

Biden says US 'stronger' on world stage now than it has been for decades

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) President Joe Biden, in a swansong foreign policy speech a week before Donald Trump's White House comeback, has said that America is stronger on the global stage than it has been for decades.

The outgoing US president took aim at Russia, China and Iran, and urged the West to maintain support for Ukraine in an address at the State Department setting out his international legacy.

But Biden's unspoken target was Trump as he touted his rebuilding of international alliances over the last four years after his Republican rival's chaotic first term. "The United States is winning the worldwide competition compared to four years ago," said Biden, after diplomats at the State Department gave him a standing ovation.

"America is stronger. Our alliances are stronger, our adversaries and competitors are weaker."

The Democrat added that America's ties with its allies were the strongest "in decades," and said partners in the Nato military alliance were now "paying their fair share". Trump has repeatedly criticised Nato countries, at one point saying he would encourage Russia to do "whatever the hell it wants" to allies that did not pay their way. The incoming president has also previously expressed admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin, but Biden mocked Putin over the progress of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Nigeria's air force says it killed 16 civilians by mistake

MAIDUGURI: (News Desk) Nigeria's air force said it was investigating reports of civilian casualties during a weekend air strike that targeted armed gangs in the northwest, the latest military operation where innocent people may have been accidentally killed.

The army and air force have increasingly used aerial assaults against the growing threat in the northwest and central region posed by armed criminal gangs, known locally as bandits, that kill villagers and carry out mass kidnappings.

Nigerian Air Force (NAF) spokesperson Air Vice Marshal Olusola Akinboyeva said late on Sunday an air strike in northwestern Zamfara state on Saturday had targeted bandits, and that the air force had managed to rescue kidnapped victims. But residents said that at least 15 civilians, including local security guards, were killed.

An investigation into the matter was being conducted, Akinboyeva said in a statement. Air strikes have inadvertently killed civilians before. In December, at least 10 people were killed after a military fighter jet pursuing bandits mistakenly bombed civilians in northwestern Sokoto state. Akinboyeva said the NAF would work to minimise and prevent any harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure in its operations. Nigeria's Chief of Defence Staff General Christopher Musa told local television on Monday that the military did not intentionally target civilians and that the Zamfara incident would be fully investigated.

Geopolitics making cybersecurity challenges more complex: World

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The global cybersecurity challenges have become more profound and complex due to geopolitical tensions, a new World Economic Forum (WEF) report says.

'Global Cybersecurity Outlook 2025' published on Monday said cybersecurity is entering an era of unprecedented complexity as geopolitical tensions are intensifying, new technologies are emerging at breakneck speed and threats are becoming more sophisticated. Nearly 60 per cent of organisations stated that geopolitical tensions have affected their cybersecurity strategy, as per the report.

The geopolitical turmoil has also affected the perception of risks, with one in three CEOs citing cyber espionage and loss of sensitive information / intellectual property (IP) theft as their top concern. Around 45pc cyber leaders expressed concerns about the disruption of operations and business processes. "The rapid adoption of emerging technologies is contributing to new vulnerabilities and new threats."

The report called for a shift in perspective from cybersecurity to enhanced cyber resilience — the ability to mitigate the impact of significant cyber incidents on its goals and objectives.

The WEF report underscored the importance of evaluating cyber risks from a socioeconomic perspective to effectively allocate resources and strengthen resilience against these threats.

At the same time, expanding regulatory demands, vulnerabilities in interwoven supply chains and a widening cyber skills gap are compounding the challenges organisations face in staying secure, the report said.

The reports added that 66pc of organisations expect artificial intelligence to have the most significant impact on cybersecurity in years to come and 37pc reported having processes in place to assess the security of AI tools before deployment.



File: This combination of pictures created on November 14, 2024 shows US President-elect Donald Trump on November 13, 2024, and Special Counsel Jack Smith

Special counsel report finds Donald Trump engaged in 'criminal effort' to overturn 2020 US

Washington (News Desk) US Special Counsel Jack Smith concluded that Donald Trump engaged in an "unprecedented criminal effort" to hold on to power after losing the 2020 election, but was thwarted in bringing the case to trial by the president-elect's November election victory, according to a report published on Tuesday. The report details Smith's decision to

bring a four-count indictment against Trump, accusing him of plotting to obstruct the collection and certification of votes following his 2020 defeat by Democratic President Joe Biden. It concludes that the evidence would have been enough to convict Trump at trial, but his imminent return to the presidency, set for Jan 20, made that impossible. Smith, who has faced relent-

less criticism from Trump, also defended his investigation and the prosecutors who worked on it. "The claim from Mr Trump that my decisions as a prosecutor were influenced or directed by the Biden administration or other political actors is, in a word, laughable," Smith wrote in a letter detailing his report. After the release, Trump, in a post on his Truth Social site,

called Smith a "lamebrain prosecutor who was unable to get his case tried before the election." Trump's lawyers, in a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland made public by the Justice Department, called the report a "politically-motivated attack" and said releasing it ahead of Trump's return to the White House would harm the presidential transition.

Casualties among Tibetan clergy unknown as last week's earthquake shook monasteries

Tibetan (News Desk) At least two Tibetan Buddhism monastic centres were severely damaged in Tibet with an unknown number of monks and nuns hurt, according to the few state media reports on the damage to religious sites since last week's powerful earthquake.

The magnitude 6.8 quake reduced to rubble roofs and walls at a monastery

and a nunnery about 15 kilometres east of the epicentre in Tingri county, China Tibet Online reported on Sunday.

Buddhist monasteries and nunneries are key to Tibet's cultural identity. Families send at least one male child to a monastery for studies, while monks are a source of blessings and council in communities.

Authorities have yet to reveal how many monasteries and nunneries were damaged though they were quick to tally more than 3,600 collapsed houses. It was also unclear if the clergy were among the 126 people who died in a headcount that has not changed since the day of the January 7 quake. The violent shaking trapped several of Dzongbu Temple's nuns,

who were later pulled out from underneath the collapsed structure, China Tibet Online said. Rescuers later moved them to makeshift facilities outside a less-damaged monastery. The nearby Sengar Chode Monastery, founded in 1541, is home to a number of relics, which have since been moved into the custody of county officials, Global Times reported.



INDIAN Prime Minister Narendra Modi (second left) with Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari (second right) and chief minister of occupied Kashmir Omar Abdullah (right) during inauguration of the Sonamarg tunnel.

Indian PM opens tunnel to zones near China, Pakistan

SRINAGAR: (News Desk) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a strategic Himalayan road tunnel on Monday, pushing all-weather access northwards towards contested high-altitude border zones with China and Pakistan. The Z-Morh or Sonmarg tunnel, stretching 6.4km beneath a treacherous mountain pass cut off by

snow for between four to six months a year, is part of a wider infrastructure drive in border zones. It helps connect India-held Kashmir with Ladakh, acting as a stepping stone in opening the Srinagar-Leh Highway all year round. "With the opening of the tunnel here, connectivity will significantly improve," Modi said, wrapped in a jacket

from the freezing cold after cutting the ribbon on the \$313 million project that has taken a decade to construct. India and China, the world's two most populous nations, are intense rivals competing for strategic influence across South Asia, and their 3,500km shared frontier has been a perennial source of tension. Their troops clashed in

2020, killing at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers, and forces from both sides today face off across contested high-altitude borderlands. However, Beijing and New Delhi agreed in October on patrols in disputed areas, shortly before a rare formal meeting — the first in five years — between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Modi.

Climate activists paint over Darwin's grave at Westminster Abbey

LONDON: (News Desk) Climate activists from Just Stop Oil painted over the grave of British naturalist Charles Darwin at Westminster Abbey on Monday. Two activists entered Westminster Abbey — Britain's site for royal weddings, coronations, burials and a major tourist attraction — and used spray chalk on Darwin's grave, the campaign group said in a statement.

The activists wrote "1.5 is dead" in orange over the surface of the white marble gravestone — a reference to recent news that global temperatures in 2024 had exceeded 1.5 Celsius above the pre-industrial era for the first time.

"We have passed the 1.5 degree threshold that was supposed to keep us safe," one of the activists said. "Darwin would be turning in his grave to know we are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction." Darwin, best known for his theory of evolution by natural selection, died in 1882. He is buried in Westminster Abbey's Scientists' Corner, where Isaac Newton and Stephen Hawking are also buried. The church confirmed the incident in a statement. "The Abbeys conservators are taking immediate action to clean the memorial and do not anticipate that there will be any permanent damage," a spokeswoman said.

'Breakthrough' in talks as Gaza truce deal draft finalised

DOHA: (News Desk) Mediator Qatar gave Israel and Hamas a final draft of a deal to end the war in Gaza on Monday, after a midnight "breakthrough" in talks attended by US President-elect Donald Trump's envoy, an official briefed on the negotiations said.

The official said the text for a ceasefire and the release of hostages was hammered out at talks in Doha which included the chiefs of Israel's Mossad and Shin Bet spy agencies and Qatar's prime minister as well Steve Witkoff, who will become US envoy when Trump takes office next week. Officials from the outgoing US administration are also thought to have participated. "The next 24 hours will be pivotal to reaching the deal," the official said.

Israel's Kan radio, citing an Israeli official, reported on Monday that Israeli and Hamas delegations in Qatar had received a draft and that the Israeli delegation had briefed Israel's leaders. Israel, Hamas and the foreign ministry of Qatar did not respond to requests for confirmation or comment. A senior Israeli official said a deal could be sealed within a few days if Hamas replies to a proposal. A Palestinian official close to the talks said information from Doha was "very promising", adding: "Gaps were being narrowed and there is a big push toward an agreement if all goes well to the end." The United States, Qatar and Egypt have worked for more than a year on talks to end the war in Gaza.

Djokovic joins Alcaraz, Sinner in Australian Open second round

MELBOURNE: (News Desk) Novak Djokovic survived a scare in his quest for tennis history before following Carlos Alcaraz and defending champion Jannik Sinner into the second round of the Australian Open on Monday.

But Greek former finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas and home favourite Nick Kyrgios both fell at the first hurdle, with the combustible Australian going out swearing and in pain. In the women's draw, Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff powered through with minimum fuss as they launched their bids to dethrone two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka. Another winner was two-time Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka, who defeated France's Caroline Garcia 6-3, 3-6, 6-3. On a blockbuster second day in Melbourne, Djokovic lost the first set to 107th-ranked American Nishesh Basavareddy in the prime-time evening match on Rod Laver Arena. But the Serbian great, hoping to roll back the years and win an 11th Australian Open and record 25th Grand Slam singles title, recovered to ease through 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

Barcelona thrash Real to clinch Spanish Super Cup

JEDDAH: (News Desk) Barcelona came from an early goal down to beat Real Madrid 5-2 in the Spanish Super Cup final on Sunday, scoring four goals in a dominant first half and surviving having their goalkeeper sent off to clinch a record-extending 15th trophy.

Lamine Yamal, Robert Lewandowski, Raphinha and Alejandro Balde were all on target before halftime, after French forward Kylian Mbappe put Real in front in the fifth minute. Raphinha grabbed another in the second half while Rodrygo scored for Real.

Barcelona put in a clinical display to lift their first trophy in more than a year, having no silverware to show for last season.

"A goal for big clubs is always to win titles, that's why we work hard. But now we have to show it in the next games," Hansi Flick told a press conference after winning his first trophy as Barca coach.

"Real made many mistakes, and we knew how to take advantage of them to control the match."

Barca prevented Real from winning their third title of the campaign, after they won the European Super Cup against Atalanta and beat Mexico's Pachuca to the Intercontinental Cup last month.

"In the first half we didn't play football, we hit long balls and that wasn't the idea," Real coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "I told the players that they can lose games, but not in the way we played in the first half. We defended badly and that cost us the game — they found their goals quite easily. We're sad, like all our fans, it's disappointing and we don't have to hide that... we have to look forwards, there's nothing else we can do." Mbappe earned an early advantage for the Spanish champions, finishing a solo run from around the halfway line with a shot inside the far post. But what looked like a dream start quickly turned into a nightmare for Ancelotti's men when Yamal levelled for Barca in the 22nd minute. Striker Lewandowski gave them the lead 14 minutes later from a penalty awarded for Eduardo Camavinga's foul on Gavi.

Sierra Leone declares public health emergency over mpox

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) Sierra Leone declared a public health emergency on Monday to combat mpox, announcing it was stepping up surveillance at its borders after confirming two cases of the deadly viral disease. The confirmation of two cases of mpox in the country has prompted immediate action as mandated by the public health act," Health Minister Austin Demby told reporters in Freetown.

"On behalf of the government of Sierra Leone, I am declaring a public health emergency." Last week Sierra Leone reported its first confirmed case of mpox since the world's highest alert level for the disease was raised last year. A second case has since been confirmed after a 21-year-old man showed symptoms on January 6, the National Public Health Agency said on social media Monday.

The public health emergency "allows us to act immediately to mobilise the resources needed to contain the disease, prevent further spread and provide care to those affected," the minister said. Demby also announced increased border surveillance and testing, as well as the launch of a national awareness campaign. He added that Sierra Leone's medical system was ready to respond

to cases, pointing to experience gained during the Ebola and Covid-19 outbreaks. "We urge all citizens to remain calm, stay informed and report any suspected cases promptly to healthcare authorities," Demby said. Mpox is caused by a virus from the same family as smallpox, manifesting in a high fever and skin lesions, called vesicles. First identified in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1970,

the disease had generally been confined to a dozen African countries but began to spread more widely in 2022, reaching developed countries where the virus had never previously circulated. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared its highest level of alert in 2024. Sierra Leone was one of the countries hardest hit by Ebola, which ravaged west Africa a decade ago in an epidemic killing some 4,000 people, includ-

ing nearly seven per cent of health workers, between 2014 and 2016. The public health emergency "allows us to act immediately to mobilise the resources needed to contain the disease, prevent further spread and provide care to those affected," the minister said. Demby also announced increased border surveillance and testing, as well as the launch of a national awareness campaign.