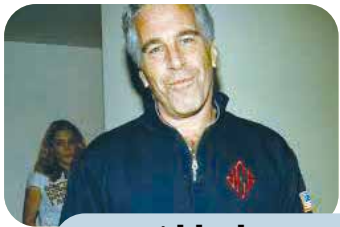


News in brief

♦ Egypt blocked plans

yesterday for a nightclub event themed around US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein's notorious parties, and arrested its organiser, the interior ministry said. The event, promoted as "A Day on Epstein's Island" had been scheduled for Tuesday. The event had been announced on social media with free entry for women, the ministry said. The statement added that the gathering had been advertised "without obtaining the necessary permits from the competent authorities". Alongside the statement, authorities released blurred photos of the detained organiser as well as the promotional flyer. When contacted by AFP using the phone number printed on the flyer, the nightclub insisted it had no connection to the event. One of the three DJs listed also denied any involvement.



**Egypt blocks
Epstein-themed
party, arrests event
organiser**

♦ Iran security
chief meets
Oman ruler after
US talks



♦ **Iran's top security** official met the Sultan of Oman in Muscat yesterday, days after a first round of talks there between officials from Washington and Tehran last Friday. Ali Larjani, who heads the Supreme National Security Council, and Sultan Haitham bin Tariq "discussed the latest developments in the Iranian-American negotiations", the official Oman News Agency said. Larjani also met Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi, who mediated Friday's indirect talks between US and Iranian officials, according to photos shared on Larjani's official Telegram channel. Larjani and Sultan Haitham also explored "ways to reach a balanced and just agreement between the two sides, and emphasised the importance of returning to the table of dialogue and negotiation". During his trip to Muscat Larjani also met Mohammad Abdulsalam, the spokesperson for Yemen's Tehran-backed Houthi rebels.

**Launch to ISS
delayed again over
weather: NASA**

♦ **NASA is now** aiming to launch four astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS) on Friday, in another delay over weather conditions, the US agency announced yesterday. It is targeting February 13 for the lift-off of Crew-12's mission aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, with a window opening at 5:15am local time (1015 GMT). "Mission teams completed a weather review Tuesday morning and have waived off the Thursday, Feb. 12, launch opportunity due to forecast weather conditions along Crew-12's flight path," NASA said in a statement. Weather at the site in Florida has been in fact favorable, NASA officials told a briefing Monday, but higher winds forecast across the rest of the East Coast are to blame for the delays. These winds could complicate any potential emergency maneuvers, like an early splashdown of the spacecraft carrying the astronauts, for example. If Friday's launch goes as planned, the astronauts should arrive at the space station by approximately 3:15 pm on Saturday.

SPOTLIGHT

Man arrested in Thailand for smuggling
rhino horn inside meat



A DNP officer unpacking rhino horns confiscated by customs from a Vietnamese traveler at Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Bangkok.

AFP | Bangkok, Thailand

Thai authorities arrested a man for allegedly smuggling more than 11 kilograms of rhino horns inside wrapped meat, in a case officials linked yesterday to an international wildlife trafficking network.

The 36-year-old Vietnamese man was detained on Monday after landing at Bangkok's main international airport on suspicion of illegal wildlife imports, the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation said in a statement.

He was travelling from Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo to Laos, transiting through Ethiopia

and Thailand, according to the department.

Airport authorities and police seized six pieces of rhinoceros horn and around 12 kilograms of unidentified meat used to conceal them inside a polystyrene icebox.

"There were some irregularities in the X-ray scan of the checked luggage so the authorities checked it," the department said.

Sadudee Panpakdee, director of the department's CITES division, told AFP officials were unsure of the value of the seized horns or what type of meat was used to conceal them.

The items were sent to a wildlife forensic laboratory for examination, officials said.

Macron says wants 'European
approach' in dialogue with Putin

Macron said last year he believed Europe should reach back out to Putin

● The Kremlin said Tuesday it welcomed Macron's approach

● The French and Russian presidents last spoke in July

AFP | Paris, France

French President Emmanuel Macron has said he wants to include European partners in a resumption of dialogue with Russian leader Vladimir Putin nearly four years after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

He spoke after dispatching a top adviser to Moscow last week, in the first such meeting since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

"What did I gain? Confirmation that Russia does not want peace right now," he said in an interview with several European newspapers including Germany's Suddeutsche Zeitung.

"But above all, we have rebuilt those channels of discussion at a technical level," he said in the



Putin, Macron

interview released on Tuesday.

"My wish is to share this with my European partners and to have a well-organised European approach," he added.

Dialogue with Putin should take place without "too many interlocutors, with a given mandate", he said.

Macron said last year he believed Europe should reach back out to Putin, rather than leaving the United States alone to take the lead in negotiations to end



Russia's war against Ukraine.

"Whether we like Russia or not, Russia will still be there tomorrow," Suddeutsche Zeitung quoted the French president as saying.

"It is therefore important that we structure the resumption of a European discussion with the Russians, without naivety, without putting pressure on the Ukrainians -- but also so as not to depend on third parties in this discussion."

The Kremlin said Tuesday it welcomed Macron's approach and was awaiting a concrete proposition for further talks.

"Russia has always advocated maintaining dialogue, which, in our view and firm belief, can help resolve the most urgent and most difficult problems," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, including AFP.

After Macron sent his adviser Emmanuel Bonne to the Kremlin last week, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had said Putin was ready to receive the French leader's call.

"If you want to call and discuss something seriously, then call," he said in an interview to state-run broadcaster RT.

The French and Russian presidents last spoke in July, in their first known phone talks in over two-and-a-half years.

The French leader tried in a series of phone calls in 2022 to warn Putin against invading Ukraine and travelled to Moscow early that year.

He kept up phone contact with Putin after the invasion but talks had ceased after a September 2022 phone call.

Bangladesh police deploy to guard 'risky' polling centres

AFP | Dhaka, Bangladesh

Bangladesh's police chief said yesterday that more than 150,000 officers will be deployed for this week's elections, warning that more than half of polling stations were flagged as vulnerable to violence.

Police records show that five people were killed and more than 600 injured in political clashes during the campaign period from December 11 to February 9.

More than 157,000 police officers, backed by 100,000 soldiers and other security forces, will guard Thursday's vote -- the first since a mass uprising toppled the autocratic government of Sheikh Hasina in 2024.

"We are 1,000 percent confident about doing our part," Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam told reporters in Dhaka.

The country of 170 million has remained in political turmoil since the uprising against Hasina,



Workers sort ballot papers and other polling materials for distribution ahead of Bangladesh's general election in Dhaka

when police carried out a deadly crackdown during her failed bid to cling to power.

Alam said police had assessed that "more than 24,000 polling centres have been marked as either high-risk or moderately risky" for possible unrest, violence or ballot stuffing -- more

than half of the 42,000 centres nationwide.

"The location of some centres is very remote, and there is intense competition, and hostility among candidates and their supporters," he said, adding that 1,300 police guns looted during the 2024 unrest have still not

been recovered.

"In high-risk and moderately risky centres, police will carry out patrol duty with body-worn cameras for the first time."

Rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra counted 158 people killed and more than 7,000 injured in political violence between August 2024 and December 2025.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) raised concerns over the law-and-order situation, accusing parties of forming "mobs" and setting up road-blocks.

Alam said the police were determined to ensure the polls were peaceful, but said he accepted that distrust of his force remained.

"It is quite understandable why people do not trust the police," he said. "Over the last 15 years, based on what we have delivered -- in fact, for the last 150 years, our predecessors mostly beat people."

China says Japan's Takaichi must show 'actions' for dialogue

AFP | Beijing, China

China insisted yesterday that Tokyo must first show "concrete actions" after Japan's newly elected prime minister Sanae Takaichi said she was "open to various dialogues" with Beijing, effectively rejecting her overtures.

Those actions included a retraction of Takaichi's November comments that Tokyo could



intervene militarily in any Chinese attack on self-ruled island Taiwan, which have fuelled a months-long diplomatic stand-off with Beijing.

A day after winning a landslide election, Takaichi told reporters Japan was "open to various dialogues with China".

Asked about her comments Tuesday, China's foreign ministry said "genuine dialogue should be

built on respect for one another".

"Proclaiming dialogue with one's mouth while engaging in confrontation -- no one will accept this kind of dialogue," spokesman Lin Jian told a regular news briefing.

"If Japan truly wants to develop a strategic and mutually beneficial relationship with China, it's very easy and clear: withdraw Takaichi's erroneous remarks about Taiwan," he said.