

News in brief

Indonesia tests using toll roads as airforce runways



◆ The Indonesian air force is trialling the use of toll roads as back-up runways for its aircraft to help bolster the vast archipelago's defences, a deputy minister said. A demonstration of two military planes taking off and landing on a toll road was held on the western island of Sumatra on Wednesday. The roads would provide an alternative in the event military bases are attacked, deputy defence minister Donny Ermawan Taufanto said.

◆ China called Taiwan's leader Lai Ching-te a "war instigator" after he warned in an interview that Beijing would target countries in the region should it seize control of the self-ruled island. Lai said in his first interview with a global news agency since taking office in May 2024 that if China were to take Taiwan, Beijing would become "more aggressive" and would next turn its expansionist ambitions to Japan, the Philippines and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Beijing's foreign ministry accused Lai of provoking aggression, calling him a "war instigator".

China calls Taiwan's leader a 'war instigator'



Risk of Nipah spread low after cases in India, Bangladesh: WHO



◆ The World Health Organization has said the risk of the deadly Nipah virus spreading was low after three cases of infection were recently confirmed in India and Bangladesh. Nipah, which spreads from animals to humans, has no vaccine and a fatality rate ranging from 40% to 75%, according to the UN health body. "In the past few weeks, three cases of Nipah—two in India and one in Bangladesh—made headlines and caused concern about a wider outbreak," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference in Geneva.

SPOTLIGHT

Kim Jong Un entrenches daughter as likely heir, Seoul says



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (L) and his daughter Kim Ju Ae participating in a tree-planting ceremony at the construction site of the Memorial Museum of Combat Feats at the Overseas Military Operations in Pyongyang

AFP | Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has entrenched his daughter as heir apparent ahead of a landmark party conference, a South Korean lawmaker said yesterday after a briefing from Seoul's main intelligence agency. The Kim family has ruled North Korea with an iron grip for decades, and a cult of personality surrounding their "Paektu bloodline" dominates daily life in the isolated country. Kim's teenage daughter Ju Ae has long been seen as the next in line, a perception stoked by a string of recent high-profile outings. South Korea's National Intelligence Service said Ju Ae has now been clearly "designated as a successor", lawmaker Lee Seong-kweun said after a parliamentary briefing with the spy agency. The assessment was made "taking into account a range of circumstances -- including her increasingly prominent public

presence at official events", he told reporters. South Korea's spy agency said last year Ju Ae appeared to be the next in line after she accompanied Kim on a high-profile visit to Beijing. Photos published ahead of a rare political congress in North Korea this month cemented that perception. State media showed Ju Ae in January paying respects alongside her father at the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, where the bodies of state founder Kim Il Sung and second-generation ruler Kim Jong Il lie in state. Pyongyang is due to hold a landmark party congress at the end of February -- where it is expected to lay out its foreign policy, war planning and nuclear ambitions for the next five years. The National Intelligence Service said it would closely monitor Ju Ae's attendance, as well as the level of protocol accorded to her.

Trump ends immigration crackdown in Minnesota

AFP | Washington

President Donald Trump's pointman yesterday announced the end of an aggressive immigration operation in Minnesota that triggered large protests and nationwide outrage following the killing of two US citizens. Thousands of federal agents including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers conducted weeks of sweeping raids and arrests in what the administration claims were targeted missions against criminals. "I have proposed and President Trump has concurred that this surge operation conclude," Trump official Tom Homan told a briefing outside Minneapolis. "A significant drawdown has already been underway this week and will continue through the next week." The operation sparked tense demonstrations in the Minneapolis area, and the fatal separate shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti last month led to a wave of criticism. Homan raised the prospect that the officers would move to another location but gave no details, as speculation is rife about which city might be targeted next.



Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky speaks while displaying a video of ICE operations in Minneapolis that lead to the killing of Alex Pretti

"In the next week, we're going to deploy the officers here on detail, back to their home stations or other areas of the country where they are needed. But we're going to continue to enforce immigration law," he said. Campaigning against illegal immigration helped Trump get

elected in 2024, but daily videos from Minnesota of violent masked agents, and multiple reports of people being targeted on flimsy evidence, helped send Trump's approval ratings plummeting. The case of Liam Conejo Ramos, five, who was detained

on January 20, also stoked anger. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said the ICE operation "had been catastrophic for our neighbors and businesses, and now it's time for a great comeback. "We will show the same commitment to our immigrant residents," he added.

Counting underway in first Bangladesh polls since deadly uprising

AFP | Dhaka

Counting was underway yesterday in Bangladesh's first election since a deadly 2024 uprising, with powerful political heir Tarique Rahman bullish about defeating an Islamist-led coalition. Leading prime ministerial hopeful Tarique Rahman, 60, said he was "confident" his Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) -- which was crushed during the 15 years of ousted premier Sheikh Hasina's autocratic rule -- can regain power in the South Asian nation of 170 million people. However, he faces a stiff challenge from a coalition led by the Muslim-majority country's largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami. Election Commission officials reported "a few minor disruptions" but top party leaders on both sides raised fears of threats, with the BNP's Rahman calling on



An electoral official opens a ballot box as counting starts at a polling station

people to vote so that "conspiracies will not succeed". Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman, 67, mounted a disciplined grassroots campaign, hoping to form the first Islamist-led government in constitutionally secular Bangladesh. Jamaat, which has campaigned on a platform of justice and ending corruption, senses its biggest opportunity in decades, with party leader Rahman saying it "will do whatever is required" to ensure a fair result. "The early results indicate something positive", the Jamaat chief said, as counting continued. BNP's Rahman has said he is "confident" of victory, and his advisor said the party would "secure a sweeping victory".

Canada probes mass shooter's past interactions with police, health system

AFP | Tumbler Ridge, Canada

Canadian police Wednesday identified the 18-year-old who carried out a mass shooting in a remote mining town, as authorities investigate the suspect's mental health and previous interactions with police and health care providers. Police commander Dwayne McDonald said authorities still don't know the motive in Tuesday's mass shooting, a rare occurrence in Canada, which has strict gun laws. The shooter -- who took her own life -- was known to have mental health issues. McDonald identified the



Investigators work at Ridge Secondary School after a mass shooting of the targeted high school four years ago. The shooter was known to police, and "we've begun the process of reaching out to" the

public health care system to "understand what interactions may have taken place," British Columbia Premier David Eby told a news conference outside the Tumbler Ridge town hall late Wednesday evening. Authorities have said the shooter had previously held a firearms license which had lapsed and that weapons had previously been confiscated from her residence -- but were subsequently returned. "I have a lot of questions. I know the people of Tumbler Ridge have a lot of questions," Eby said, adding officials want to do "all we can" to "prevent tragedies like this from happening again."