

India expects \$200 million missile deal with Philippines this year, sources say

Delhi(News Desk) India expects to sell short-range missiles to the Philippines this year in a deal worth more than \$200 million, Indian sources told Reuters, for New Delhi's second major defence export contract with Manila as tension grows with China. The Akash missile system developed by India's defence research body has drawn interest from the Philippines, which has told New Delhi it would make an order in the fiscal year that begins in April, said three sources. All the sources spoke on condition of anonymity as the matter is a sensitive one. The surface-to-air missile system with a range of up to 25 km (16 miles) was exported to Armenia last year in a \$230m deal, the sources said, adding that the Philippine sale is expected to be bigger than the Armenian deal. However, they did not reveal the number of missiles and accompanying systems, including radars, involved. India's Bharat Dynamics Ltd BARS, the manufacturer of the missiles, was one of the exhibitors at last year's Asian Defense and Security Exhibition in Manila.

Conspiracy theorist Gabbard confirmed as new US spy chief

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) The Republican-controlled US Senate confirmed Tulsi Gabbard on Wednesday as Donald Trump's choice to lead the country's intelligence services, despite criticism over her lack of experience and past support for Russia and Syria. Gabbard — appointed to be director of national intelligence — has faced questions over her 2017 meeting with now-deposed Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad and her peddling of Kremlin propaganda, particularly false conspiracy theories about the Ukraine war. She is also regarded with suspicion over her views on US government surveillance and her backing for National Security Agency (NSA) leaker Edward Snowden, seen on both sides of Congress as having imperilled Americans safety.

Gabbard scraped through a 52-48 floor vote — with former Senate leader Mitch McConnell as the sole Republican "no" — as Democrats warned that she had no business being anywhere near the country's most sensitive classified secrets. "On the night that Russia invaded Ukraine and launched the first full-scale invasion of a sovereign nation in Europe since World War II, what was Ms Gabbard doing?" Chuck Schumer, the top Senate Democrat, said ahead of the vote. "She was spending her energy blaming NATO and the US for what Putin did... That alone should be disqualifying for anyone seeking to become the top intelligence adviser to the president." Schumer said Gabbard, 43, had blown her chance to reassure senators over her judgment at her confirmation hearing and accused Republicans of ignoring her "troubling history of pushing conspiracies and spreading propaganda."

Hamas rejects 'threats' amid push to salvage Gaza deal

GAZA CITY: (News Desk) Hamas on Wednesday rejected "American and Israeli threats" while mediators were "working intensively" to resolve the crisis surrounding the ceasefire deal.

A Hamas delegation was in Cairo for truce talks, the group said, rejecting the US and Israeli threats and demanding that Tel Aviv comply with the deal.

The truce has come under increasing strain in recent days, prompting a new push by mediators Qatar and Egypt to salvage it.

"A delegation headed by Khalil al-Hayya, head of the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip, arrived in Cairo and began meetings with Egyptian officials," the group said.

A senior Hamas official told AFP the delegation "will discuss ways to end the current crisis and ensure the (Israeli) occupation's commitment to implementing the agreement".

On Tuesday, Israel warned that it could resume fighting if prisoners were not released by Saturday, echoing a threat by US President Donald Trump who said "hell" would break out if Hamas failed to release "all" prisoners by that day.

A sixth prisoner exchange was scheduled for Saturday, but earlier this week Hamas announced it was postponing the release, citing Israel's failure to allow the entry of key humanitarian aid into Gaza. A diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity mediators were engaged with both Israel and Hamas to resolve the dispute and ensure the implementation of the agreement. Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said, "We will not accept the language of American and Israeli threats. Israel must commit to implementing the terms of the ceasefire agreement" to secure the release of prisoners.

"We have received assurances from mediators that efforts are being made to compel the occupation to uphold the ceasefire terms in Gaza," said Qassem. A Palestinian source told AFP mediators Egypt and Qatar were "working intensively" to resolve the crisis surrounding the ceasefire deal. A Palestinian official said mediators had stepped up their intervention "to prevent things sliding into a real crisis."

Israel likely to strike Iran in coming months, warns US intelligence report

Talabib(News Desk) Israel is likely to attempt a pre-emptive strike on Iran's nuclear programme in the coming months to set its progress back but escalate tensions across the Middle East and renew fears of a wider regional conflagration, a US intelligence report says.

Warnings about a potential Israeli strike were included in multiple intelligence reports between the end of the Biden administration and the start of the Trump administration, none more comprehensive than an early January report produced by the

Joint Chiefs of Staff's intelligence directorate and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). The report warned that Israel is likely to attempt a strike on Iran's Fordow and Natanz nuclear facilities within the first six months of 2025. Serving and former US officials told The Washington Post that the prediction is rooted in an analysis of Israel's planning following its bombing of Iran last October, which degraded Tehran's air defences and left it exposed to further attacks. The officials spoke anonymously



Police examine a car which drove into a crowd in Munich on February 13, injuring several people

Afghan asylum-seeker drives into Munich crowd, hurts 28 in suspected attack

Kabul(News Desk) Some 28 people were injured when a 24-year-old Afghan asylum seeker drove a car into a crowd of people in Munich in what the state premier said was probably an attack on Thursday, as the German city prepared to host a top-level security conference.

Police in the southern city said a car approached police vehicles stopped by a

demonstration held by the Verdi union before speeding up and hitting people. The suspected attack throws security back into the spotlight before a federal election next week following several other violent attacks.

It also came hours before leading international figures, including US Vice President JD Vance and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, were in

the city for the high-profile Munich Security Conference, which starts on Friday.

"It was probably an attack," Bavaria state premier Markus Soeder told reporters. Bavaria's interior minister said he did not suspect there was a connection to the conference. Police said they had detained the driver and did not consider him to pose any further

threat.

A passerby said he witnessed the incident from a window of a neighbouring office building. The car, a Mini Cooper, had threaded its way between the police vehicles and then accelerated, he said. Another witness said she had seen part of the incident from a building. The car had accelerated and hit several people in the crowd, she said.

Sharaa speaks of 'strong strategic ties' with Russia in Putin phone call

DAMASCUS:(News Desk) Syria's interim leader Ahmed al-Sharaa emphasised the "strong strategic ties" between his country and Russia during his first telephone call with President Vladimir Putin since taking power, the Syrian presidency said on Wednesday. Rebels led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham ousted Moscow's close ally Bashar al-Assad in December after a lightning offensive, and questions

have remained over the fate of Russia's two military bases in the war-torn country. Sharaa emphasised "the strong strategic ties between the two countries and Syria's openness to all parties" in a way that serves "the interests of the Syrian people and strengthens Syria's stability and security", the presidency statement said. It also said Putin extended "an official invitation to Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani

to visit Russia". The Kremlin, in a readout of the call, said Putin wished Sharaa "success in solving the tasks facing the new leadership of the country for the benefit of the Syrian people". US tells UN it can no longer pay for Syrian camps holding IS-linked prisoners. "The Russian side emphasised its principled position in support of the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian state," it added.

Moscow helped keep Assad in power when it intervened militarily in Syria's war in 2015, launching devastating strikes on rebel-held areas. When rebels swept into Damascus in December, Russia granted Assad asylum, angering many Syrians including the country's new rulers. Russia is seeking to secure the fate of its naval base in Tartus and its air base at Hmeimim — both on Syria's Mediterranean coast.



Gaziantep (Turkiye): Syrian refugees work in a textile workshop. Turkiye is the world's sixth-largest textile manufacturer and its industry hosts most of the Syrian migrants, who number around 2.9 million

Hasina govt behind 'crimes against humanity', says UN

GENEVA:(News Desk) Bangladesh's former government was behind systematic attacks and killings of protesters as it tried to hold onto power last year, the UN said on Wednesday, warning that the abuses could amount to "crimes against humanity".

Before prime minister Sheikh Hasina was top-

pled in a student-led revolution last August, her government cracked down on protesters and others, including by "hundreds of extrajudicial killings", the United Nations said.

The UN rights office (OHCHR) said it had "reasonable grounds to believe that the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, imprisonment and influc-

tion of other inhumane acts have taken place".

These alleged crimes committed by the government, along with violent elements of Hasina's Awami League party and the Bangladeshi security and intelligence services, were part of "a widespread and systematic attack against protesters and other civilians", OHCHR's report

into the violence said.

The world body estimates over '1,400 people may have been killed' by security forces during the 45-day uprising. Hasina, 77, who fled into exile in neighbouring India, has already defied an arrest warrant to face trial in Bangladesh for crimes against humanity. Asked about Hasina's personal culpability,

Israeli military killed 85 journalists in 2024: CPJ

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) A record number of journalists were killed around the world last year, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said on Wednesday, adding that Israel was responsible for nearly 70 per cent of the deaths.

At least 124 journalists in 18 countries died in 2024, the deadliest year for reporters and media workers since the committee started recording the numbers more than three decades ago, the CPJ said in a statement.

CPJ said the Israel-Gaza conflict has accounted for the deaths of 85 journalists at the hands of the Israeli military. It said Israel had attempted to stifle investigations into incidents, shift blame onto journalists and ignore its duty to hold people to account for the killings.

The Israeli military said not enough information was provided on the incidents and that it was therefore not able to check them.

The number of journalists and media workers killed in 2024 is up sharply over recent years — 102 were killed in 2023 and 69 in 2022.

Sudan and Pakistan had the second-highest number of journalists killed last year, CPJ's CEO Jodie Ginsberg said.

Karachi police unveil traffic and parking plan for tri-series, Champions Trophy

Karachi(News Desk) The Karachi Police on Thursday unveiled traffic and parking plans for spectators visiting the National Bank Stadium ahead of the Champions Trophy and the currently ongoing tri-series.

Two of the four tri-series matches are scheduled for Karachi, with the final between Pakistan and New Zealand set for Friday, February 14. Pakistan defeated South Africa on Wednesday after Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah inaugurated the newly renovated stadium a day earlier.

Meanwhile, the Champions Trophy matches to be held in Karachi are scheduled for Feb 19, 21 and March 1. The PCB recently carried out major renovation of Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium, Karachi's National Bank Stadium and the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium (Rawalpindi) for the eight-nation Champions Trophy beginning on Feb 19.

According to a notification issued by the Karachi Traffic Police today, both sides of Sir Shah Suleman Road will remain open for traffic. A special parking plan has been devised for fans attending the matches.

As per the traffic plan, those coming from Karsaz on Shah Suleman Road underneath the Stadium Flyover should park at the National Coaching Centre (NCC) and China Ground.

Shaheen, Saud, Kamran fined for misconduct in ODI win over South Africa

Lahore(News Desk) Pakistan players Shaheen Afridi, Saud Shakeel and Kamran Ghulam were fined by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Thursday for misconduct in their match against South Africa. Shaheen obstructed South African batter Matthew Breetzke as he took a single in Wednesday's match in Karachi, resulting in physical contact and a heated exchange of words. The ICC said he would be fined 25 per cent of his match fee for "inappropriate physical contact". The statement added that Shakeel and substitute fielder Ghulam would have 10pc of their match fee docked for celebrating too closely to batter Temba Bavuma. South African skipper Bavuma was run out for 82 in his team's total of 352-5. Shakeel and Ghulam were found guilty of "using language, actions or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from a batter upon his/her dismissal during an International Match". Pakistan chased the highest target they have ever faced in one-day internationals, reaching victory at 355-4 which set up a tri-series final between Pakistan and New Zealand in Karachi on Friday.

Sabalenka, Gauff dumped out of Qatar Open

DOHA: (News Desk) Top seed Aryna Sabalenka and third seed Coco Gauff were upset in the second round of the Qatar Open in Doha on Tuesday.

Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova came from behind to stun Sabalenka 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7-5), while Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine capitalized on 39 unforced errors to oust Gauff 6-2, 7-5.

Sabalenka and Alexandrova have developed a bit of a rivalry, with Belarus' Sabalenka entering the match having won just four of their seven meetings.

The two swapped efficient sets to even the match before Sabalenka started to take charge in the third, twice putting Alexandrova down a break. But the Russian fought back from 4-2, breaking Sabalenka to get back on serve and take the match to a tiebreaker.

Sabalenka, who won points on only 58 percent of her first serves, dropped each of her six serve chances in the tiebreaker. As for the unseeded Kostyuk, she won 58 percent of the total points in her match, broke Gauff's serve four times and benefited from seven double faults from the former US Open champion. Gauff had a chance to send the second set into a tiebreak as she served down 6-5. But two consecutive double faults gave Kostyuk two match points, the second of which she converted for the win. Gauff, who hit just eight winners on Tuesday, had a first-round bye and now has lost three consecutive matches in Doha. She lost to Katerina Siniakova in her opening match last year and in the quarterfinals in 2023. Another American, sixth seed Jessica Pegula, fared better in her match with a Ukrainian, defeating Elina Svitolina 6-3, 7-6 (7-3).

Fourth seed Jasmine Paolini of Italy defeated France's Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-4, and fifth seed Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan topped Peyton Stearns 6-2, 6-4 to move to the Round of 16 but other seeds had a rough time in early play Tuesday. Ons Jabeur of Tunisia dropped seventh seed Qinwen Zheng of China 6-4, 6-2, breaking Zheng's serve six times and winning 70 percent of her own first-serve points. Ninth seed Paula Badosa of Spain lost a 6-4, 6-3 decision to Amanda Anisimova. The 12th seed, Russian Mirra Andreeva, was eliminated by Rebecca Sramkova of Slovakia 3-6, 6-3, 7-5. Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia won a close one against 16th seed Liudmila Samsonova of Russia, who hurt herself with 10 double faults in the 7-6 (5), 7-5 loss.