

Openly gay South African imam shot dead

JOHANNESBURG: (News Desk) Muhsin Hendricks, considered the world's first openly gay imam, was shot dead on Saturday near the southern city of Gqeberha, police said. The imam, who ran a mosque intended as a safe haven for gay and other marginalised Muslims, was in a car with another person when a vehicle stopped in front of them and blocked their exit, the police said. "Two unknown suspects with covered faces got out of the vehicle and started firing multiple shots at the vehicle," the Eastern Cape force said in a statement. "Thereafter they fled the scene, and the driver noticed that Hendricks who was seated at the back of the vehicle was shot and killed." A police spokeswoman confirmed to the authenticity of a video on social media that purported to show a targeted killing in Bethelsdorp near Gqeberha, formerly known as Port Elizabeth. "The motive for the murder is unknown and forms part of the ongoing investigation," police said, urging anybody with information to come forward and help trace the killer.

Myanmar militia ready to deport 10,000 cyber scam workers

YANGON: (News Desk) A Myanmar ethnic militia said on Saturday it was preparing to deport 10,000 people linked to cyber scams in the area it controls to Thailand as part of a crackdown on the illicit compounds. Scam compounds have mushroomed in Myanmar's borderlands and are staffed by foreigners who are often trafficked and forced to work, swindling people around the world in an industry analysts say is worth billions of dollars. "We have announced to get rid of all scams from our soil. We are now implementing it," Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) spokesman Major Naing Maung Zaw said on Saturday. "We have made a list and are prepared to transfer about 10,000 people (to Thailand)," he said. The deportations would be carried out in groups of 500 per day. The BGF has already sent 61 people across a border bridge to Thailand and are preparing to hand over "about 500 people including many different nationalities" daily, Naing Maung Zaw said. The military task force responsible for border security in Thailand's Tak province has coordinated with BGF leaders to receive 7,000 workers from scam compounds, Thai media reported on Saturday. BGF soldiers patrolled workplaces at Shwe Kokko in Myanmar's eastern Myawaddy township on Friday as part of a crackdown on alleged human trafficking, an agency's stringer saw. Shwe Kokko, a scam compound located in an area under BGF control in Karen state, is a built-up city that stands out among the surrounding agricultural fields. Cyber scam compounds often lure people from around the globe with promises of high-paying jobs but then effectively hold them hostage and force them to commit online fraud or face severe punishment.

Turkiye removes pro-Kurdish mayor over 'terror' links

ISTANBUL: (News Desk) A ninth mayor from Turkey's pro-Kurdish DEM party, the third largest in parliament, has been removed from office because of alleged links to a "terrorist organisation", the interior ministry said on Saturday. The suspension of the mayor of Van, a majority Kurdish city in the east of the country, came with negotiations underway between the government and the historic head of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been in an armed struggle with the state since 1984. "Sentence to three years and nine months in prison for aiding a terrorist organisation, the mayor of the municipality of Van, Abdullah Zeydan, has been temporarily suspended from his duties," the interior ministry said in a statement, adding that the governor of the region had been named to replace him. The local governor replaced Abdullah Zeydan. Opposition website Bir Gun denounced what it said was a "coup d'état against the people", and said Zeydan had refused to sign the document dismissing him. "Shameless thieves have usurped the will of the people," the mayor said on his X account. Since his Feb 11 conviction, which he has appealed, thousands of Zeydan's supporters have gathered in front of the headquarters of the Van municipality, from which they were evicted at dawn by police. According to local news agency ANKA, there were 127 arrests. The DEM party denounced a "coup against our municipality of Van and a blow to the will of the people", noting that Zeydan was elected in March with more than 55 per cent of the votes. Other party leaders said the government was sending mixed signals. "On the one hand, dialogue goes on, on the other, the will of the people is being confiscated," said one of DEM's co-presidents, Tuncer Bakirhan, calling on the government to "show sincerity". Opposition politicians have faced a series of legal probes, detentions and arrests in what critics say is a government effort to muzzle dissent and hurt their electoral prospects. Turkey's government dismisses accusations of political interference in the cases and says the judiciary is independent.

Tear gas fired at Hezbollah supporters as Lebanon blocks Iranian flight

BEIRUT: (News Desk) The Lebanese army fired tear gas on Saturday at Hezbollah supporters protesting around Beirut airport against Lebanon blocking an Iranian flight to Beirut this week after the Israeli military accused Tehran of using civilian aircraft to smuggle cash to Beirut to arm the Lebanese group. Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah called on the army to hold those who fired at the protesters to account. The Lebanese army and government "should have held immediate meetings to prevent the Israeli en-

emy from imposing its dictates on the airport and from continuing its occupation of Lebanese territory... instead of using force against a peaceful sit-in on the airport road," Fadlallah added in a statement. Iran barred Lebanese planes from repatriating several Lebanese nationals stranded in Iran on Friday, in a standoff between the two countries following what Tehran described as an Israeli threat to attack it. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi spoke to his Lebanese counterpart by phone on the matter and both "declared their



People, including Hindu pilgrims on their way to attend the "Maha Kumbh Mela", or the Great Pitcher Festival, gather at the New Delhi Railway Station to board a train in New Delhi, India on Feb 15, 2025.

18 dead in New Delhi stampede to catch trains to Kumbh Mela

Delhi (News Desk) At least 18 people, including five children, died during a stampede at a railway station in India's New Delhi late on Saturday when surging crowds scrambled to catch trains to the Kumbh Mela, officials and reports said. The Kumbh Mela, the world's largest religious gathering, attracts tens of millions of Hindu faithful every 12 years to the

northern city of Prayagraj and has a history of crowd-related disasters — including one last month, when at least 30 people died in another stampede at the holy confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers. The stampede occurred at about 8pm (7:30 PKT) on Saturday on two platforms where passengers were waiting to board trains to

Prayagraj city, where the Kumbh Mela is taking place, media reports said. "I can confirm 15 deaths at the hospital. They don't have any open injury. Most (likely died from) hypoxia or maybe some blunt injury but that would only be confirmed after an autopsy," Dr Ritu Saxena, deputy medical superintendent of Lok Nayak Hospital in New Delhi told AFP. "There are also 11 others

who are injured. Most of them are stable and have orthopaedic injuries," she said. Broadcaster NDTV reported three more dead from the stampede quoting an official of another hospital in the city. The death toll included five children, media reports said, citing the Press Trust of India news agency. The youngest of the victims was seven years old and the oldest 79.

Mali gold mine accident kills at least 48: report

Mali (News Desk) At least 48 people were killed in the collapse of an illegally operated gold mine in western Mali on Saturday, authorities and local sources told AFP. Mali is one of Africa's leading gold producers, and mining sites are regularly the scene of deadly landslides and accidents. Authorities have struggled to control unregulated mining of the

precious metal in the country, which is among the world's poorest. "The toll at 1800 today is 48 dead following the collapse," said a police source. "Some of the victims fell into the water. Among them was a woman with her baby on her back." A local official confirmed the cave-in, while the Kenieba gold miners' association also put the death toll at 48. The accident took place near the town of Kenieba

in Mali's gold-rich Kayes region, Taouile Camara, Secretary General of the National Union of Gold Counters and Refineries (UCROM), told Reuters. The women had climbed down into open-pit areas left by industrial miners to look for scraps of gold when the earth collapsed around them, he said. The search for victims was ongoing, the head of an environmental organisation told AFP.

Saturday's accident took place at an abandoned site formerly operated by a Chinese company, sources told AFP. In January, a landslide at a gold mine in southern Mali killed at least 10 people and left many others missing, most of them women. Just over a year ago, a tunnel collapsed at a gold mining site in the same region as Saturday's landslide, killing more than 70 people.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks to the press who are travelling with him to the Munich Security Conference after a mechanical issue forced his plane to return to Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, US on February 13, 2025

US, Russia officials to meet in Saudi Arabia over Ukraine war

Washington (News Desk) US and Russian officials will meet in Saudi Arabia in the coming days to start talks aimed at ending Moscow's nearly three-year war in Ukraine, a US lawmaker and a source familiar with the planning said on Saturday. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who met

with US Vice President JD Vance in Germany on Friday, said Ukraine was not invited to the talks in Saudi Arabia and Kyiv would not engage with Russia before consulting with strategic partners. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and White House Middle East envoy

Steve Witkoff will travel to Saudi Arabia, US Representative Michael McCaul told Reuters. It was not immediately clear who they would meet from Russia. On the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, McCaul said the aim of the talks was to arrange a meeting between US President Donald Trump,

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Zelenskiy "to finally bring peace and end this conflict." A source with knowledge of the plans confirmed the planned talks in Saudi Arabia between US and Russian officials. The US State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Hong Kong's twin panda cubs to make public debut today

HONG KONG: (News Desk) Hong Kong's baby panda twins will make their public debut on Sunday, with officials rolling out a full-scale panda marketing campaign to boost tourism. The pair, one female and one male, were born six months ago and join four other pandas at the city's Ocean Park theme park. "This is the first pair of giant pandas born in Hong Kong, and the whole city is cheering with excitement," John Lee, the city's leader, said at a ceremony on Saturday. He added that a naming competition had been launched with the names to be announced in the first half of the year. Since their mother Ying Ying became the world's oldest giant panda on record to have given birth, just one day shy of her 19th birthday, panda decor and promotions have mushroomed across Hong Kong. The panda carers said the female cub seemed more active than her male twin. She loves climbing the tree inside the enclosure and resting there while her brother likes to wander around and play with the plants. The male cub has been marked with two purple food-colouring spots on its back to distinguish it from his sister, the Associated Press reported.

Champions Trophy opening ceremony sans teams to be held at Lahore Fort today

LAHORE: (News Desk) A colourful ceremony to mark the opening of the ICC Champions Trophy, without any participating team, is set to be held here at the historical Lahore Fort on Sunday. The eight-nation Champions Trophy is scheduled to start from Feb 19 when hosts Pakistan face New Zealand in Karachi. As all four teams, out of total eight participating, are in Karachi, surprisingly, the International Cricket Council and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) picked Lahore as the venue for the ceremony. Traditionally, the participating teams attend the opening ceremony before the start of the first match of the Champions Trophy, besides the photoshoots of the captains.

However, this time no such ceremony will be held because the Indian government refused to send its team to Pakistan to play any match of the Champions Trophy or attend the opening ceremony or the photoshoot of the event. As a result, all the Champions Trophy matches involving India are going to be held in Dubai. More over, the England and Australian teams also delayed their arrival, despite ending their respective tours of India and Sri Lanka. According to the fresh plan, the England squad will arrive in Lahore on Feb 18 while the Australian touring party is due to touch down here on Feb 19.

Pakistan have got all it takes to win Champions Trophy, says Aaqib

KARACHI: (News Desk) Pakistan have all it takes to win the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy, the team's interim head coach and selector Aaqib Javed has said. Aaqib made the remarks following the side's five-wicket defeat against New Zealand in the tri-nation One-day International series final here at the National Bank Stadium on Friday. Batting first on a bowling friendly surface, Pakistan managed to score 242, a target which New Zealand chased down with reasonable ease after restricting Pakistan to a below par total thanks to a brilliant bowling show. It was New Zealand's victory in a row against Pakistan in the tri-nation series, the BlackCaps having beaten the hosts by 78-runs on batting paradise in Lahore. Despite Pakistan's record chase of 353 against South Africa in the last league match of the tri-nation series, their results against a much stronger New Zealand team exposed their prevailing weaknesses; mainly the lack of quality spinners. Additionally, questions were raised over former skiller Babar Azam's promotion as opener, affecting the whole batting line-up of the Mohammad Rizwan-led team.

Top-ranked Sinner accepts three-month doping ban after settlement with WADA

LONDON: (News Desk) World number one Jannik Sinner has accepted an immediate three-month doping ban after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said they had reached a settlement on his period of ineligibility, allowing him to return before the French Open in May. WADA had appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against Sinner's initial exoneration by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA), announced in August after the three-time major winner failed drug tests. Sinner, who successfully defended his Australian Open crown last month, had tested positive for anabolic agent clostebol which the 23-year-old said had entered his system from a member of his support team through massages and sports therapy. Sinner's ban began on February 9 and will end on May 4 while he can return to training on April 13. The French Open is scheduled to begin on May 25. "WADA confirms that it has entered into a case resolution agreement in the case of Italian tennis player Jannik Sinner, with the player accepting a three-month period of ineligibility for an anti-doping rule violation," WADA said in a statement on Saturday. "WADA accepts that Mr Sinner did not intend to cheat and that his exposure to clostebol did not provide any performance-enhancing benefit and took place without his knowledge as the result of negligence of members of his entourage. However, under the Code and by virtue of CAS precedent, an athlete bears responsibility for the entourage's negligence." The case was set to be heard by CAS in April and Sinner was in danger of being banned for up to two years. Sinner will miss Masters tournaments at Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo and Madrid. The positive tests were not initially made public while the ITIA investigation was ongoing and Sinner had been allowed to carry on playing after successfully appealing provisional suspensions. "We were satisfied that the player had established the source of the prohibited substance and that the breach was unintentional. Today's outcome supports this finding," said the ITIA on Saturday.