

## China bans livestock product imports from numerous countries on disease worries

Hongkong(News Des) China has prohibited imports of sheep, goat, poultry and even-toed ungulates from African, Asian and European countries due to outbreaks of livestock diseases such as sheep pox, goat pox and foot-and-mouth-disease. The ban, which also includes processed and unprocessed products, comes after the World Health Organisation released information of disease outbreaks in various countries, according to a series of announcements by China's General Administration of Customs dated January 21.

The ban on the world's largest meat importer affects Ghana, Somalia, Qatar, Congo (DRC), Nigeria, and Tanzania, Egypt, Bulgaria, East Timor and Eritrea.

China also said it has stopped imports of sheep, goat and related products from Palestine, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Bangladesh due to sheep pox and goat pox outbreaks.

It also blocked the imports of even-toed ungulates and related products from Germany following an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, it said.

## Chinese AI startup DeepSeek overtakes ChatGPT on Apple App Store

Xinghai(News Desk) Chinese startup DeepSeek's artificial intelligence (AI) Assistant on Monday overtook rival ChatGPT to become the top-rated free application available on Apple's App Store in the United States. Powered by the DeepSeek-V3 model, which its creators say "tops the leaderboard among open-source models and rivals the most advanced closed-source models globally", the artificial intelligence application has surged in popularity among US users since it was released on January 10, according to app data research firm Sensor Tower.

The milestone highlights how DeepSeek has left a deep impression on Silicon Valley, upending widely held views about US primacy in AI and the effectiveness of Washington's export controls targeting China's advanced chip and AI capabilities.

AI models from ChatGPT to DeepSeek require advanced chips to power their training. The Biden administration has since 2021 widened the scope of bans designed to stop these chips from being exported to China and used to train Chinese firms' AI models.

However, DeepSeek researchers wrote in a paper last month that the DeepSeek-V3 used Nvidia's H800 chips for training, spending less than \$6 million. Although this detail has since been disputed, the claim that the chips used were less powerful than the most advanced Nvidia products Washington has sought to keep out of China, as well as the relatively cheap training costs, has prompted US tech executives to question the effectiveness of tech export controls.

## New US admin hires more Indians as 'Samosa Caucus' influence grows

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) The Trump administration has now confirmed the nomination of three Indian-Americans to key positions, as the informal 'Samosa Caucus' celebrates its expanded representation in the US Congress.

The nominations, coupled with the swearing-in of a record six Indian-Americans to the House of Representatives earlier this month, further highlight the growing influence of the Indian community in US politics.

With 4.5 million members, the diaspora has cemented its position in the American economy and education sectors, and is now becoming a critical force in US politics as well.

So far, President Donald Trump has nominated half a dozen Indian-Americans to key positions, from the FBI's Kash Patel to other key officials in the White House.

Ricky Gill has been named senior director for South and Central Asia at the National Security Council (NSC). Kush Desai joins the White House as deputy press secretary, and Saurabh Sharma has taken on a role in the Presidential Personnel Office.

Meanwhile, the new Congress welcomed Ami Bera (California), Suhash Subramania (Virginia), Pramila Jayapal (Washington), Ro Khanna (California), Shri Thanedar (Michigan), and Raja Krishnamoorthi (Illinois).

Traditionally aligned with the Democratic Party, Indian-Americans are now increasingly gravitating toward the Republicans. Trump's economic policies, which favour tax cuts and deregulation, have resonated with affluent and conservative segments of the diaspora. Shared values such as family, education and nationalism further align with Trump's messaging.

High-profile Republican figures like Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy have amplified Indian-American visibility within the Republican Party, further encouraging a re-evaluation of political loyalties.



GAZA: People gather by a banner welcoming returning Palestinians from the Netzarim corridor, near the rubble of collapsed buildings along the coastal al-Rashid Street.

## Iran deputy FM says no contact with US since Trump's return

Washington(News Desk) Iran and the United States have not exchanged any messages since the return of Donald Trump to the White House, a senior Iranian diplomat said on Monday. "It has only been a few days since the new American administration took office and no messages have been exchanged," Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi told the local ISNA news agency.

During his first term, Trump pursued a policy of "maximum pressure", withdrawing the US from a landmark nuclear deal which imposed curbs on Iran's nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief. Tehran adhered to the deal — known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — until Washington's

withdrawal but then began rolling back its commitments. Efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear pact have since faltered. "We have to plan calmly and patiently. When the policies of the other side (Trump) are announced, we act accordingly," said Takht-Ravanchi. On Thursday, Trump said he hoped to avoid military strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, hoping for

an agreement. Iran has repeatedly expressed willingness to revive the deal, and President Masoud Pezeshkian, who took office in July, has called for an end to his country's isolation. Earlier this month, before Trump officially returned to the White House, Iranian officials held nuclear talks with counterparts from Britain, France and Germany.

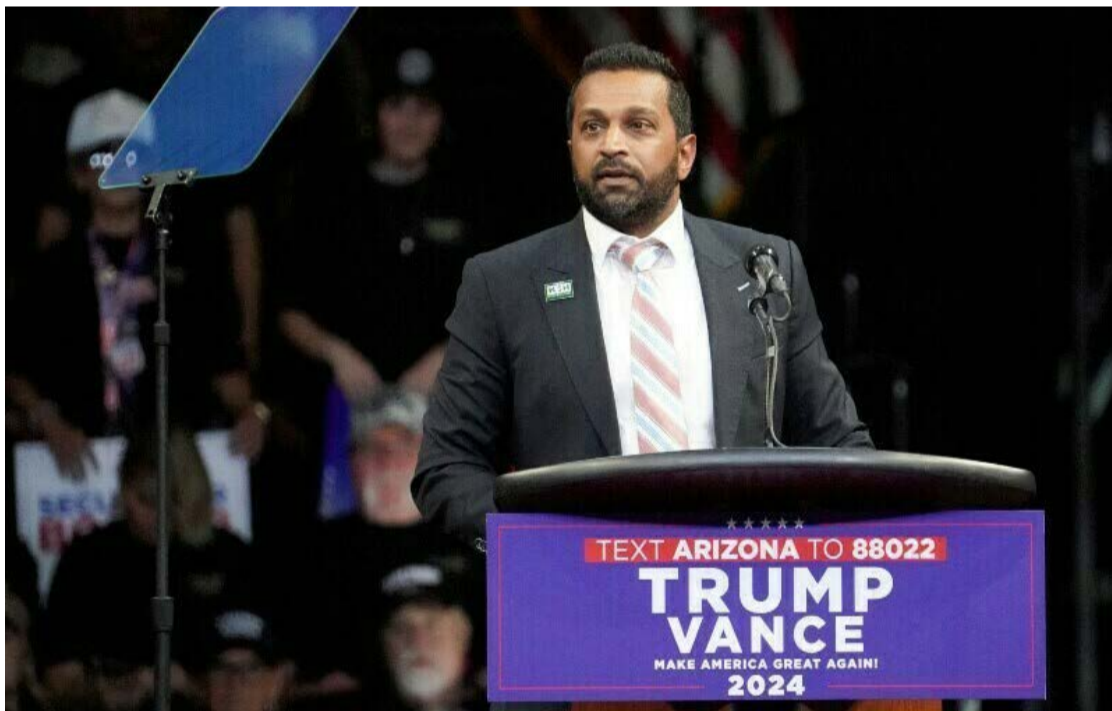
## Saudi Arabia allows foreigners to invest in firms with property in Makkah, Madina

Riyadh(News Desk) Saudi Arabia's market regulator said on Monday it would allow foreign investment in listed companies that own real estate within Islam's two holiest sites of Makkah and Madina, as the Gulf country looks to attract more investment. The move will allow foreigners to invest in firms whose revenues rely on the Islamic pilgrimage, one of the top revenue sources for

the oil-rich kingdom. Saudi Arabia's market watchdog, the Capital Market Authority (CMA), said in a statement the move aimed to attract foreign capital and provide liquidity for present and future projects in the two cities. Saudi Arabia has said it aims to welcome 30 million pilgrims for Haj and Umrah annually by 2030. In 2019, it earned about

\$12 billion from the two pilgrimages, according to official data. The annual Haj pilgrimage plays a vital role in the country's economy and upping the number of pilgrims is an integral part of its Vision 2030 economic reform agenda that aims to wean the economy off oil revenues. Saudi Arabia's benchmark index was up 0.2 per cent, led by 10pc increases in

both Jabal Omar Development Company and Makkah Construction and Development Company, which have real estate in Makkah. The bourse, the Gulf Arab region's largest with a market capitalisation of 10.2 trillion riyals (\$2.72tr), opened up to foreign investors in 2015 in a bid to attract more funds and has seen a flurry of new listings in recent years.



Kash Patel, former chief of staff to the defence secretary, speaks on the day Republican presidential candidate and former US President Donald Trump holds a campaign rally, in Prescott Valley, Arizona

## China says 'extremely unlikely' Covid pandemic came from lab leak

Hongkong(News Desk) China said on Monday it was "extremely unlikely" Covid-19 came from a laboratory, after the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) said it believed the virus had more likely come from a lab rather than natural transmission. "The conclusion that a laboratory leak is extremely unlikely was reached by the

China-WHO joint expert team based on field visits to relevant laboratories in Wuhan," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said. "This has been widely recognised by the international community and the scientific community," she added. The CIA said on Saturday the virus was "more likely" leaked from a Chinese lab than trans-

mitted by animals. The new assessment came after John Ratcliffe was confirmed last week as the CIA director under the second White House administration of Donald Trump. "CIA assesses with low confidence that a research-related origin of the Covid-19 pandemic is more likely than a natural origin based on the available body of re-

porting," a CIA spokesperson said in a statement Saturday. The agency had not previously made any determination on whether Covid had been unleashed by a laboratory mishap or spilled over from animals. Beijing on Monday urged the United States to "stop politicising and instrumentalising the issue of origin-tracing".

## Afghan Taliban supporters rally against ICC arrest warrant requests

GHAZNI: (News desk) Some 200 Taliban supporters rallied in central Afghanistan on Sunday against the International Criminal Court chief prosecutor's request for arrest warrants for two Taliban leaders.

The rally followed the announcement by the ICC on Thursday that chief prosecutor Karim Khan was seeking arrest warrants for Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani over the persecution of women.

The Taliban government has imposed a raft of restrictions on women and girls, which the United Nations has described as "gender apartheid", since sweeping back to power in 2021.

Demonstrators in Ghazni city condemned Khan's move, chanting slogans that included "Death to America" and "long live the Islamic Emirate" — the Taliban authorities' name for their government.

"We have gathered here to show the West that their decision is cruel and rejected by Afghans," said Ghazni resident Noorulhaq Omar. "It will never be accepted because the Afghan nation will sacrifice their life for their emir," he said, referring to Akhundzada.

## Ill-fated Korean plane warned of bird strikes seconds before black box stopped recording

Seoul(News Desk) THE ill-fated Jeju Air plane in last month's deadly crash received a warning from air traffic control about bird activity just one minute before its black box recording stopped, the transport ministry said on Saturday.

The ministry briefed the preliminary findings to the bereaved families following its probe into the fatal crash of the low-cost carrier plane from Bangkok that killed 179 people on board and left two survivors, in South Korea's southwestern city of Muan on Dec 29 of last year.

The government plans to release the preliminary report by Monday, which will be sent to the International Civil Aviation Organisation, the United States, France and Thailand, the ministry said. The investigation committee under the ministry said surveillance footage from the time of the accident at Muan International Airport confirmed that the plane attempted a go-around when it hit a flock of birds. The plane first communicated with the air traffic control tower at 8:54:43am as it was approaching for landing. The control tower cleared it for landing on Runway 01, in the opposite direction of the runway where the accident happened. At 8:57:50am, the control tower issued a warning to the aircraft about a potential bird strike.

## Just bread and tea: WFP says aid cuts to Afghanistan leave millions hungry this winter

Kabul(News Desk) The head of the World Food Programme in Afghanistan says the agency can only feed half the millions of Afghans in need after cuts in international aid and an impending freeze in US foreign funding. Many people were living on just "bread and tea", WFP Country Director Hsiao-Wei Lee told Reuters. Afghanistan was tipped to the brink of economic crisis in 2021 as the Taliban took over and all development and security assistance to the country was frozen, with restrictions also placed on the banking sector. Since then humanitarian aid — aimed at funding urgent needs through non-profit organisations and bypassing government control — has filled some of the gap. But donors have been cutting steadily in recent years, concerned by Taliban restrictions on women, including their order that Afghan female NGO employees stop work, and competing global crises. Lee told Reuters shortly before finishing her three-year term in Afghanistan that funding cuts had meant that roughly half the 15 million Afghans in acute need of food were not receiving rations during this year's harsh winter.

## Napoli beat Juventus to continue Serie A title charge

MILAN: (News Desk) Napoli continued their Serie A title charge on Saturday by coming from behind to win a feverish contest with rivals Juventus 2-1 and go six points clear at the top of the table.

Antonio Conte's side bounced back from Randal Kolo Muani's strike moments from half-time in his Juve debut. Napoli won their seventh straight match thanks to a bullet header from Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa and Romelu Lukaku's 69th-minute penalty.

Napoli are hunting a second Scudetto in three seasons and Saturday's win, and in particular their dominant performance in the second half, was another sign that they, and not Inter Milan, are the team to beat.

The roar that accompanied the hosts' goals and the final whistle underlined the renewed belief that supporters have in their team after watching Napoli put up a dreadful defence of the title last season.

"We wanted to win, we did and we're all very happy. There's not much else to say," said Anguissa to DAZN. "We know that we're a good team but all we can do is take it one game at a time, with the self-confidence of knowing that we're a team with character that's difficult to beat."

Juve, meanwhile, are 16 points behind Napoli in fifth after falling to their first league defeat of the season, not the position expected when Thiago Motta replaced Massimiliano Allegri as coach in the summer.

"I'm disappointed with the defeat because we played well in the first half, against a team which isn't top by chance," said Motta whose team have won once since the turn of the year. Kolo Muani gave Juve a deserved half-time lead two days after finally completing his loan move from Paris Saint-Germain, where he had been frozen out by coach Luis Enrique. He was in the right place at the right time in the 43rd minute to spin and lash home his third club goal of the season after Anguissa challenged for the ball and sent it straight to the France forward. But Napoli were a different team after the break.

## Trump's plan to 'clean Gaza' stokes fear of another Nakba

GAZA:(News Desk) US President Donald Trump's suggestion that Jordan and Egypt should take more Palestinians from Gaza is raising concerns that they are being driven out of the coastal strip, with Arab states worried about the destabilising impact of any such exodus. Both Hamas and Palestinian political leaders have reacted with fury and defiance to a plan floated by US President Donald Trump to "clean out" Gaza, which has been met with approval from the Israeli side.

Calling Gaza a "demolition site", Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One that he had spoken to Jordan's King Abdullah II about moving Palestinians out of the territory. "You're talking about probably a million and half people, and we just clean out that whole thing," Trump said of Gaza, whose population is about 2.4 million. Tens of thousands waiting to re-enter besieged enclave as Israel closes entry gates "I'd rather get involved with some of the Arab nations and build hous-

ing at a different location where they can maybe live in peace for a change," Trump said, adding that moving Gaza's inhabitants could be "temporarily or could be long term." "I'd like Egypt to take people. And I'd like Jordan to take people", he said, adding that he would also talk to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Sunday. For Palestinians, any attempt to move them from Gaza would evoke dark historical memories of 'Nakba' — the mass persecution and displacement of Palestinians from their land for the creation of

Israel. Egypt had previously warned against any "forced displacement" of Palestinians into the Sinai desert, which Sisi said could jeopardise the peace treaty Egypt signed with Israel in 1979. Jordan is already home to 2.3m registered Palestinian refugees. Jordan's rejection of any displacement of Palestinians is "firm and unwavering," Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said on Sunday. Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas condemned "any projects" to relocate the people of Gaza outside the territory. Also, Bassem Naim, a

member of Hamas's political bureau, said Palestinians would "foil such projects" as they have done to similar plans "for displacement and alternative homelands over the decades". Palestinians, he said, "will not accept any offers or solutions, even if their apparent intentions are good under the banner of reconstruction, as proposed by US President Trump." Tens of thousands of displaced Palestinians were blocked from returning to the north of the territory on Sunday at the Israeli military barrier of the Netzarim corridor.

Palestinians wait to be allowed to return to their homes in northern Gaza after they were displaced to the south at Israel's order during its war, in the central Gaza Strip on January 26. — Reuters/Mohammed Salem On Sunday, cars and carts loaded with belongings lined up near the blocked Netzarim corridor that they would cross to enter the north. Ismail al-Thawabtah, director general of the government media office in Gaza, also said there were tens of thousands waiting at the junction.