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China's slowdown deepens as investment falls; retail sales hit post-COVID low in Nov

Beijing: China's investment continued to decline in November, while retail sales experienced their slowest growth since the government lifted strict COVID-19 restrictions, as reported by The Epoch Times (TET). Industrial output increased by 4.8 per cent year over year in November, a deceleration compared to the 4.9 per cent rise reported in October, according to the National Bureau of Statistics of China. This growth fell short of the economists' forecast of 5 per cent and represents the slowest growth since August 2024.

Baloch Voice for Justice condemns enforced disappearance of Hajra Baloch

Balochistan: Baloch Voice for Justice has strongly condemned the enforced disappearance of Hajra Baloch, the wife of Sanaullah Baloch, alleging that she was unlawfully detained by Pakistani forces, including the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) and other security agencies, from the Daru Hotel area of Hub Chowki in Balochistan. In a statement, the rights group said Hajra Baloch's detention and subsequent disappearance constitute a clear violation of fundamental rights and due process. Describing the incident as a serious crime under international human rights law, Baloch Voice for Justice said such actions reflect a growing trend of repression in the region.

Study flags widespread labour rights violations in Karachi

Karachi: A recent study has shown that labour rights violations are widespread in major textile factories in Karachi and Faisalabad, which produce healthcare exports for Europe, according to a report by Dawn. The 52-page report "Public money, private harm: The role of EU procurement in perpetuating labour violations: lessons from Pakistan and Sweden" was carried out in collaboration with Swedwatch and local organisations, including AwazCDS-Pakistan and NowCommunities, and is based on testimonies from textile workers in Karachi and Faisalabad.

“Rich and powerful men will be held accountable,” says Ro Khanna

Washington: American politicians and public are awaiting the release of the infamous Epstein Files even as Democrats on the House Oversight Committee released another collection of images from Jeffrey Epstein's estate. The full tranche of files are expected to be released on the midnight of Friday. US representative from California's 17th congressional district, Ro Khanna said that finally rich men who covered up for abuse would be held accountable once the tranche of files are released.

TikTok signs deal to sell its US entity to American investors

New York: TikTok has signed the deal backed by US President Donald Trump to sell its US assets to a group of American investors, CEO Shou Chew told employees in a memo on Thursday (local time), as per CNN. Although the transaction is not yet complete, the move brings TikTok one step closer to securing its long-term future in the United States. It comes after a law passed last year required that the US version of the app be spun off from its parent company, ByteDance, or be banned in the United States.

Earthquake of magnitude 4.1 strikes Afghanistan

Kabul: An earthquake of magnitude 4.1 struck Afghanistan on Friday, s statement by the National Center for Seismology (NCS) said. The earthquake occurred at a shallow depth of 10km, making it susceptible to aftershocks. In a post on X, the NCS said, "EQ of M: 4.1, On: 19/12/2025 00:14:48 IST, Lat: 36.76 N, Long: 72.08 E, Depth: 10 Km, Location: Afghanistan."

Rahul, Olaf Scholz hold talks on global affairs and India-Germany ties

Berlin (UNI)

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, held a luncheon meeting with former German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, where the two leaders discussed global affairs, trade, and strategies to strengthen India-Germany relations in a rapidly changing world.

Rahul Gandhi has been in Germany since December 15. During his visit, he engaged with the Indian diaspora, participating in programs organised by the Indian Overseas Congress and meeting community members to discuss various issues. He also visited the BMW headquarters, sharing videos and photos of BMW's adventure bikes on social media.

Earlier in his trip, Gandhi addressed students, scholars, and academics at the Hertie School in Berlin. He spoke on leadership, democracy, and global responsibility, reflecting on a world undergoing transitions in power and sharing his perspectives

Russia, Ukraine carry out new exchange of bodies

Moscow/Kyiv: Ukraine and Russia have carried out a new exchange of bodies of dead soldiers, Ukrainian and Russian officials said on Friday.

Kremlin aide Vladimir Medinsky said Russia had handed over to Ukraine the remains of 1,000 Ukrainian servicemen and had received the bodies of 26 Russian soldiers from Kyiv.

Ukrainian officials confirmed that Kyiv had received 1,003 bodies of killed servicemen from Russia.

They said that investigators and experts would work to conduct all necessary examinations and identify them.

Ukraine's prisoner-of-war coordination center posted on the Telegram app pictures of several large trucks and people in protective overalls checking bodies in white sacks.

H3N2 remains dominant flu strain in China

Beijing (UNI/Sputnik)

The A(H3N2) influenza subtype has remained the dominant flu strain since late March in China, accounting for 87.1 percent of all flu-like outbreaks, a Sputnik correspondent has learned after analyzing data from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

China recorded 6,499 influenza outbreaks involving 10 or more people from March 31 to December 14, marking a year-on-year increase of 1,675 percent year-on-year increase compared to the 366 outbreaks recorded during the same period in 2024.

According to data from China's CDC, epidemiological tracking shows the current influenza wave



on the state of Indian democracy. He underscored the importance of inclusive and equitable education and emphasized the need for stronger global cooperation to tackle struc-

tural inequalities.

In addition to these engagements, Gandhi met leaders and workers of the Indian Overseas Congress. He will be in Germany till December 20.

Trump signs defense bill pressuring Pentagon to release Venezuela strike footage

Washington (UNI)

US President Donald Trump on Thursday signed into law the annual defense policy bill, which includes a provision pressuring the Pentagon to release footage of US strikes targeting alleged drug boats near Venezuela.

The US Senate on Wednesday passed the USD 901 billion National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2026.

The bipartisan bill, approved 77-20 in the Senate and 312-112 in the House, includes a 3.8-4 percent military pay raise, boosts arms production, and authorizes USD 400 million annually for weapons for Ukraine.

It also maintains US troop levels in Europe and South Korea with allied consultation. Key provisions



include an overhaul of Pentagon procurement processes, development of the Golden Dome missile defense system, and pressure on Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to

French lawmakers fail to agree budget compromise

Paris: French lawmakers failed on Friday to hammer out a compromise 2026 budget bill, making special legislation likely to roll over spending limits into the new year in the absence of a proper budget.

Members of a joint committee of lawmakers from both houses threw in the towel after less than an hour of talks to agree a budget bill.

Prime Minister Sebastian Lecornu said he would consult with key political leaders on Monday on the steps to be taken, adding that parliament would now not be able to vote on a budget before the end of the year.

The collapse of the talks is likely to force Lecornu to seek emergency legislation to allow spending, tax collection and borrowing in the new year until a proper budget can be agreed.



rating security environment in Gaza, where both sides continue to violate the ceasefire, with many long-term

outstanding issues remaining unresolved.

In an effort to address these con-

Gunman in Brown University shooting found dead

Agencies, Boston/Providence, Rhode Island

The suspect in last weekend's mass shooting at Brown University is dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, with investigators certain he also killed a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor two days later, officials said on Thursday.

The gunman, identified as Portuguese national Claudio Neves Valente, 48, was found dead Thursday night in a storage rental facility in Salem, New Hampshire, where he had rented a unit last month, officials said.

Valente attended Brown University more than two decades ago as a Ph.D. student in physics and was a former classmate in Portugal of slain



MIT professor Nuno Loureiro, 47. Despite those links, authorities said that his motive in the killings re-

mains a mystery.

"I don't think we have any idea why now, or why Brown, or why these students, why this classroom," said Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha, at a Thursday night press conference in Providence, where the university is located.

Valente entered a building used for Brown's engineering and physics programs on December 13 and fired at least 44 rounds from his 9 mm pistol, killing two students and injuring another nine, according to the Providence police affidavit for his arrest.

Then, officials say, he fatally shot Loureiro inside his home before disappearing and leading investigators on a manhunt that stretched over five days.

Putin signals no compromise on Ukraine at annual press marathon

Agencies, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that Russia's terms for ending the war in Ukraine were unchanged from those he laid out in June 2024, offering no sign of compromise as the United States pushes hard for a settlement to the conflict.

Putin set out the Kremlin's stance in the opening moments of his annual end-of-year press conference, a marathon event that typically runs for some four hours.

He said he did not see readiness on the Ukrainian side to agree a peace deal, but there were "certain signals" it was willing to engage in dialogue.

"The only thing I want to say is that we have always said this: we are ready and willing to end this conflict peacefully, based on the principles I outlined last June at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and by addressing the root causes that led to this crisis," Putin said.

He was referring to a speech 18 months ago in which he demanded that Ukraine abandon its ambition of joining the NATO military alliance and withdraw entirely from four regions that Russia has claimed as its own territory.

Putin laid out a detailed assess-



ment of the battlefield situation, saying Russia was advancing along the entire front line and Ukrainian forces were in retreat.

Ukraine says Russian gains are incremental and have come at the cost of huge casualties.

It says it is fighting back in locations such as Kupiansk in the northeast, which Russia said it had captured last month.

Kyiv has long called for a ceasefire and said it does not believe that Putin is serious about seeking peace. Russia says it is Ukraine that is refusing to come to the table.

Myanmar arrests hundreds under new election law ahead of December vote

Myanmar: Myanmar's junta said this week it had arrested more than 200 people under a new law against undermining elections, drawing criticism from a monitoring group that the legislation is being used to block criticism of the regime and prevent scrutiny.

The military government is set to begin a general election on December 28, the first since a 2021 coup overthrew the civilian administration.

The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), which served as an accredited international observer during the 2015 and 2020 polls, said in an assessment that the election protection law enacted by the junta in July is a major concern.

Israel charges Russian with allegedly spying for Iran

Agencies, Jerusalem

Israel has charged a Russian citizen with spying for Iran, including photographing Israeli ports and infrastructure under the direction of Iranian intelligence agencies, Israel's domestic security agency the Shin Bet said on Friday.

The Russian individual was then paid in digital currency, the agency said in a joint statement.

A decades-long shadow war between Israel and Iran escalated into a direct war in June when Israel struck various targets inside Iran, including through operations that relied on Mossad commandos being deployed deep inside the country.

Israel has arrested dozens of citizens who allegedly spied for Iran, in

what sources told Reuters has been Tehran's biggest effort in decades to infiltrate its arch foe.

The arrests followed repeated efforts by Iranian intelligence operatives over the years to recruit ordinary Israelis to gather intelligence and carry out attacks in exchange for money.

In a statement sent to media in 2024 following a wave of arrests by Israel of Jewish citizens suspected of spying for Iran, Iran's U.N. mission did not confirm or deny seeking to recruit Israelis and said that "from a logical standpoint" any such efforts by Iranian intelligence services would focus on non-Iranian and non-Muslim individuals to lessen suspicion.

Pakistani nationals deported, stopped over suspected illegal travel

Islamabad: Thousands of Pakistanis have been deported from different countries for begging, while tens of thousands were stopped at airports this year over suspected illegal travel attempts, Geo News reported.

During the session of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Rights, chaired by Agha Rafiullah, the Director General of the FIA, Riffat Mukhtar Raja, detailed enforcement actions and recent trends.

He informed the committee that 51,000 Pakistanis were denied entry this year.

Further, he reported that Saudi Arabia had the highest rate of deportations, sending back 24,000 individuals for begging.

Most French citizens support Farmers' protests

Paris (UNI/SPUTNIK)

The majority of French citizens support the farmers' protests, which began amid an outbreak of lumpy skin disease, and do not trust the government and its policy on resolving the crisis caused by the unrest, according to a study conducted by Odoxa and Backbone Consulting for the Figaro newspaper.

According to the survey results, 78 percent of respondents support the farmers' protests, which are centered in the southwestern part of the country. The same number of respondents

are convinced that Prime Minister Sebastian Lecornu's government has "failed" to deal with the crisis since it began, the survey showed.

The opinion that the government is unable to cope with the current situation is shared by the majority of respondents who sympathize with almost all of the country's leading political parties, the report said. Only among supporters of French President Emmanuel Macron's centrist Renaissance party does a majority (62 percent) believe that the government is handling the crisis, it added.

