

Accused IS terrorist arrested by Pakistan appears in US court over Kabul airport attack

Washington (News Desk) An operative of the militant Islamic State (IS) group who allegedly helped carry out the 2021 suicide bombing outside Kabul airport during the chaotic US military withdrawal from Afghanistan appeared in a Virginia court on Wednesday. Mohammad Sharifullah has confessed to scouting out the route to the airport, where the suicide bomber later detonated his device among packed crowds trying to flee days after the Afghan Taliban seized control of Kabul, the Justice Department said. The blast at the Abbey Gate killed at least 170 Afghans as well as 13 US troops who were securing the airport's perimeter. Sharifullah appeared in a court in Alexandria, near the US capital Washington, wearing light blue prison garb and a black face mask. He was officially appointed a public defender and provided with an interpreter. He did not enter a plea.

Banking data theft attacks on smartphones triple in 2024: report

Washington (News Desk) The number of Trojan banker attacks on smartphones surged by 196 per cent in 2024 compared to the previous year, according to Kaspersky, a global cybersecurity company. In its report called "The mobile malware threat landscape in 2024", the company said that cybercriminals were "shifting tactics, relying on mass malware distribution to steal banking credentials." "Over the past year, Kaspersky detected more than 33.3 million attacks on smartphone users globally, involving various types of malware and unwanted software," the report said. Additionally, it noted that the number of "Trojan banker attacks on Android smartphones increased from 420,000 in 2023 to 1,242,000 in 2024." "Trojan banker malware is designed to steal user credentials for online banking, e-payment services and credit card systems," according to the report. It added that victims are tricked into downloading Trojan bankers through links via SMS or messaging apps — as well as through attachments in messengers — and by directing users to malicious web pages. Cybercriminals "can even send messages from a hacked contact's account, making the fraud appear more trustworthy," the report noted. "To deceive users, attackers often exploit trending news and hype topics to create a sense of urgency and lower victims' guard."

New Trump travel ban could bar Afghans, Pakistanis soon: report

Washington (News Desk) A new travel ban by President Donald Trump could bar people from Afghanistan and Pakistan from entering the US as soon as next week based on a government review of countries' security and vetting risks, three sources familiar with the matter said. The three sources, who requested anonymity, said other countries could also be on the list but did not know which ones. The move harkens back to the Republican president's first term ban on travellers from seven majority-Muslim nations, a policy that went through several iterations before it was upheld by the US Supreme Court in 2018. Former president Joe Biden, a Democrat who succeeded Trump, repealed the ban in 2021, calling it a stain on our national conscience. The new ban could affect tens of thousands of Afghans who have been cleared for resettlement in the US as refugees or on Special Immigrant Visas because they are at risk of Taliban retribution for working for the US during a 20-year war in their home country. Trump issued an executive order on January 20 requiring intensified security vetting of any foreigners seeking admission to the US to detect national security threats. That order directed several cabinet members to submit by March 12 a list of countries from which travel should be partly or fully suspended because their "vetting and screening information is so deficient". Afghanistan will be included in the recommended list of countries for a complete travel ban, said the three sources and one other who also asked not to be identified. The three sources said Pakistan also would be recommended for inclusion. The departments of State, Justice and Homeland Security and the Office of the Director for National Intelligence, whose leaders are overseeing the initiative, did not respond immediately to requests for comment. One source pointed out that Afghans cleared for resettlement in the US as refugees or on the special visas first undergo intense screening that makes them "more highly vetted than any population" in the world. The State Department office that oversees their resettlement is seeking an exemption for Special Immigrant Visa holders from the travel ban "but it's not assumed likely to be granted," the source said. That office, the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts, has been told to develop a plan by April for its closure, Reuters reported last month.



A PALESTINIAN looks at the devastation in a refugee camp at Nur Shams, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Iran appoints new envoy to UN nuclear watchdog

Tehran (News Desk) Iran has appointed Reza Najafi as its new ambassador and permanent representative to several Vienna-based international organisations, including the UN nuclear watchdog, local media reported. He will be replacing Mohsen Nazari-Asl who served in the role since 2022, ISNA news agency said on Wednesday. Najafi, a former deputy foreign minister, previously held the post from 2013 to 2018 — a period marked by Iran's signing of a landmark nuclear deal with the United States and world powers. The deal — known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — imposed curbs on Iran's nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief. It fell apart after the US withdrew from the agreement

in 2018 during President Donald Trump's first term. Tehran adhered to the deal until a year after Washington pulled out, but then began rolling back its commitments. Trump, who returned to the White House in January, reinstated his "maximum pressure" policy of sanctions against Iran over allegations the country is seeking nuclear weapons capability. Tehran has consistently denied the claims and repeatedly expressed a willingness to revive the accord but efforts to that end have faltered. Last month, UN atomic agency chief Rafael Grossi said Iran was "enriching (uranium) at 60 per cent, so almost weapon level" and that the 2015 deal was an "empty shell" that was "no longer fit for purpose".

Trump warns Gaza 'you are dead' if hostages not freed

Washington (News Desk) US President Donald Trump on Wednesday threatened further destruction of Gaza if all remaining hostages are not released, and issued an ultimatum to Hamas leaders to flee. The United States, meanwhile, confirmed unprecedented indirect talks with Hamas, which it proscribes as a "terrorist" group, focused on American hostages in Gaza. Strongly backing Israel as the ceasefire teeters, Trump said he was "sending Israel everything it needs to finish the job" as his administration expedites billions of dollars in weapons. "Release all of the hostages now, not later, and immediately return all of the dead bodies of the people you murdered, or it is over for you," he wrote

on his Truth Social platform after meeting freed hostages. "This is your last warning! For the leadership, now is the time to leave Gaza, while you still have a chance." Trump also warned of repercussions for Gaza as a whole, where virtually the entire population has been displaced by Israel's relentless military campaign in response to

Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack. "To the People of Gaza: A beautiful future awaits, but not if you hold hostages. If you do, you are dead!" His comments follow Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's warning of "consequences that you cannot imagine" if Hamas does not hand over the remaining hostages seized in the October 7 attack.



South Korean soldiers and rescue workers inspect a damaged house after a bomb accident at a village in Pocheon on March 6, 2025.

Torture, murder of trans man in US shines light on rising fears

New York (News Desk) US prosecutors gave a graphic account on Wednesday of the torture and murder of a transgender man whose case has highlighted the growing dangers faced by the trans community. Sam Nordquist was abducted, beaten and sexually assaulted for weeks before his body was hidden, prosecutors said, announcing seven

adults had been indicted for the Black 24-year-old's murder. Nordquist travelled from Minnesota to New York to meet an online contact who was among those indicted Wednesday. Nordquist's family had not heard from him since January, and the last time he was seen was in early February. The seven suspects had

previously been indicted for lesser crimes, with the charge of first-degree murder — the state's most serious and carrying possible life imprisonment without parole — added Wednesday. Two children were also allegedly involved in the beating of Nordquist, who was brutalised in a motel in Canandaigua, located in upstate New York. "Sam was beaten, assaulted, sexually abused, starved, held captive, and we cannot make sense of that," said Ontario County Assistant District Attorney Kelly Wolford at a briefing. Wolford said hate crime charges had not been brought because "we cannot put that on his gender, and we cannot put that on his race".

Trump brings 'TV instincts' to first Congress speech

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) Donald Trump leaned on his reality TV instincts as he goaded opponents, wooed adoring fans, and engineered heart-tugging moments Tuesday in the longest-ever presidential speech to Congress. There was dismay on the left and jubilation on the right as Trump addressed lawmakers, amid a tense atmosphere, with Washington's political divisions on full display. Trump's speech was meant to be to the whole of Congress and the nation, but he sounded like he was still campaigning for the presidency, rarely bothering to reach out to opponents at all — unless to throw jibes. On the Republican side of the chamber, the president's jabs were met with repeated standing ovations and chants of "USA! USA!" On the other side, the Democratic members remained seated and stony-faced.

Amnesty calls for probing Israeli attacks on Lebanon's health sector as war crimes

BEIRUT: (News Desk) Amnesty International said on Wednesday that Israel's attacks on ambulances, paramedics and health facilities during its recent war with Hezbollah should be investigated as war crimes. A Nov 27 truce agreement largely halted more than a year of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel, including two months of full-blown war in which Israel sent in ground troops. During the conflict, the Israeli military accused Hezbollah of using ambulances belonging to the Islamic Health Committee for transporting fighters and weapons, accusations the group denied. According to Amnesty, "the Israeli military's repeated unlawful attacks during the war in Lebanon on health facilities, ambulances and health workers, which are protected under international law, must be investigated as war crimes." It urged the Lebanese government to provide the International Criminal Court with "jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute crimes within the Rome Statute committed on Lebanese territory, and ensure victims' right to remedy". The Israeli military did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment on Amnesty's report. In December, Lebanon's then health minister Firas Abiad said that during the hostilities, there were "67 attacks on hospitals, including 40 hospitals that were directly targeted", killing 16 people.

Ex-Pakistan coach Jason Gillespie accuses successor Aqib Javed of 'undermining' him and Gary Kirsten

Lahore (News Desk) Former Pakistan test coach Jason Gillespie has accused his successor, Aqib Javed, of undermining him and ex-white-ball coach Gary Kirsten to take charge of the national team across all formats. Gillespie's comments came in response to a social media post containing quotes from Javed a few days after hosts Pakistan crashed out of the Champions Trophy without a win. Javed told reporters on Tuesday that Pakistan had changed 16 coaches and 26 selectors in around two years, stressing that any side would struggle under such circumstances. "This is hilarious," Australian Gillespie said on social media. "Aqib was clearly undermining Gary and I behind the scenes, campaigning to be the coach in all formats. "He is a clown." Javed has yet to respond to Gillespie's allegations.

BCCI's Shukla sidesteps talk of resumption of Indo-Pak cricket ties

LAHORE: (News Desk) The Pakistan team couldn't make it this far but a national hero was here at the Gaddafi Stadium for the semi-final of the Champions Trophy on Wednesday. Olympic javelin champion Arshad Nadeem brought out the trophy to open the last-four clash between South Africa and New Zealand in front of a thin crowd that eventually swelled up as the day turned to night. Pakistan's javelin thrower and Olympic gold medalist Arshad Nadeem (L) carries the ICC Champions trophy before the start of the one-day international (ODI) semi-final cricket match between New Zealand and South Africa at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on March 5. The dismay at Pakistan's cricket team falling at the first hurdle in the first International Cricket Council tournament on home soil in almost three decades had been evident in the buildup to the game. There was little excitement and the semi-final being held on a weekday and that too in the month of Ramadan hardly helped. This was the last game of the tournament, that is to be hosted by Pakistan, to be played in Pakistan. India has stolen the show — and the tournament — from the country. Having refused to travel to Pakistan, India played all its matches in Dubai. The hybrid arrangement agreed between the Pakistan Cricket Board and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) meant that it was already decided that the final would be held in Dubai if India made it that far. India held up to its part of the bargain, cruising past Australia in the first semi-final on Tuesday. "You should've asked Australia to win," BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla, who was in Lahore along with representatives from other cricket boards, told reporters in a light-hearted conversation when asked if he felt that Pakistan should've held the Champions Trophy final. Shukla's arrival in the country had generated a significant amount of interest about the resumption of bilateral cricketing ties between the two countries.

South Korea air force jet accidentally drops bombs, injures civilians

Seoul (News Desk) South Korea's Air Force said on Thursday that one of its fighter jets had accidentally dropped eight bombs in the wrong place during a training exercise, resulting in civilian injuries. "Eight MK-82 general-purpose bombs were abnormally released from an Air Force KF-16 aircraft, landing outside the designated firing range," the Air Force said. The incident occurred around 10:00am (0100

GMT) in Pocheon, around 25 kilometres (16 miles) south of the heavily fortified border with the nuclear-armed North. "We deeply regret the unintended release of the bombs, which resulted in civilian casualties, and wish those injured a swift recovery," the Air Force said in a statement. It said it had established an accident response committee to investigate the incident, and said it would "take all necessary

measures, including compensation for damages". The Air Force said the military jet had been "participating in a joint live-fire exercise involving both the Air Force and Army". South Korea was holding combined live-fire drills with the United States on Thursday in Pocheon, the Yonhap news agency reported. South Korea's National Fire Agency said that the bombs were "presumed to have fallen on a village

during a South Korea-US joint exercise". This resulted in "casualties and property damage, with many displaced residents", it said, adding that four people had been seriously injured and three suffered minor injuries. One church building and sections of two houses were damaged, according to the statement. Like a thunderclap, one local resident, who gave only his surname Park, told Yonhap that he had been at

home, watching television when the accident happened. "I suddenly heard an enormous explosion, like a thunderclap, and the whole house shook. When I went outside, everything was in chaos," Park said. Even at a senior centre about a kilometre away, the accident was felt. "A sudden explosion shook the building. The windows shattered, and one of our teachers was injured and taken to the hospital," the centre's

director, surnamed Yu, told Yonhap. "Fortunately, none of the seniors were hurt, but they were so frightened that we sent them all home," they added. Joint South Korea-US "Freedom Shield" military exercises, one of the security allies' largest annual joint exercises, are set to begin later this month. The two Koreas remain technically at war since the 1950-1953 conflict ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.