

Search for MH370 resumes 11 years after crash

KUALA LUMPUR: (News Desk) A fresh search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 has been launched more than a decade after the plane went missing in one of aviation's greatest enduring mysteries. Maritime exploration firm Ocean Infinity has resumed the hunt for the missing plane, Malaysian Transport Minister Anthony Loke said on Tuesday. Loke told reporters contract details between Malaysia and the firm were still being finalized, but welcomed "the proactiveness of Ocean Infinity to deploy their ships" to begin the search for the plane, which went missing in March 2014. Loke said details about how long the search would last had not been negotiated yet. He also did not provide details about when exactly the British firm restarted its hunt. The Malaysian government said in December it had agreed to launch a new search for MH370. The Boeing 777 carrying 239 people disappeared from radar screens on March 8, 2014, while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

Trump administration to take control of media access at White House

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) The White House announced on Tuesday that it would decide which journalists get access to President Donald Trump's events — removing the power from an independent association of media outlets that has done so for decades. The move comes amid a legal battle with the Associated Press news agency, which the White House has barred from events in spaces such as the Oval Office and Air Force One in a row over naming of the Gulf of Mexico. Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said that the White House Correspondents Association (WHCA) had "long dictated" which journalists were in the "pool," the small group of journalists given access to "intimate spaces." "Not anymore. I am proud to announce that we are going to give the power back to the people who read your papers, who watch your television shows and who listen to your radio stations," Leavitt said. Leavitt said "legacy outlets" would still be allowed to join the press pool, but that access would also be opened to "deserving outlets who have never been allowed to share in this awesome responsibility."

Space telescope to explore what happened right after Big Bang

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) Nasa is preparing to launch a megaphone-shaped observatory on a mission to better understand what happened immediately after the Big Bang that initiated the universe and to search the Milky Way for reservoirs of water, a crucial ingredient for life.

The US space agency's SPHEREx space telescope is tentatively scheduled to be launched on Friday aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California.

The SPHEREx — short for Spectro-Photometer for the History of the Universe, Epoch of Reionisation and Ices Explorer — is looking to answer questions about the origin of the universe while mapping the distribution of galaxies.

Closer to home — relatively speaking — SPHEREx will look within our galaxy for reservoirs of water frozen on the surface of interstellar dust grains in large clouds of gas and dust that give rise to stars and planets.

The observatory, during its planned two-year mission, will collect data on more than 450 million galaxies, as well as more than 100 million stars in the Milky Way, as it explores the origins of the universe and the galaxies within it. It will create a three-dimensional map of the cosmos in 102 colours — individual wavelengths of light.

The mission is intended to gain insight into a phenomenon called cosmic inflation, the rapid and exponential expansion of the

universe from a single point in a fraction of a second after the Big Bang that occurred roughly 13.8 billion years ago. By way of comparison, Earth is about 4.5 billion years old.

"We have pretty good evidence that inflation occurred, but the physics driving that event is really uncertain," said cosmologist Olivier Dore of Caltech and Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, a SPHEREx project scientist.

"By mapping the distribution of galaxies over the whole sky, we can directly constrain unique properties of inflation. This is why we want to map the whole sky and why we need spectroscopy (studying objects based on colour) to make the map 3D.

The fact that we can connect these two things — the distribution of galaxies on large scales all the way to the physics of inflation — is very powerful and very mind-boggling and almost magical," Dore added.



Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy meet at Trump Tower in New York City, US.

Trump to sell 'gold card' US visas for \$5 million

Washington (News Desk) US President Donald Trump unveiled plans on Tuesday to sell new "gold card" residency permits for a price of \$5 million each — and said Russian oligarchs may be eligible. Trump said sales of the new visa, a high-price version of the traditional green card, would bring in job creators and could be used to reduce the US

national deficit. "We're going to be selling a gold card. You have a green card, this is a gold card. We're going to be putting a price on that card of about \$5 million," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. The Republican president, who has made the deportation of millions of undocumented migrants a priority of his second term, said the new card

would be a route to highly prized US citizenship. "A lot of people are going to want to be in this country, and they'll be able to work and provide jobs and build companies," Trump said. "It'll be people with money." Sales of the cards would start in about two weeks, Trump added. "We'll be able to sell maybe a million of these cards.

We have it all worked out from a legal standpoint," Trump added. The billionaire former real estate tycoon said that all applicants for the new gold cards would be carefully vetted. But asked if wealthy Russians would also be able to apply, Trump said it was a possibility. "Possibly. I know some Russian oligarchs that are very nice people.

Israel considers extending 42-day truce in Gaza

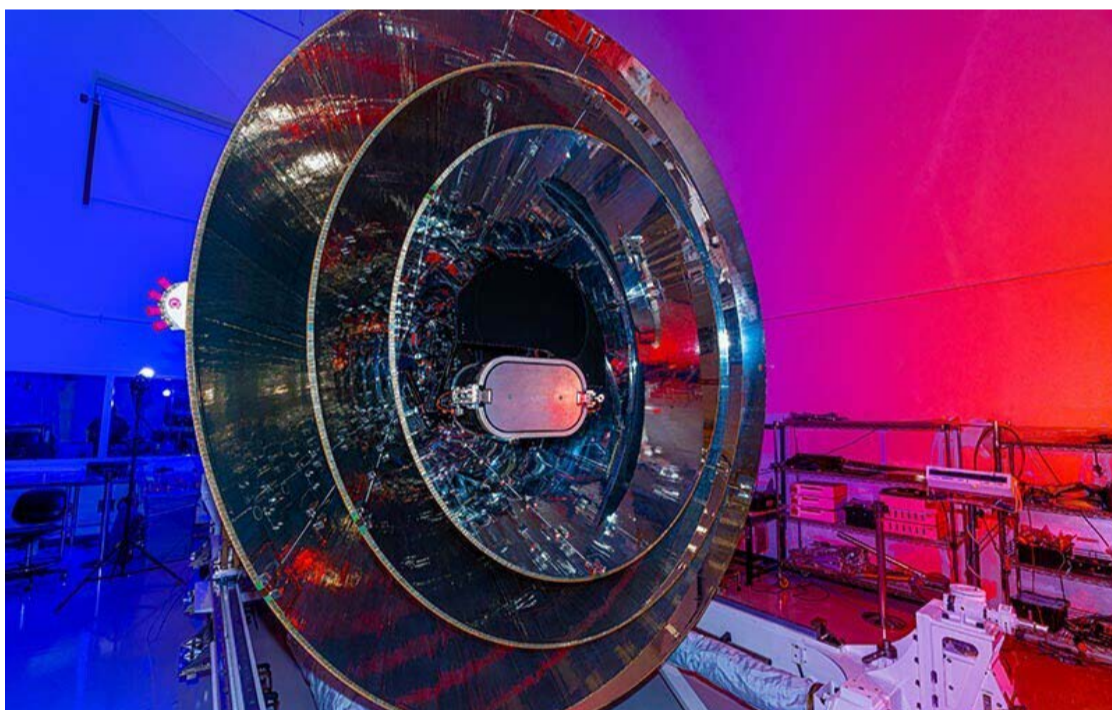
JERUSALEM: (News Desk) Israel is considering an extension of the 42-day truce in Gaza as it seeks to bring home the remaining 63 prisoners, while putting off agreement on the future of the enclave for now.

The initial phase of the ceasefire deal, launched with the backing of the United States and the help of Egyptian and Qatari mediators on Jan 19, is due

to end on Saturday and it remains unclear what will follow. "We are being very cautious," Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Sharen Haskel told reporters in Jerusalem, when asked whether the truce might be extended without the start of talks on a second phase which would include difficult issues such as a final end to the war and the future governance of Ga-

za. "There wasn't a particular agreement on that, but it might be a possibility," she said. "We didn't close the option of continuing the current ceasefire, but in return for our [prisoners], and they have to be returned safely." If no agreement is reached by Friday, officials expect either a return to fighting or a freeze in the current situation in which the truce would con-

tinue but prisoners would not return and Israel may block the entry of aid into Gaza. Two officials who have been involved in the ceasefire process said Israel and Hamas have not engaged in negotiations to finalise an agreement over second phase of the ceasefire. "I think it's unrealistic to see something like that forming within a few days," Haskel said.



A semi-frontal view of the SPHEREx observatory is seen during integration and testing at BAE Systems in Boulder, Colorado, US, in this handout photo obtained by Reuters on February 24, 2025.

US, Ukraine agree to terms of critical minerals deal

Washington (News Desk) The US and Ukraine have agreed on the terms of a draft minerals deal central to Kyiv's push to win Washington's support as President Donald Trump seeks to rapidly end the war with Russia, two sources with knowledge of the matter said on Tuesday. A source familiar with the contents of the draft agreement said that it does not specify any US security guarantees or continued flow

of weapons but says that the United States wants Ukraine to be "free, sovereign and secure." One of the sources familiar with the deal said future weapons shipments are still being discussed between Washington and Kyiv. Trump told reporters that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wants to come to Washington on Friday to sign a "very big deal." This came after the two leaders exchanged hostile words last

week. The US president, who has cast the deal as a repayment for billions of dollars in aid to Kyiv, also said some form of peacekeeping troops are needed in Ukraine if an agreement to end the conflict is struck. Moscow, which launched an invasion of Ukraine three years ago, has refused to accept any deployment of NATO forces. Some European countries have said they would be willing to send peacekeeping forces

to Ukraine. Trump said on Monday that Moscow would accept such peacekeepers, but the Kremlin denied that on Tuesday. Trump's rush to impose an end to Russia's war in Ukraine and his lurch toward Moscow has stoked fears of far-reaching US concessions to Russian President Vladimir Putin that could undermine security in Ukraine and Europe and alter the geopolitical landscape.

Nations spar over nature funding at UN talks

ROME: (News Desk) Global talks to protect nature restarted on Tuesday with a call for humanity to come together to "sustain life on the planet" and overcome a fight over funding that caused a previous meeting last year to end in disarray.

More than two years after a landmark deal on nature — including a pledge to protect 30 per cent of the world's land and seas by 2030 — nations are still haggling over the money needed to reverse destruction that scientists say threatens a million species.

Negotiators meeting at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation headquarters in Rome this week are tasked with resolving a deadlock between rich and developing countries over whether or not to create a specific fund to finance nature conservation.

Disagreement over this saw the previous UN COP16 talks in Cali, Colombia, in November stretch hours into extra time and end without agreement.

Inexperience cost us the tournament, says coach Aqib Javed after Pakistan's Champions Trophy fiasco

Lahore (News Desk) Interim head coach and de facto chief selector Aqib Javed said on Wednesday that hosts Pakistan were kicked out of the Champions Trophy tournament "due to a lack of experience among the players".

A wave of criticism has engulfed the Pakistan cricket team following their six-wicket defeat to India in Dubai, a result that was decisive in Pakistan's ouster from the International Cricket Council (ICC) Champions Trophy, an event which they are hosting. Before that, during the opening match against New Zealand in Karachi, the Green Shirts faced a 60-run defeat.

India and New Zealand advanced from the four-team group as both sides won their respective matches against Bangladesh and Pakistan. Speaking at a pre-match press conference in Rawalpindi before Pakistan's final match in the Champions Trophy against Bangladesh on Thursday, Javed said, "We lost against them (India) but when there is a lack of experience and the pressure gets to you, it's difficult for the new guys to tackle that." His remarks came when he was asked about the main difference between the Indian and Pakistani teams in ICC events, in particular, and if the second line of players were not able to complement the seniors.

India slammed for one-venue 'farce' in Champions Trophy

Lahore (News Desk) Former cricketers and pundits have slammed India's "undeniable" advantage of playing all their Champions Trophy matches in Dubai, while the other seven teams have to shuttle between three venues in Pakistan, and the UAE.

India refused to travel to hosts Pakistan for the 50-over tournament, because of security concerns and political tensions, and are playing all their matches at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. A stand-off between the rivals lasted for more than a month, leaving plans for the tournament in jeopardy until the Pakistan board finally agreed a compromise with the International Cricket Council. The deal means Pakistan will play at a neutral venue in any ICC tournament hosted by India until 2027. The decision was reached after Jay Shah — secretary of the powerful BCCI — took over as ICC chairman in December at the headquarters of the sports' governing body in Dubai. "I feel very uncomfortable about the way that India is being treated at the moment," former England cricketer and popular broadcaster Jonathan Agnew told ABC Sport.

Pakistan to host delayed South Asian Games next year

LAHORE: (News Desk) Pakistan will host the much-delayed 14th South Asian Games in 2026, the South Asian National Olympic Committee announced in a meeting held here on Tuesday.

The games — which were supposed to be held in 2021 but was postponed due to Covid-19 — will be staged in Lahore, Faisalabad and Islamabad from Jan 23 to 31. The meeting — chaired by South Asian Olympic Committee Pakistan Olympic Association president Arif Saeed — was attended by the representatives of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives while an Indian spokesperson joined the meeting online.

There were problems in holding the multi-nation gala in 2021 as the POA and the government of Pakistan were not on the same page regarding different matters. The doubts still linger over the games, as the Indian Olympic Association may not get a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) from its government to send the contingent to Pakistan as per the stubborn policy adopted by the Indian government.

The meeting reinforced the collective commitment of the South Asian National Olympic Committees to foster regional sports development and strengthen cooperation through sports.

The achievement of javelin stars Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem and Neeraj Chopra of India were also highlighted during the meeting.

The athletes brought South Asia into the global spotlight at Paris 2024 by winning medals in javelin throw — an achievement that not only inspired youth of the subcontinent but also underscored the power of sports in promoting peace, unity and shared aspirations across borders.

Moreover, it was also announced that the events for each sport will also be decided before March 31 and the technical handbooks will be prepared and released subject to approval of the Asian Federations concerned.

It was also decided to form the South Asian Olympic Committee Constitution Review Committee to align its constitution with the Olympic Council of Asia.

Britain boosts defence spending on eve of Starmer's visit to US

LONDON: (News Desk) Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Tuesday he would increase annual defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2027 and target a 3pc level last seen just after the Cold War, a signal to US President Donald Trump that Britain can boost Europe's security.

On the eve of his departure to meet Trump in Washington, Starmer told parliament he was bringing the increase in defence spending forward to offer Europe more support as the US spearheads

peace talks with Russia over its war in Ukraine. With public spending already stretched in Britain, Starmer said the increase from its current 2.3pc would be fully paid for by a 40pc cut to international aid, an announcement he said he was not happy to make but one which was necessary to offer Ukraine and Europe support in a "new era." Since Trump seemingly abandoned the United States' more Ukraine-friendly approach to Russia's war, blindsiding much of Eu-

rope, Starmer and other European leaders have stepped up diplomatic efforts to show a united front to support Kyiv. "Starting today, I can announce this government will begin the biggest sustained increase in defence spending since the end of the Cold War," Starmer said, adding that combined with spending on intelligence services it would reach 2.6pc from 2027. "We must go further still. I have long argued that ... all European allies must step up and do more

for our own defence," he said. He added that Britain would set a target for spending 3pc of gross domestic product in the next parliament, which will convene after a national election due in 2029. US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth welcomed the spending rise after speaking to British defence minister John Healey. "A strong step from an enduring partner," Hegseth said on X. The increase would see Britain spending 13.4 billion pounds (\$17 billion)

a year more on defence from 2027, Starmer said. The Institute for Fiscal Studies, a non-partisan think tank, said this seemed "misleadingly large" as an increase of 0.2 percentage points of GDP amounted to only around 6 billion pounds. Britain's defence ministry said it spent 53.9 billion pounds in the 2023/24 financial year. To meet the increase in spending, the international aid budget will be cut from 0.5pc of gross national income to 0.3pc in 2027, meaning bor-

rowing levels would not change, Starmer said. Britain last cut its aid budget in November 2020, during an economic crisis resulting from Covid-19, reducing the level to 0.5pc of GDP from 0.7pc, a move criticised by some development groups for diminishing the nation's global influence. "This is a short-sighted and appalling move," said Romilly Greenhill, chief executive officer of Bond, a network for organisations working in international development and humanitarian assistance.