCCI will follow every uniform-related ICC rule during Champions Trophy," Devajit Saikia, the Indian cricket board's secretary, was quoted as saying by Indian news agency Press Trust of India.

Earlier today, state broadcaster PTV reported that according to Indian media outlet NDTV, the BCCI was sent a "firm message" from the ICC regarded the alleged hesitation to print Pakistan on its kits.

"It is the responsibility of every team to add the tournament logo to their jerseys. All teams are obligated to comply with this rule," NDTV reported an ICC official as saying.

PTV reported that the ICC rejected the Indian board's contention that it was not keen to have Pakistan written on its team kit as part of its host nation regulation.

"The Indian board has, in fact, been asked by ICC that the Indian team is obligated to have 'Pakistan' written on the kit as the nation is the original host for the tournament," PTV said.

India, due to political strains with Pakistan, has not played any bilateral cricket with Pakistan since 2012-13 when a Misbahul Haq-led squad toured India for a white-ball series.

## Bangladesh scraps order against anti-government action

Dhaka (News Desk) A Bangladeshi education ministry order demanding officers report institutions and pupils involved in anti-government "provocative activities" was withdrawn on Wednesday after criticism it undermined the spirit of last year's student-led revolution. The mass uprising spearheaded by students toppled long-time autocrat Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, with an interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus taking

charge. The order, signed by the ministry's director of its "monitoring and evaluation" for secondary education, Abed Noman, was issued on January 2 — but shot to attention after it circulated on social media and in newspapers. Wahiduddin Mahmud, the education minister, said he had not been aware of the order and that it had been cancelled. "The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education was not instructed to issue any notification," he said. "This matter will

be investigated." The now cancelled order had told officials to "remain vigilant and proactive in preventing students from engaging in provocative actions, driven by propaganda, misinformation, or disinformation against the government or the country." It did not provide clarification on what those actions might include. "Officials must notify the authorities if any educational institution or student is involved in provocative activities, so that necessary measures

can be taken," it added. Supreme Court lawyer Snehadri Chakravarty had earlier called it a clear violation of constitutional rights. "Student-led protests once toppled former prime minister Sheikh Hasina because people's freedom of speech and expression was being curtailed," Chakravarty told AFP. "Within five months, some factions of the government appear to be echoing her actions," he added. "This type of notification is not in line with the spirit of the mass up-

rising, which claimed so many lives." More than 800 people died in the months of protests that culminated in the ouster of Hasina's government on August 5, according to the interim government. Protests began in July with rallies led by university students against civil service job quotas but soon escalated into deadly unrest and demands that she step down. Attacks on demonstrators by police and pro-government student groups last month also sparked international condemnation.

The autocratic Hasina, 76, won a fifth term as prime minister in January but the opposition boycotted a vote it said was neither free nor fair. Critics accused her government of a litany of rights abuses, including the murder of opposition activists. The daughter of a revolutionary who led Bangladesh to independence, Hasina presided over breakneck economic growth in a country once written off by US statesman Henry Kissinger as an irredeemable "basket case".