

The Washington Post

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RE V1 V2 V3 V4



Snow 36/20 • Tomorrow: Mostly sunny, cold 32/15 **B18**

Democracy Dies in Darkness

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2026 • \$4

U.S. downs Iran drone that neared warship

Aircraft carrier is part of military buildup to press Tehran on nuclear aims

BY ALEX HORTON,
DAN LAMOTHE
AND JOHN HUDSON

U.S. forces shot down an Iranian drone approaching the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea, officials said Tuesday, escalatory moves as Washington floods the region with military hardware amid renewed tensions with Tehran.

The incident occurred about 500 miles from Iran's southern coast. U.S. officials identified the drone as a Shahed-139, a variant in a class of one-way attack drones that crash into targets and detonate onboard explosives. It was flying with "unclear intent" and approached the carrier despite U.S. personnel using unspecified de-escalatory measures, according to Navy Capt. Tim Hawkins, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the region.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News the drone was "acting aggressively" when it approached the carrier.

An F-35C fighter jet shot down the drone, Hawkins said. No American personnel were injured, and no equipment was damaged, he said.

The U.S. military has deployed dozens of aircraft to bases operating in the region. **SEE IRAN ON A12**

Protests in Iran: High death toll has few recent parallels. **A12**

Israeli tech firms cash in on years of warfare

Demand rises sharply for their weapons tested in Gaza, Iran and Lebanon

BY SHIRA RUBIN

TEL AVIV — By the time the Israeli start-up Kela opened its doors in 2024, its employees had already been serving as reservists on Israel's battlefields.

Once in the office, the team at the military tech firm began experimenting with solutions for overcoming the kinds of problems they'd personally seen drones encounter in war zones like Lebanon, including electronic jamming and signal loss. The employees configured fiber-optic drone prototypes that were then rapidly dispatched to troops on the front lines and pitched to foreign militaries looking for battle-tested technology.

"It was iteration under fire," said Hamutal Meridor, Kela's president, referring to the process of testing and ironing out kinks in tech products. Such technology, she said, can help armies keep pace with a "battlefield which is moving at the speed of software." Last year, the firm, which is also developing a platform to integrate military and **SEE ISRAEL ON A13**



MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

"This is no time to play games with that funding," House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) said of money for Homeland Security.

Shutdown ends, with ICE talks to come

BY RILEY BEGGIN
AND KADIA GOBA

The U.S. House passed a set of spending bills Tuesday to end the partial government shutdown while buying time for bipartisan negotiations over new accountability measures for immigration enforcement.

President Donald Trump later signed them into law, reopening the government, which had partially closed early Saturday. The deal kicks off a 10-day sprint for Republicans and Democrats to

Congress has till Feb. 13 to reach deal on DHS policy changes, funding

agree on policy changes regarding how Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents operate during immigration raids.

If they do not reach consensus in time, the Department of Homeland Security — including the Transportation Security Ad-

ministration and the Federal Emergency Management Agency — will shut down on Feb. 14. ICE operations and the agency's other immigration efforts could continue because of the \$170 billion appropriated for Homeland Security under the Republican tax and spending law passed last year.

"ICE and the Department of Homeland Security need to dramatically change," House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-New York) told reporters Monday. "And absent that, then a

full-year appropriations bill is in deep trouble."

The vote was 217-214. House Democrats pledged not to help House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) kick off the process of considering the legislation, though 21 voted for the final bill Tuesday afternoon. Twenty-
SEE SHUTDOWN ON A5

Forum on Hill: Citizens recount assaults and shootings by ICE. **A6**

Measles: Cases are confirmed at a family detention center in Texas. **A6**

Big questions remain after Epstein file disclosures

BY MERYL KORNFIELD

Last Friday, the Justice Department finalized its release of files related to sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, publishing more than 3 million documents to its website.

But the Trump administration won't release millions of other files in its possession and many other records were released with

heavy redactions, exacerbating concerns from those critical of the administration who argue the releases have not answered some of the most significant questions around Epstein's sexual abuse of young girls, his interactions with rich and powerful people and the ways he avoided any serious legal consequences despite years of scrutiny.

The disclosure of most of the

government's Epstein documents was forced by the bipartisan Epstein Files Transparency Act. Reps. Ro Khanna (D-California) and Thomas Massie (R-Kentucky), the architects of that law, told The Washington Post that they have spoken to victims who have not yet seen their statements to law enforcement released to the public, raising their concerns that the disclosure has been in-

complete. The two argued that the redactions appeared to not comply with the law, which requires that no document should be withheld or redacted based on "embarrassment, reputational harm, or political sensitivity." Officials should instead make re-
SEE EPSTEIN ON A6

Crypto: DOJ files show Epstein invested in Coinbase in 2014. **A2**



BRYAN ANSELM/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Pampered to perfection at the Westminster dog show

Old English sheepdogs are groomed during the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in New York on Monday, ahead of the best in show being selected Tuesday night. More than 3,000 dogs were competing in various events during the 150th annual show. **Story, B1**

Musk wanted to hook users; his chatbot got more sexual

A look inside xAI as the company relaxed its controls on Grok, setting off internal concerns

BY FAIZ SIDDIQUI,
NITASHA TIKU
AND ELIZABETH DWOSKIN

Weeks before Elon Musk officially left his perch in government last spring, employees on the human data team of his artificial intelligence start-up xAI received a startling waiver from their employer, asking them to pledge to work with profane content, including sexual material.

Their jobs would require being exposed to "sensitive, violent, sexual and/or other offensive or disturbing content," the waiver said, emphasizing that such content "may be disturbing, traumatizing, and/or cause you psychological stress."

The waiver — which two former employees confirmed receiving, and a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Post

— was alarming to some members on the team, who had been hired to help shape how xAI's chatbot Grok responds to users. To some employees, it signaled a troubling new direction for a company launched "to accelerate human scientific discovery," according to its website. Maybe now, they said they thought, it was willing to produce whatever content might attract and keep users.

Their concerns proved prescient, the employees said. In the next few months, team members were suddenly exposed to a stream of sexually charged audio, **SEE GROK ON A10**

Merger: Musk's SpaceX acquires xAI, creating a giant private firm. **A2**

Raid at X: Alleged content-related offenses are probed in France. **A13**

IN THE NEWS

Threat to Scouting The Pentagon warned the organization, formerly known as the Boy Scouts, to make "core value reforms" or risk losing its partnership with the military. **A7**

Grid attack Russia struck Ukraine's power sector a day after President Donald Trump reiterated Moscow had agreed to a pause. **A11**

THE NATION

A judge extended temporary protected status for Haitians in an ongoing lawsuit. **A4**

Federal officers in Minneapolis will start wearing body cameras, Kristi L. Noem said. **A4**

THE WORLD

The stepson of Norway's crown prince is on trial on 38 charges, including rape. **A12**

A 13-year-old Australian swam miles to alert rescuers after his family was stranded at sea. **A14**

THE ECONOMY

Josh D'Amaro will succeed Bob Iger as CEO of the Walt Disney Co., capping more than a year of internal jockeying. **A18**

PepsiCo will cut the prices of Lay's, Doritos, Cheetos and more amid consumer complaints of rising prices. **A18**

STYLE

"The Muppet Show" is back with an unapologetically nostalgic 50th-anniversary special. **B1**

A couples comedy, a teen horror and a few documentaries were among the highlights at the Sundance Film Festival, the last to be held in Park City, Utah. **B1**

SPORTS

Eileen Shiffrin is a parent, a coach, an advocate and a friend for star U.S. skier Mikaela Shiffrin — and she's back at the Olympics. **B7**

THE REGION

A female calf is the first Asian elephant to be born at the National Zoo in almost 25 years. **B13**

BUSINESS NEWS.....A18
COMICS.....B4
OBITUARIES.....B17
OPINION PAGES.....A16
TELEVISION.....B6
WORLD NEWS.....A11

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