

## INTERNATIONAL

## GLOBAL SUMMIT

## UN touts panel for 'human control' of AI

AFP, New Delhi

A UN panel on artificial intelligence will work towards "science-led governance", the global body's chief said yesterday as leaders at a New Delhi summit weighed their message on the future of the booming technology.

However, the US delegation warned against centralised control of generative AI, highlighting the difficulties of reaching consensus over how it should be handled.

The flip side of the gold rush around AI is a host of issues from job disruption to misinformation, surveillance and the heavy electricity consumption of data centres.

"We are barreling into the unknown," UN chief Antonio Guterres told the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. "The message is simple: less hype, less fear. More facts and evidence."

Dozens of world leaders and ministers delivered a shared view on the benefits of AI, such as instant translation and drug discovery, but also the risks. It is the fourth annual global meeting focused on AI policy, with the next to take place in Geneva in the first half of 2027.

Tens of thousands of people from across the sector visited the vast summit and expo site, with some complaining of poor organisation including crowded and chaotic entry and exit points.



Demonstrators protest outside Argentina's National Congress on Thursday, as lawmakers debate labour reforms proposed by President Javier Milei's libertarian government to attract investment and revive growth. Unions argue the measures would roll back workers' rights.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Attackers kill at least 50 in Nigeria

Several women and children abducted

REUTERS, Maiduguri

At least 50 people were killed, and several women and children were abducted after armed men attacked a village in Nigeria's northwestern Zamfara state, a state lawmaker told Reuters yesterday.

Hamis A. Faru, a lawmaker representing Bukkuyum South, said the attackers raided Tungan Dutse village from around 5:00pm on Thursday until about 3:30am on Friday, burning down buildings and shooting residents who tried to flee.

"They have been moving from one village to another ... leaving at least 50 people dead," Faru told Reuters by phone.

He said the number of abducted victims was yet to be determined. Traditional leaders and local government officials were still accounting for the missing.

## Russian plan to kill officials halted: Kyiv

AFP, Kyiv

Kyiv said yesterday that 10 people were arrested in Ukraine and Moldova on suspicion of planning to assassinate senior Ukrainian political figures on Moscow's orders, with payouts of up to \$100,000.

Kyiv has previously accused Russia of plotting to kill several senior officials, including President Volodymyr Zelensky and the head of Ukraine's intelligence service.

"As part of the work of a joint investigative team of Ukrainian and Moldovan law enforcement officers, an organised group has been exposed that was preparing contract killings of well-known Ukrainian citizens and foreigners," Prosecutor General Ruslan Kravchenko said.

## Path for Gaza must start with end to 'aggression'

Says Hamas after Board of Peace meets for first time

AFP, Gaza City

Discussions on Gaza's future must begin with a total halt to Israeli "aggression", Palestinian movement Hamas said after US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace met for the first time.

"Any political process or any arrangement under discussion concerning the Gaza Strip and the future of our Palestinian people must start with the total halt of aggression, the lifting of the blockade, and the guarantee of our people's legitimate national rights, first and foremost their right to freedom and self-determination," Hamas said in a statement Thursday.

Trump's board met for its inaugural session in Washington on Thursday, with a number of countries pledging money and personnel to rebuild the Palestinian territory, more than four months into a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted however that Hamas must disarm



before any reconstruction begins.

"We agreed with our ally the US that there will be no reconstruction of Gaza before the demilitarisation of Gaza," Netanyahu said.

The Israeli leader did not attend the Washington meeting but was represented by his foreign minister Gideon Saar. Trump said several countries, mostly in the Gulf, had pledged more than seven billion dollars to rebuild the territory. Indonesia will take a deputy commander role in a nascent International Stabilisation Force.

## Trump orders release of UFO records

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump said on Thursday he would direct federal agencies to begin releasing government files related to aliens and unidentified flying objects, pointing to what he described as strong public interest in the issue.

In a social media post, Trump said he would order Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth and other agencies to release the information, calling the matter "extremely interesting and important."

Earlier in the day, Trump, without providing evidence, accused former president Barack Obama of improperly disclosing classified information when discussing aliens publicly, saying Obama "made a big mistake."

"He took it out of classified information ... He's not supposed to be doing that," Trump told reporters while traveling to Georgia.

During an interview with podcast host Brian Tyler Cohen released on Saturday, Obama was asked if aliens were real.

## EPSTEIN SCANDAL

## Probe into former UK prince goes on Cops search royal mansion

REUTERS, Sandringham



British police were searching the former mansion of King Charles' younger brother Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor yesterday after a photograph of the royal emerging from a police station was splashed on newspapers around the world.

Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested on Thursday, his 66th birthday, on suspicion of misconduct in public office over allegations he sent confidential government documents to disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein when he was a trade envoy.

The former prince was released under investigation after being held by police for more than 10 hours.

He has not been charged with any offence.

## Potato farmers stare at losses as prices dip

FROM PAGE 1

forced to sell their produce at throwaway prices. Some even dumped potatoes on the streets last year, unable to sell them or store the surplus in already full warehouses.

The production cost for high-yielding potato varieties such as Asterix, Diamond and Granola stands at Tk 16.64 per kilogramme this year. However, over the past month, field prices have hovered around Tk 8-9 per kg, according to data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Agriculturists attributed the low prices to overproduction, compounded by the government's failure to expand export capacity.

Last year, potato production reached a record 1.15 crore tonnes, significantly higher than the country's annual demand for 90 lakh tonnes, according to the DAE and the Bangladesh Cold Storage Association.

Frustrated by losses due to low prices, farmers cultivated the tuber on 4.69 lakh hectares this season, down 5 percent from 4.94 lakh hectares the previous year. Yet prices have continued to fall.

"We are selling at the field level at Tk 9-10 per kilogramme. If the market price remains like this, we will suffer greater losses compared to last year," said Jamal Uddin, a farmer from the Mostafi area of Lalmonirhat sadar upazila, a bordering district in the north and a key potato-growing region.

He cultivated potatoes on 18 bighas of land this year, down from 22 bighas last year due to financial losses.

In Lalmonirhat and four other northern districts — Kurigram, Rangpur, Gaibandha and Nilphamari — potatoes have been cultivated on 110,700 hectares of land.

Munshiganj, one of the leading potato-producing districts, saw potatoes cultivated on approximately 34,758 hectares in the 2025-26 season, 100 hectares less than the previous year.

Anwar Hossain, a farmer from Panchar in Munshiganj sadar, said he planted potatoes on 4 bighas of land this year, compared to 15 bighas last year after incurring huge losses.

"I'm really worried about a further

slump in price this year," he said.

Tozammel Hossain, a farmer from Balakur village in Joypurhat, said he deliberately delayed harvesting in hopes of securing a better price.

"But I will still incur a loss of at least Tk 8,000 to Tk 10,000 per bigha at the current price, despite an increased yield compared to last year," he said.

Another farmer from the same village, Md Mukul, said, "I invested Tk 70,000 in 80 decimals of land, borrowing Tk 50,000 from an NGO. I harvested 240 maunds of potatoes, but if I sell at the current price, I can't even recover the costs, let alone repay my debt."

Afzal Hossain, a vegetable wholesaler at Rangpur Poura Market, said potatoes were being sold at Tk 13-14 per kg, while traders were purchasing from farmers at Tk 9-10 per kg.

"Prices are gradually declining," he added.

Trader Rostam Ali of Tilakpur Haat, a major potato market in Akkelpur upazila of Joypurhat, said on February 18 high yielding potatoes were selling for Tk 300-340 per maund, while red potatoes of the Rumana variety fetched Tk 450.

"Every day I am buying three trucks of potatoes, but prices are much lower than last year and are continuing to drop daily," he said.

Fazlul Haque, a seasonal potato trader in Gobindaganj, Gaibandha, echoed Rostam.

Ratan Kumar Ray, acting Agricultural Marketing Officer of Joypurhat district, said market prices over the past month ranged from Tk 300 to Tk 350 per maund.

"At this same time last year, the price was Tk 500 per maund," he added.

Abu Taher, Agricultural Marketing Officer of Bogura district, said farmers had been selling high-yielding potatoes directly from the field for Tk 280-300 per maund over the past month, compared to more than Tk 560 per maund at the same time last year.

Additional Director Sirajul Islam of the Rangpur Regional Office, DAE, said farmers achieved expected yields due to favourable weather this year but remained deeply disappointed by

the low market prices.

"If potatoes cannot be exported abroad, farmers will face extreme anxiety over their produce again this year," he said.

According to agriculture ministry data, potato exports from Bangladesh have not exceeded 62,000 tonnes in the last five years. In the 2020-21 fiscal year, only 51,543 tonnes were exported, while in 2024-25 exports reached 62,135 tonnes.

Asked about managing surplus potatoes and the continuous losses faced by farmers, Abdur Rahim, director general of the DAE, told The Daily Star, "This year, favourable weather and low pest infestation led to a bumper harvest. However, we now have a potato surplus. This excess must be exported."

He blamed high transportation costs as a major hurdle to exports.

"Special care must be given to potato varieties that are in high demand abroad. We will urge the new government to prioritise potato exports — we are working on it," he said.

The DG also stressed the need to increase storage facilities to prevent surplus produce from going to waste.

Jahangir Alam Khan, an agricultural economist and former director general of the Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute, said, "In terms of both consumption and production, potato is the second most important crop in Bangladesh. If farmers repeatedly fail to get fair prices during the peak season, they will be discouraged from production."

"To save farmers from losses, the government could initiate potato procurement and storage, similar to how they purchase rice and paddy every year. These potatoes could be sold year-round alongside TCB products. Additionally, the government could release these stocks into the open market if prices skyrocket later," he suggested.

Khan further recommended that Bangladeshi embassies abroad should work on capturing international markets.

[Our Lalmonirhat Correspondent S Dilip Roy and Munshiganj Correspondent Tanjil Hasan contributed to this report]

## Kabul shakes as 5.8-quake hits eastern Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A strong earthquake rocked eastern Afghanistan including the capital Kabul yesterday, AFP journalists and residents said.

The 5.8 magnitude quake struck a mountainous area around 130 kilometres (80 miles) northeast of Kabul, the United States Geological Survey said.

The epicentre was near several remote villages and struck at 5:39 pm (1309 GMT), just as people in the Muslim-majority country were sitting down to break their Ramadan fast.

"We were waiting to do our iftars, a heavy earthquake shook us. It was very strong, it went on for almost 30 seconds," said Zilgay Talabi, a resident of Khenj district near of the

epicentre.

"Everyone was horrified and scared," Talabi told AFP, saying he feared "landslides and avalanches" may follow. Power was briefly cut in parts of the capital, while east of Kabul an AFP journalist in Nangarhar province also felt it.

Earthquakes are common in Afghanistan, particularly along the Hindu Kush mountain range, near where the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates meet.

Haqmal Saad, spokesman for the Panjshir province police, described the quake as "very strong" and said the force was "gathering information on the ground".

Mohibullah Jahid, head of Panjshir Natural Disaster Management

agency, told AFP he was in touch with several officials in the area.

The district governor had told him there were reports of "minor damage, such as cracks in the walls, but we have not received anything serious, such as the collapse of houses or anything similar", Jahid said.

Residents in Bamiyan and Wardak provinces, west of Kabul, told AFP they also felt the earthquake.

In Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, rescue service official Bilal Ahmad Faizi said the quake was felt in border areas.

In August last year, a shallow 6.0 magnitude quake in the country's east wiped out mountainside villages and killed more than 2,200 people.

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