









SALAR 

Bezos' Blue Origin launches rocket on first test flight

Blue Origin launched its massive new rocket on its first test flight Thursday, sending a prototype satellite to orbit thousands of miles above Earth.

Named after the first American to orbit Earth, the New Glenn rocket blasted off from Florida, soaring from the same pad used to launch NASA's Mariner and Pioneer spacecraft a half-century ago.

Years in the making with heavy funding by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, the 98-metre rocket carried an experimental platform designed to host satellites or release them into their proper orbits. All seven main engines fired at liftoff as the rocket blazed through the predawn sky, drawing cheers from spectators lining the nearby beaches. Company employees erupted in shouts and frenzied applause once the craft successfully orbit 13 minutes later, a feat that drew quick praise from SpaceX's Elon Musk.

"Congratulations on reaching orbit on the first attempt!" Musk said via X. For this test, the satellite was expected to remain inside the second stage while circling Earth. The mission was expected to last six hours, with the second stage then placed in a safe condition to stay in a high, out-of-the-way orbit in accordance with NASA's practices for minimising space junk. The first-stage booster missed its landing on a barge in the Atlantic minutes after liftoff so it could be recycled, but the company stressed that the more important goal was for

the test satellite to reach orbit. Bezos said before the flight it was "a little crazy" to even try to land the booster on the first try.

New Glenn was supposed to fly before dawn Monday, but ice buildup in critical plumbing caused a delay. The rocket is built to haul spacecraft and eventually astronauts to orbit and also the moon.

Founded 25 years ago by Bezos, Blue Origin has been launching paying passengers to the edge of space since 2021, including himself. The short hops from Texas use smaller rockets named after the first American in space, Alan Shepard. New Glenn, which honors John Glenn, is five times taller.

Blue Origin poured more than USD1 billion into New Glenn's launch site, rebuilding historic Complex 36 at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. The pad is 14 km from the company's control centres and rocket factory, outside the gates of NASA's Kennedy Space Center.

Blue Origin envisions six to eight New Glenn flights this year, if everything goes well, with the next one coming up this spring. "There's room for lots of winners" Bezos said from the rocket factory over the weekend, adding that this was the "very, very beginning of this new phase of the space age, where we're all going to work together as an industry ... to lower the cost of access to space."

The biggest rocket of all, at approximately 123m, is SpaceX's Starship. Musk said the seventh test flight of the full rocket could occur later Thursday from Texas.

He hopes to repeat what he pulled off in October, catching the returning booster at the launch pad with giant mechanical arms.

Starship is what NASA plans to use to land astronauts on the moon later this decade. The first two moon landings under the space agency's Artemis program, which follows the Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s, will see crews descending from lunar orbit to the surface in Starships.

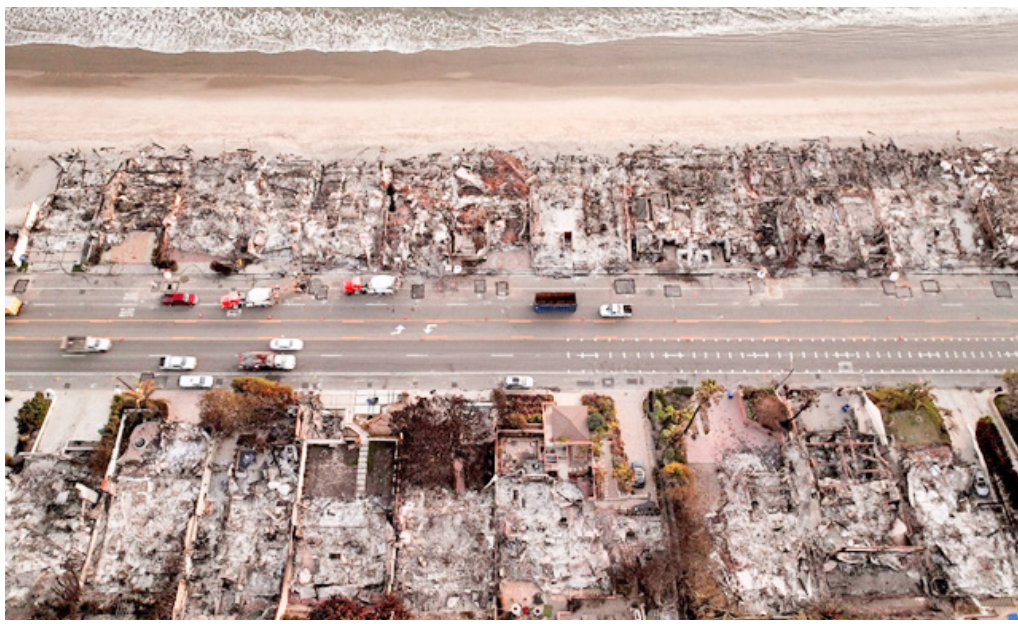
Blue Origin's lander, dubbed Blue Moon, will make its debut on the third lunar touchdown by astronauts.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson pushed for competing moon landers similar to the strategy to hire two companies to ferry astronauts to and from the International Space Station. Nelson will step down when President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Monday.

Trump has tapped tech billionaire Jared Isaacman to run NASA. Isaacman, who has twice rocketed into orbit on his own privately financed SpaceX flights, must be approved by the Senate. New Glenn's debut was supposed to send twin spacecraft to Mars for NASA. But the space agency pulled them from last October's planned flight when it became clear the rocket wouldn't be ready in time. They will still fly on a New Glenn rocket, but not until spring at the earliest. The two small spacecraft, named Escapade, are meant to study the Martian atmosphere and magnetic environment while orbiting the red planet. —PTI



Blue Origin's New Glenn rocket lifts off from Launch Complex 36 at the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, on Thursday in Cape Canaveral, Florida PHOTO: PTI



LANDSCAPES NOW HELLSCAPES

An aerial view shows the devastation from the Palisades Fire on beachfront homes in Malibu, California. Authorities have confirmed at least 25 deaths so far, with the toll expected to rise as fires continue to rage across parts of the city PHOTO: PTI

Pollution, water quality in focus ahead of Delhi polls

Ahead of Delhi Assembly polls on 5 February, residents across the national capital have raised concerns over a range of civic issues, including poor road conditions, water quality and rising pollution levels.

Mohammad Sadiq, a resident of Seelampur in northeast Delhi, highlighted the ongoing issue of contaminated water.

"We have electricity, but the water quality is very poor. We have to buy clean water for drinking and cooking, which costs between Rs 30 to Rs 50 per day. The condition of the roads in our area is another major concern. We expect the next government to resolve these issues," he said.

Another resident from Hardevpuri, Durgapuri in northeast Delhi, Harsh Tyagi, pointed to multiple problems, including narrow lanes, lack of parking, and insufficient green cover.

"The pollution level in our area is high due to the lack of trees. The narrow lanes leads to parking congestion and there is no proper drainage system," Tyagi said.

In northwest Delhi, Nisha Sharma, expressed concerns about bad roads and stray cattle.

"While we have access to electricity and clean water, the roads are in poor condition, with potholes everywhere. The main roads are fine, but the inner lanes in Trinagar and Wazirpur are in bad shape. Stray cattle is also a challenge, making it difficult to navigate through the area," Sharma said.

Environmental advocate Verhean Khanna, founder of the New Delhi Nature Society, stressed the importance of reducing waste and increasing greenery to tackle pollution.

"We have to produce less amount of garbage, especially the plastic waste. There are some garbages which we cannot avoid. We need a proper and separate channels for disposing electronic wastes and biodegradable waste can be



Strictest anti-pollution curbs under stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) like a ban on construction activities are imposed in Delhi-NCR to combat worsening air pollution levels PHOTO: PTI

- People are forced to buy clean water for drinking and cooking, which costs between Rs 30 to Rs 50 per day. There's also the issue of hanging wires and electric poles

converted into fertiliser," Khanna said.

"We have set up three pits in a park at our colony where we are converting the biodegradable waste, which we collect from the houses of the society, into fertilisers," he added.

Khushboo Tiwari, a resident of Chhatarpur, voiced concerns over drainage overflow during monsoons.

She said the Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road sees major traffic congestion, especially during peak hours. Additionally, the drainage

system overflows during rains, creating difficulties for the residents.

There's also the issue of hanging wires and electric poles near homes, posing safety risks, she added. Tiwari further claimed that there is no park in their area for the residents.

Bittu Bhardwaj, a resident of southwest Delhi, said that after Anand Vihar, Palam is the most polluted area in the national capital.

"There is a lot of construction ongoing in this part of the city which causes high pollution level in the area. Palam is the second most polluted area in the national capital following Anand Vihar. The roads are in bad condition leading to traffic congestion in the locality," Bhardwaj said.

Sunil Kumar Aledia, executive director, Centre for Holistic Development, called for collective participation to address the pollution and civic

issues in Delhi.

He said the population density is increasing leading to extra burden on the waste creation in several forms posing a significant challenge.

The issue of climate change is not being properly addressed due to which the society is getting impacted, he added.

"We need to have proper planning and participation of all stakeholders of the society to deal with the rising civic issues. We also need to aware people before seeking their participation. There are garbage mountains in Delhi which are not being disposed off properly," Aledia said.

He further said that the government should have a proper plan regarding the vehicles in the national capital. Voting for Delhi Assembly elections will take place on 5 February, with counting to be held on February —PTI

LETTERS

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US TikTok users flock to Chinese app RedNote amid ban concerns

Social media giant TikTok is preparing to shut down its app in the United States this Sunday – the day that legislation signed by President Joe Biden last year banning the app takes effect.

There is a slim chance this dramatic development might not happen if the US Supreme Court accepts a last minute legal argument from TikTok's Chinese owner, ByteDance, that the ban is unconstitutional – or if ByteDance divests its US operations.

But the 170 million users of TikTok in the US aren't taking any chances. Many self-described "TikTok refugees" have begun to flee to alternative social media sites, mocking the alleged security concerns on TikTok in the process. "Goodbye to my Chinese spy" has become a new TikTok trend.

The most popular alternative that has emerged is the Chinese social media app Xiaohongshu (known as RedNote in English). On 13 January, the app surged to number one in the US Apple App Store, attracting more than 7,00,000 new users.

This mass digital migration of social media users marks a new phase in the ongoing digital cold war between the US and China. But there are many questions about whether

RedNote – or any other alternative platform – will be a viable, long-term refuge for US TikTok users if the ban goes ahead.

Owned by Shanghai-based Xingyin Information Technology and established in 2013, RedNote is a Chinese-language lifestyle, social networking and e-commerce platform. It has a hybrid style of Instagram-meets-Pinterest and approximately 300 million monthly active users – the majority of whom are in China.

RedNote stores its users' personal data in China, in compliance with China's data protection and cybersecurity laws and other regulatory policies.

But RedNote isn't the only alternative platform users are migrating to. Another is Lemon8, also owned by ByteDance, which bills itself as a "lifestyle community".

First launched in Japan in 2020, it had the second top spot in the Apple App Store – after RedNote – earlier this week. The app allows existing TikTok users to migrate their account handles and data.

Like TikTok, Lemon8 stores data of users outside China, including in the US and Singapore. However, if the US government does ban TikTok it could easily use the same rationale to ban Lemon8.

Other local US-based alternative platforms, such as



An alternative to TikTok, Rednote was launched on 13 January which surged to number one in the US Apple App Store, attracting more than 7,00,000 new users PHOTO: X

Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, are not seen as ideal options by many users. This is because they are less creator-friendly and lack a strong sense of community.

Many see RedNote as the best alternative given its similar content style and algorithms to TikTok and community-driven appeal. More importantly, the platform is beyond the control

of the US government and cannot be directly banned.

At the time of writing, the hashtag "TikTok refugee" had garnered about 250 million views and over 5.5 million comments on RedNote. Some US users satirically explained their move to the platform out of spite: since the US government is worried about our personal data being taken by

China, let's just hand it directly over to the Chinese government. Are you going to take away my mobile?"

Chinese users of RedNote are enthusiastically embracing TikTok refugees from the US.

For example, they are producing tutorial videos to teach new users how to navigate the app. This hospitality is summed up by one popular

comment from a Chinese user on the platform who said: "friends who come over from TikTok, I want to say, you are not refugees, you are brave explorers." The new migration to RedNote has also intensified national pride of Chinese internet users.

They vividly refer to the migration as a "Western awakening movement", which allows US citizens to open their eyes to see the world outside the centre of the west.

This phrase was coined in reference to the "self-strengthening movement" in China in the late 19th century – a reform effort aimed at modernising China by adopting Western technologies, knowledge and values. The unexpected migration has seen some RedNote-related stocks surge by as much as 20 per cent earlier this week. The positive interactions between American and Chinese internet users help promote the Communist Party of China's idea of "people-to-people diplomacy". This idea is best summed up by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who in July 2024 said: "The hope of the China-US relationship lies in the people, its foundation is in the two societies, its future depends on the youth, and its vitality comes from exchanges at subnational levels." However, RedNote

might not be a viable, long-term refuge for US TikTok users.

Their sudden migration to RedNote could be more like a flash mob protest against the TikTok ban. It may not be easy for them to get used to a very different digital ecosystem – and make a decision to permanently reside on the Chinese app. RedNote has already posted a job ad to urgently recruit content moderators who understand English to cope with the dramatic growth of English-speaking users.

It's also worth noting that the migration to RedNote is still very small, and only a fraction of the 170 million people in the US who use TikTok.

The US government also has the authority to pressure Apple to remove RedNote from the US App Store if it thinks the migration poses a national security threat. Regardless of whether this happens, the mass migration of TikTok refugees to RedNote – even if it is temporary – shows the US's regulation of digital technologies, driven by geopolitical competition, has significantly fractured the global internet. Fortunately, we have witnessed the spirit of optimism and humanitarianism among US and Chinese internet users amid the tension of the digital cold war. —PTI

# Last minute crisis delays ceasefire: Bibi

## Meanwhile, Hamas officials say that the group is committed to the ceasefire agreement



TEL AVIV, 16 JAN

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Thursday that a "last-minute crisis" with Hamas is hindering Israeli approval of a long-anticipated agreement aimed at pausing hostilities in the Gaza Strip and facilitating the release of dozens of hostages. In the meantime, Israeli airstrikes resulted in the deaths of at least 48 people across the heavily bombed region, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Netanyahu's office stated that his Cabinet will not convene to endorse the ceasefire agreement until Hamas demonstrates compliance. Officials accused the militant group of reneging on aspects of the deal in a bid for further concessions. In response, Izzat al-Rashq, a senior Hamas representative, affirmed the group's commitment to the ceasefire announced by mediating parties, including the US and Qatar. The deal, unveiled aims to secure the release of 33 hostages from Gaza and facilitate the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. It also proposes a phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from several areas, allowing hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to return to their homes and significantly increasing humanitarian assistance. Despite the potential breakthroughs, Netanyahu faces domestic pressure to bring hostages home amid threats from Far-Right coalition partners to destabilise his government should he concede too much. Around half of the casualties were reported to be women and children, with the toll expected to rise as records are updated. Since the onset of the conflict on 7 October, 2023, following a surprise attack by Hamas, approximately 1,200 people, predominantly civilians, have been killed and around 250 abducted. Ongoing Israeli military actions have resulted in the deaths of over 46,000 individuals in Gaza, mostly civilians, as reported by the Health Ministry, prompting heavy international scrutiny. Mediators from Egypt, Qatar, and the US are expected to reconvene in Cairo to iron out remaining details. The long-term governance and reconstruction of Gaza remains uncertain, with many questions about its future still unanswered. —PTI

### German cops probe AfD's mock plane ticket campaign

BERLIN, 16 JAN

Authorities in Germany have initiated a criminal investigation following the distribution of around 30,000 fake "deportation" flight tickets by the nationalist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in Karlsruhe. The mock tickets resemble actual boarding passes and feature a one-way flight from "Germany" to a "safe country of origin" for a passenger named "illegal immigrant," scheduled for 23 February, coinciding with a snap federal election. Local politicians condemned the initiative as incitement to hatred, with the Left Party planning to file charges. Karlsruhe Mayor Frank Menstrup labelled the campaign as crossing a line, exacerbating fear within the community. —DW News



A woman embraces the body of her 7-year-old son who was killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip. PHOTO: PTI



The deal was merely a step forward. We will continue to work until all terms of the agreement are applied, until we have achieved peace & are able to turn the last page of war

—Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Qatar PM

The UN stands ready to support the implementation of this deal and scale up the delivery of humanitarian relief to the countless Palestinians who continue to suffer

—Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General

For the innocent Palestinians whose homes turned into a warzone overnight and the many who have lost their lives, this ceasefire must allow for a huge surge in humanitarian aid

—Keir Starmer, UK PM

The ceasefire provides an important opportunity to substantially increase humanitarian assistance to the civilian population of Gaza

—Giorgia Meloni, Italy PM

After fifteen months of unjustifiable suffering, there is immense relief for the people of Gaza and hope for the hostages and their families in the wake of the ceasefire deal

—Emmanuel Macron, French President

### IS linked rebels kill at least 10 people in Congo

GOMA, 15 JAN

At least 10 people were killed in eastern Congo by extremist rebels linked to the Islamic State group, a local official said on Wednesday. The rebels with the Allied Democratic Forces, an IS affiliate in the region, attacked the village of Makoko in the Lubero territory of the North Kivu province on Wednesday, a provincial member of parliament, David Sikuli, told The Associated Press. Eastern Congo has struggled with armed violence for decades as more than 120 groups fight for power, land and valuable mineral resources, while others try to defend their communities. Some armed groups have been accused of mass killings. The violence has caused nearly 7 million people to flee their homes. —PTI

### Cuba begins prisoners' release amid US policy shift

HAVANA, 16 JAN

Cuba commenced the release of several prisoners on Wednesday as part of dialogues facilitated by the Vatican. More than a dozen individuals, including tattooist Reyna Yacnara Barreto Batista, who was arrested during the historic 2021 protests, were set free. Barreto, sentenced to four years for public disorder, reported that she and eight men were informed of their release early in the morning. This move follows the announcement from President Joe Biden's administration regarding plans to revoke Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism. While the Cuban government stated the releases were not directly linked to the US decision, it cited the spirit of an upcoming Jubilee declared by Pope. —PTI

### Drake sues Universal Music over diss track

LOS ANGELES, 16 JAN

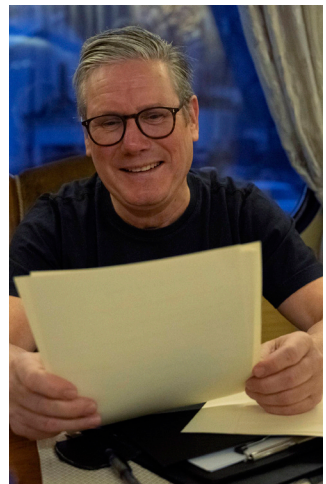
A major hip-hop feud escalated as Drake has filed a lawsuit against Universal Music Group (UMG) for defamation linked to rival Kendrick Lamar's diss track "Not Like Us." The suit claims UMG promoted the track despite false allegations of pedophilia against Drake, which allegedly incited violence, including a shooting at his Toronto home. Drake's grievance, filed in federal court in New York City, seeks damages and accountability from UMG for its role in disseminating the track's dangerous content. UMG refuted the claims, asserting it has invested significantly in Drake's career. The legal action comes as the track is nominated for five Grammys, amidst escalating tensions between the two artists. Drake's legal team argued that UMG prioritised profits over artist safety. —PTI

## FOCUS ON DEFENCE

# UK's Starmer in Ukraine; pledges 100-year partnership

KYIV, 16 JAN

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived in Ukraine's capital on Thursday, announcing a commitment to secure the country's future for a century, just days before Donald Trump is inaugurated as US President. Starmer and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy are set to sign a "100-Year Partnership" treaty in Kyiv, focusing on defence, science, energy, and trade. This marks Starmer's first visit to Ukraine since he took office in July, having previously met with Zelenskyy while in opposition. Welcomed at Kyiv railway station by UK Ambassador Martin Harris and Ukraine's envoy to London, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Starmer reiterated the UK's strong support. Since Russia's invasion three years ago, the UK has pledged £12.8 billion (approximately USD 16 billion) in military and civilian aid and trained over 50,000 Ukrainian troops. Starmer will also announce an additional £40 million (USD 49 million) for Ukraine's postwar recovery. However, uncertainty looms over US support under Trump, who has questioned the cost of assistance and expressed a desire to swiftly end the conflict. Kyiv's allies are working to bolster Ukraine's position for potential future negotiations. Starmer stated that the partnership aims to ensure Ukraine "is never again vulnerable" to Russian aggression, citing the historical context of Crimea's annexation in 2014. Key aspects of the treaty include enhanced cooperation on maritime security and the tracking of stolen Ukrainian grain exported by Russia. Zelenskyy and Starmer are also expected to discuss a proposal for Western troops to monitor a potential ceasefire, alongside Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership. —PTI



Keir Starmer PHOTO: PTI

# Biden warns of rising oligarchy

WASHINGTON DC, 16 JAN

In a poignant farewell address, outgoing President Joe Biden cautioned against the rise of an ultra-wealthy "oligarchy" in America, which he believes threatens the nation's democracy as he prepares to hand power to President-elect Donald Trump. Biden, who will be succeeded by Trump on 20 January, expressed concerns over the alarming concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few individuals. "There are dangerous consequences if their abuse of power is left unchecked," he stated, highlighting the potential detrimental effects on democracy and citizens' rights. He specifically mentioned the growing influence of billionaire tech figures, including Elon Musk, and raised alarms over social media companies' roles in spreading misinformation. He compared the potential emergence of a "tech industrial complex" to the military industrial complex outlined by former President Dwight D Eisenhower in 1961. —PTI



Joe Biden PHOTO: X

# Trump, Biden claim credit for truce deal

WASHINGTON DC, 16 JAN

US President Joe Biden and president-elect Donald Trump are both claiming credit for Israel and Hamas agreeing to a ceasefire deal in Gaza on Wednesday after the White House brought Trump's Middle East envoy into negotiations that have dragged on for months. Trump wasted no time in asserting he was the moving force behind the deal. Biden, meanwhile, stressed that the deal was reached under "the precise contours" of a plan that he set out in late May. "This ceasefire agreement could have only happened as a result of our Historic Victory in November, as it signaled to the entire World that my Administration would seek Peace and negotiate deals to ensure the safety of all Americans, and our Allies," Trump wrote on social media. He added his incoming Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff - who was participating in the talks in Doha, Qatar - would continue "to work closely with Israel and our Allies to make sure Gaza NEVER again becomes a terrorist safe haven." —PTI



Donald Trump PHOTO: X

# US RECOVERS \$31M IN SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENTS TO THE DEAD

WASHINGTON DC, 16 JAN

The US government clawed back more than USD 31 million in Social Security payments that improperly went to dead people, a recovery that one official said Wednesday was "just the tip of the iceberg." The money was reclaimed as part of a five-month pilot program after Congress gave the Department of Treasury temporary access to the Social Security Administration's "Full Death Master File" for three years as part of the omnibus appropriations bill in 2021. The SSA maintains the most complete federal database of individuals who have died, and the file contains more than 142 million records, which go back to 1899, according to the Treasury. —PTI

# US REMOVES SANCTIONS ON BARC, TWO OTHER INDIAN COMPANIES

WASHINGTON DC, 16 JAN

Days ahead of passing the baton of the presidency to Donald Trump, the Biden administration has announced lifting sanctions on three Indian entities - Indian Rare Earths, Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Center (IGCAR), and Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC). Imposed during the Cold War era, the removal of sanctions on these three Indian entities will support US foreign policy objectives by reducing barriers to advanced energy cooperation, including joint research and development and science and technology cooperation, towards shared energy security needs and goals, the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) said on Wednesday. —PTI

# Yoon skips questioning post-arrest

SEOUL, 16 JAN

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol will not attend a second round of questioning scheduled for Thursday, following his dramatic arrest over a failed martial law declaration in December. His lawyer, Yoon Kab-keun, informed the press that the President is unwell and believes he has already fully articulated his position during previous interrogations. Yoon was arrested on Wednesday, making him the first sitting South Korean president to be detained. During hours of questioning, Yoon exercised his right to remain silent, subsequently being moved to the Seoul Detention Centre. Authorities are permitted to detain him for 48 hours without a new warrant, which could extend for another 20 days should they proceed with formal charges. Concurrently, the Constitutional Court is set to hold a second hearing in impeachment trial, determining his potential removal from presidential office. —PTI



Yoon Suk Yeol PHOTO: X

# Death toll rises to 87 in SA's police and miners' standoff

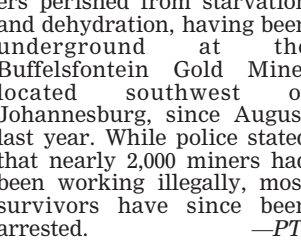
STILFONTEIN, 16 JAN

The death toll from a protracted standoff between police and illegally working miners at an abandoned gold mine in South Africa has climbed to at least 87, authorities confirmed on Thursday. This follows the conclusion of an operation that extracted over 240 survivors from deep underground. It is believed that many miners perished from starvation and dehydration, having been underground at the Buffelsfontein Gold Mine, located southwest of Johannesburg, since August last year. While police stated that nearly 2,000 miners had been working illegally, most survivors have since been arrested. —PTI

# China offers to invest \$3.7B in S Lanka's oil refinery

BEIJING, 16 JAN

China has offered to invest USD 3.7 billion in Sri Lanka, stated to be the biggest-ever foreign investment in the island nation, to build a state-of-the-art oil refinery as the two countries signed a new plan to upgrade BRI cooperation during Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's state visit here. On Thursday, Dissanayake met Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Zhao Leji and pitched for more Chinese investment in his address to Chinese firms. A day earlier, Dissanayake held talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping following which the two sides signed 15 agreements. According to Sri Lankan President's media division, his visit marked a "significant milestone" by securing the largest foreign direct investment to date of USD 3.7 billion Chinese investment to build a state-of-the-art oil refinery at Hambantota. "This significant achievement was formalised this morning with the signing of an agreement between Sri Lanka's Ministry of Energy and Sinopec, a leading Chinese international petroleum corporation," it said. —PTI



Activists are demanding immediate action to end the slaughter and protect Morocco's stray dogs. PHOTO: X

# 'TO MAKE COUNTRY CLEAN' Morocco to cull 3M dogs ahead of FIFA World Cup

RABAT, 16 JAN

Morocco is all set to slaughter three million stray dogs in a brutal clean up bid before hosting the 2030 World Cup. The initiative aims to make the country's cities look nicer to visiting football fans. Morocco will co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup alongside Spain and Portugal, marking the tournament's centennial edition. The country has already begun preparing its infrastructure, aiming to upgrade stadiums and transportation networks to meet FIFA standards. But it has also reportedly killed thousands of stray dogs, and it's feared that the numbers could still ramp up as 2030 approaches. According to the coalition, dogs are poisoned with strychnine - a highly toxic, colourless, and bitter chemical used as a pesticide, particularly for killing small animals such as birds and rodents. The pups are also reportedly shot in the streets, the coalition says, or trapped and transported to facilities where they're brutally slaughtered. With outrage mounting, activists are demanding immediate action to end the slaughter and protect Morocco's stray dogs. Jane Goodall, a top animal rights advocate, has now written to FIFA, urging immediate action and accusing the organisation of ignoring what she describes as "a horrific act of barbarity". In her letter to FIFA's Secretary general Mattias Grafström, Goodall said she was appalled at reports of large-scale dog killings by Moroccan authorities, an initiative said to have ended last August. "I am equally appalled to learn from the IAWPC - International Animal Coalition that you have been presented with detailed dossiers documenting these horrific acts, most of which are conducted in the most brutal and cruel fashion imaginable, and yet appear to have ignored them," she wrote. —Agencies



Activists are demanding immediate action to end the slaughter and protect Morocco's stray dogs. PHOTO: X



