

## Two killed in Pak militant raids on banks

AFP, Quetta

Heavily armed militants looted several banks in Pakistan's Balochistan province yesterday before clashing with security forces, with one policeman and a civilian killed, authorities told AFP.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack in southwest Pakistan, where ethnic Baloch separatists have stepped up attacks on security forces in recent years.

"It was an organised heist in which at least three banks were looted of about 150 million Pakistani rupees (around \$530,000)," a police official in the Panjgur district said.

"They tried to loot two more banks before clashes erupted with security forces, forcing them to flee," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to talk to the media.



Moroccans look at a destroyed vehicle and other debris following a flash flood in the coastal town of Safi, about 300 kilometres (186 miles) south of the capital Rabat, yesterday. The death toll from flash floods that hit the coastal town over the weekend rose to 37, local authorities said.

PHOTO: AFP

## DEADLY FLOODS Indonesia to revoke 22 forestry permits

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia will revoke more than 20 forestry permits across the country, the forestry minister said yesterday, after deadly floods and landslides devastated parts of the northwestern island of Sumatra.

Environmentalists and experts have pointed to the role forest loss played in flash flooding and landslides that this month killed more than 1,000 people and washed torrents of mud into villages.



The government will revoke 22 forestry permits that encompass more than one million hectares of land, forestry minister Raja Juli Antoni told reporters.

More than 100,000 hectares covered by the cancelled permits were on Sumatra, he said. "With the addition of another one million hectares today, around 1.5 million hectares of our forests have been regulated," he said.

## US still wants Ukraine to cede Donbas

Says official briefed on peace talks with Russia; Kyiv's non-Nato status is 'cornerstone': Kremlin

AFP, Kyiv

US negotiators still want Ukraine to cede control of the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions, collectively known as the Donbas, as a condition of peace talks with Russia, an official briefed on the negotiations told AFP yesterday.

Russian President Vladimir "Putin wants territory," the official said, adding that the United States was demanding that Ukraine "withdraw" from the regions -- and that Kyiv was "not agreeing" to this demand.

"It's a bit striking that the Americans are taking the Russians' position on this issue," the official added.

The Kremlin yesterday called Kyiv's non-Nato status a "cornerstone" in talks to end the war, after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky admitted some of the alliance's members were against his country joining the bloc.

"This issue is one of the cornerstones and requires special discussion," spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists, including AFP, during a daily briefing.

He added Russia was expecting the United States to "provide us with the concept that is being discussed in Berlin today," as Zelensky held talks in the German capital with US envoys and European leaders seeking a way forward.



Meanwhile, the Russian Defence Ministry said yesterday that its air defence units had shot down 130 Ukrainian drones overnight, 15 of which were headed for Moscow.

Sergei Sobyanin, the mayor of Moscow, said that four more Ukrainian drones en route to the capital had been brought down in the morning and that emergency services were on the scene.

Earlier, Zelensky said he hoped Washington would back the idea of freezing the front line where it is, rather than Ukraine ceding the entire Donbas region as Moscow demands.

"The fairest possible option is to stay where we are," Zelensky told

reporters. "This is true because it is a ceasefire... I know that Russia does not view this positively, and I would like the Americans to support us on this issue."

The European Union, meanwhile, was scrambling to agree a plan on financing Ukraine in the coming years, with a proposal to use frozen Russian assets set for discussion at a leaders' meeting on Thursday.

"We are not there yet, and it is increasingly difficult, but we're doing the work and we still have some days," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas told journalists yesterday morning.

## Thailand to go to the polls on February 8

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's next general election will take place on February 8, the election commission said yesterday, and parties must nominate their candidates for prime minister before the end of this year.

"Today the Election Commission has drafted election details and proposed to the Commissioner who agreed that Sunday, February 8, 2026 will be the election day," the commission said.

Advance voting will take place on February 1.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, of Bhumjaithai party, assumed office in September after his predecessor was removed over an ethics violation.

He dissolved parliament on Friday, paving the way for the national poll, which under law must be held between 45 to 60 days after the dissolution.

## Iran Nobel winner Narges 'unwell' after violent arrest

AFP, Paris

Iranian Nobel winner Narges Mohammadi was taken to hospital twice after being violently arrested last week and appeared unwell in her first telephone contact since being detained, her supporters said yesterday.

Mohammadi suffered "severe and repeated baton blows to the head and neck" during her arrest and in the call "her physical condition was not good, and she appeared unwell", her foundation said in a statement.

Iranian civil society activists, including prize-winning filmmaker Jafar Panahi, called for the "immediate and unconditional release" of Mohammadi and other campaigners arrested on Friday.

Mohammadi, who won the 2023 Nobel prize, was detained after addressing a memorial ceremony in the eastern city of Mashhad for lawyer Khosrow Alikordi, who was found dead earlier this month.

The foundation said Mohammadi was "taken to the hospital emergency room twice" following her arrest. Hamid Mohammadi, one of her brothers who lives in Norway, told AFP in Oslo that Narges Mohammadi had called another brother inside Iran, telling him she was hit "brutally" on the head and her face and "as a result had been taken to be checked by a physician".



## ATTACK ON US TROOPS Syria, coalition forces chasing IS 'sleeper cells'

AFP, Damascus

Syrian forces and a US-led coalition launched an operation against Islamic State group sleeper cells on Sunday, a Syrian interior ministry official said, a day after a deadly attack on US troops in the country.

Two US troops and a civilian interpreter were killed in what the Syrian government described as a "terrorist attack" on Saturday, while Washington said it had been carried out by an Islamic State group (IS) militant who was subsequently killed.

The ministry official, who requested anonymity, told AFP that a "security campaign" across the Syrian desert was tracking "Daesh sleeper cells, in cooperation with the US-led international coalition", using the Arabic acronym for the IS group.

The official said three individuals have so far been arrested over their suspected involvement in the Saturday attack, which took place in central Syria's Palmyra region.

## Russia 'exporting chaos' in 'new age of uncertainty'

Warns new UK spy chief



AFP, London

The new head of Britain's MI6 foreign intelligence service yesterday used her maiden speech to warn that Russia is "exporting chaos" in a "new age of uncertainty".

Blaise Metreweli, the first woman to lead the MI6 Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), spoke at its London headquarters, warning about the "threat" posed by an "aggressive, expansionist and revisionist" Russia, the UK's foreign ministry said in a preview.

"The export of chaos is a feature not a bug in the Russian approach to international engagement, and we should be ready for this to continue until Putin is forced to change his calculus," Metreweli said.

Metreweli was appointed in June as the 18th head of the service. The MI6 chief is the only publicly named member of the organisation and reports directly to the foreign minister.

**২৬ ডিসেম্বর  
বিজয় দিবস**

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