

## Trump vows to end 'American decline' at inauguration eve rally

Washington (News Desk) Donald Trump pledged a blitz of presidential actions to end "American decline," telling a fired-up inauguration eve rally on Sunday that he would crack down on woke ideology and immigration.

In a raucous campaign-style gathering in Washington, the 78-year-old Republican promised cheering supporters that he would act with "historic speed" from day one of his White House comeback.

"Tomorrow at noon, the curtain closes on four long years of American decline, and we begin a brand new day of American strength and prosperity," Trump told a packed sports arena.

"I will act with historic speed and strength and fix every single crisis facing our country."

Billionaire Trump was joined on stage by Elon Musk — the tech tycoon who will lead a major cost-cutting drive in his administration — and who vowed to make America strong "for centuries." Then at the end the rally Trump danced alongside the disco band Village People as they performed their 1970s hit YMCA, which became the unofficial anthem of his election campaign. Much of Trump's hour-long speech focused on immigration, driving home one of the dark messages that helped spur his remarkable victory in November's presidential election over Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris. "We're going to stop the invasion of our borders," added Trump, who has pledged to launch raids targeting undocumented migrants within days of taking office.

## China executes man who killed 35 in car rampage: state media

Hongkong (News Desk) China on Monday executed a man who killed 35 people in a car rampage in the southern city of Zhuhai in November, state media said. A court in the city "executed Fan Weiqiu in accordance with the execution order issued by the Supreme People's Court", state broadcaster CCTV said.

On November 11, 62-year-old Fan deliberately drove a small SUV through crowds of people exercising outside a sports complex. A delivery man (C) lays online orders of flower bouquets at a makeshift memorial outside the Zhuhai Sports Centre in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province on November 13, 2024, two days after 35 people were killed when a man drove a car into a crowd in one of the country's deadliest mass-casualty events in years.

He killed 35 and wounded 43, state media reported at the time, in China's deadliest attack since 2014.

Fan was detained at the scene with self-inflicted knife wounds and fell into a coma, police said at the time.

He was sentenced to death last month, with a court saying his motives "were extremely vile, the nature of the crime extremely egregious, the methods particularly cruel, and the consequences particularly severe, posing significant harm to society".

CCTV said on Monday that Zhuhai's public prosecutor "sent personnel to supervise [the execution] in accordance with the law".

## Displaced Gazans head home through rubble as truce begins

JERUSALEM: (News Desk) Thousands of displaced, war-weary Gazans set off across the devastated Palestinian territory to return to their homes on Sunday, after a long-awaited truce between Israel and Hamas went into effect following an initial delay.

The ceasefire began nearly three hours later than scheduled, during which time Israel's military said it was continuing to operate in Gaza, with the territory's civil defence agency reporting 19 people killed and 25 wounded in bombardments.

Thousands of Gazans carrying tents, clothes and their personal belongings were seen heading back to their homes, after more than 15 months of conflict that displaced the vast majority of the territory's population, in many cases more than once.

In the northern area of Jabalia, hundreds of Gazans streamed down a sandy path, returning to an apocalyptic landscape dotted with piles of rubble and destroyed buildings. And in the main southern city of Khan Yunis, people celebrated their pending homecoming.

"I'm very, very happy," said Wafa al-Habeel. "I want to go back and kiss the ground and the soil of Gaza. I am longing for Gaza (City) and longing for our loved ones." The truce had been scheduled to begin at 0630 GMT (8:30 am) but a last-minute dispute over the list of hostages to be freed on the first day led to the holdup.

The truce is intended to pave the way for a permanent end to the war, but a second phase has yet to be finalised. It follows a deal struck by mediators Qatar, the United States and Egypt after months of negotiations. "Full of hope" In Gaza City, well before the ceasefire went into effect, people were already celebrating, waving Palestinian flags in the street.

## UK teen pleads guilty to Southport girls' murder that triggered riots

London (News Desk) A teenager on Monday pleaded guilty to killing three young girls in a stabbing spree last year that sparked the UK's most violent riots in a decade.

On what was set to be the opening day of his trial, Axel Rudakubana, 18, admitted to murdering the three girls at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class last year in Southport, northwest England. The stabbings sent shock waves across the UK, triggering unrest and ri-

ots in more than a dozen English and Northern Irish towns and cities, including in Southport and Liverpool. Authorities blamed far-right agitators for fuelling violence, including by sharing misinformation claiming the alleged attacker was a Muslim asylum seeker.

Bebe King, six, Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, and Alice da Silva Aguiar, nine, were killed in the attack in the seaside resort near Liverpool on July 29, 2024.

Ten others were wounded, including eight children, in one of the country's worst mass stabbings in years.

Rudakubana admitted a total of 16 charges, including the three counts of murder, 10 counts of attempted murder and one count of possessing a blade.

He also admitted production of a biological toxin, ricin, as well as possessing an Al-Qaeda training manual, although the attack has not been treated as a terror incident.

Wearing a grey tracksuit and a surgical mask, the teenager refused to stand in court and did not speak except to say the word "guilty".

The judge ruled that he would be sentenced on Thursday.

In December, not guilty pleas had been entered on Rudakubana's behalf when he refused to speak in the court, and the case had been set for a four-week trial.

The unrest linked to the killings lasted several days, and saw far-right

rioters attack police, shops, hotels housing asylum seekers as well as mosques, with hundreds of participants subsequently arrested and charged.

Rudakubana was born in Wales to parents of Rwandan origin, and lived in Banks, a village northeast of Southport.

Despite being 17 years old at the time, restrictions on reporting Rudakubana's name were lifted in August due to concerns over the spread of misinformation.

referring to the female population of Afghanistan, were among the strongest public criticism in recent years by a Taliban official of the school closures, which Taliban sources and diplomats have previously told Reuters were put in place by the supreme spiritual leader Haibatullah Akhundzada despite some internal disagreement.

Tributes to Taylor Swift, then in the middle of her Eras tour, wrote on Instagram that she "was completely in shock" after the attack on the dance class at the start of the school holidays. The pop star reportedly met two of the survivors of the attack during her August shows in London. The UK's head of state King Charles III also travelled to Southport in August to meet with survivors, inspecting a sea of floral tributes laid outside the city's town hall.



US President Joe Biden shakes hands with General Mark A Milley, 20th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during the Armed Forces Farewell Tribute in his honour in Arlington, Virginia.

## Biden issues pardons to protect Milley, Fauci, others from Trump retaliation

Washington (News Desk) US President Joe Biden issued pre-emptive pardons on Monday for people Republican successor Donald Trump has targeted for retaliation, including former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley and former White House chief medical advisor Anthony Fauci. The pardon also

covers all lawmakers who served on the congressional select committee that investigated the January 6, 2021 storming of the Capitol by Trump supporters, and police officers who testified before it. Trump, who will return to the presidency later Monday, has repeatedly called for the prosecution of his perceived enemies

since winning the White House in November. Biden praised public servants as the "lifeblood of our democracy." Without mentioning Trump, he expressed alarm that some of them were subjected to threats and intimidation for doing their job. "These public servants have served our nation with honour and distinc-

tion and do not deserve to be the targets of unjustified and politically motivated prosecutions," Biden said in a statement. Trump in December backed a call for the FBI to investigate fellow Republican Liz Cheney over her role in leading Congress's probe of the January 6, 2021, assault on the US Capitol by his supporters.

## Indian rapist murderer of Kolkata doctor sentenced to life in prison

Delhi (News Desk) The rapist and murderer of an Indian doctor was sentenced to life in prison on Monday for a gruesome crime that sparked nationwide protests and widespread hospital strikes last year.

The family of the 31-year-old medic broke into tears saying they were "shocked" at the sentence and had hoped her mur-

derer would be hanged, for a case that highlighted the chronic issue of violence against women in the world's most populous country.

But Judge Anirban Das said the case did not deserve the death penalty as it was not "the rarest of the rare cases", and ordered that Sanjoy Roy must spend his life behind bars. The discovery of the train-

ee doctor's bloodied body at a government hospital in the eastern city of Kolkata in August 2024 sparked outrage.

The murder led to demands by doctors at government hospitals for additional security, with thousands of citizens in Kolkata and elsewhere in India joining doctors' protests in solidarity.

Roy, 33, the lone accused in the case, who had been a civic volunteer in the hospital, was arrested a day after the victim's body was discovered.

India's Supreme Court last year ordered a national task force to examine how to bolster security for healthcare workers, saying the brutality of the killing had "shocked the conscience of the nation".



US President-elect Donald Trump speaks at a MAGA victory rally at Capital One Arena in Washington, DC on January 19, one day ahead of his inauguration ceremony.

## Afghan Taliban deputy foreign minister calls for girls' high schools to open

Khost (News Desk) The Taliban's acting deputy foreign minister called on his senior leadership to open schools for Afghan girls, among the strongest public rebukes of a policy that has contributed to the international isolation of its rulers.

Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, who previously led a team of negotiators at

the Taliban's political office in Doha before US forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021, said in a speech at the weekend that restrictions on girls and women's education was not in line with Islamic Sharia law. "We request the leaders of the Islamic Emirate to open the doors of education," he said, according to local

broadcaster Tolo, referring to the Taliban's name for its administration. "In the time of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), the doors of knowledge were open to both men and women," he said. "Today, out of a population of forty million, we are committing injustice against twenty million people," he added,

referring to the female population of Afghanistan, were among the strongest public criticism in recent years by a Taliban official of the school closures, which Taliban sources and diplomats have previously told Reuters were put in place by the supreme spiritual leader Haibatullah Akhundzada despite some internal disagreement.

## Trump wants US to partly own TikTok, hints at delaying ban

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) Hours after TikTok went dark across the United States, President-elect Donald Trump called for the US to take part-ownership in TikTok and vowed to issue an executive order delaying a ban on the wildly popular app to allow time to "make a deal". Trump's announcement came on Sunday, as a deadline for its Chinese owners ByteDance to sell its US subsidiary to non-Chinese buyers lapsed. The law banning the app, however, includes a clause allowing for a 90-day delay if the White House can show progress toward a viable deal. ByteDance flatly refused any sale and TikTok stopped working for its 170 million American users late on Saturday before a law shutting it down on national security grounds took effect on Sunday. Outgoing President Joe Biden's administration said it would leave the matter to Trump, who takes office on Monday, and that it would not enforce any ban. "I will issue an executive order on Monday to extend the period of time before the law's prohibitions take effect, so that we can make a deal to protect our national security," Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

## UN races to feed one million Palestinians

ROME: (News Desk) The UN's World Food Programme said on Sunday it was moving full throttle to get food to as many Gazans as possible after border crossings reopened as part of a long-awaited ceasefire deal.

"We're trying to reach a million people within the shortest possible time," the WFP's Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau said, as the Rome-based UN agency's trucks began rolling into the strip.

"We're moving in with wheat flour, ready to eat meals, and we will be working all fronts trying to restock the bakeries," Skau said, adding the agency would attempt to provide nutritional supplements to the most malnourished.

An initial 42-day truce between Israel and Hamas is meant to enable a surge of sorely needed humanitarian aid into the Palestinian territory after 15 months of conflict. "The agreement is for 600 trucks a day... All the crossings will be open," Skau said. The first WFP trucks entered Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing in the south and through the Zikim crossing in the north, the agency said in a statement, as it began trying to pull "the war-ravaged territory back from starvation." "We have 150 trucks lined up for every day for the next at least 20 days," Skau said, adding that the WFP was "hopeful that the border crossings will be open and efficient".

## Champions Trophy preparations on schedule, PCB says

Lahore (News Desk) The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) allayed fears about the readiness of the venues for this year's Champions Trophy as it welcomed media for a tour of stadiums in Lahore and Karachi on Monday. The eight-team 50-over event will be the first global tournament to be held in Pakistan in 28 years. India, however, will play all their matches in Dubai due to the hostile relationship between the two countries. Stadiums in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi are being upgraded and if the tournament is successful more could follow in a country deemed unsafe following a 2009 attack on touring Sri Lankan cricketers. "We are on schedule to complete the renovation and upgrade of the Gaddafi Stadium (in Lahore)," PCB spokesperson Sami Ul Hasan said. "The venue is expected to be handed over to us by the end of the month." "We have no doubt about Gaddafi Stadium's operational readiness to host the Champions Trophy match between Australia and England on February 22."

## Djokovic books Alcaraz clash, wants apology from Australian Open broadcaster

MELBOURNE: (News Desk) Novak Djokovic charged into the Australian Open quarter-finals and booked a mouth-watering encounter with Carlos Alcaraz before the Serb shifted the focus by snubbing the Grand Slam's official broadcaster and slamming them for mocking him and his fans. Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka dismissed teenager Mirra Andreeva while Coco Gauff overcame Belinda Bencic to go through to the last eight and extend their winning streaks as Melbourne Park stifled in the summer heat earlier in the day.

A red-hot Djokovic then thumped Jiri Lehecka 6-3, 6-4, 7-6(4) to stay on course for a record 25th Grand Slam title and 11th in Melbourne but the Serb was in no mood to discuss his chances as he declined an on-court interview and curtly thanked the crowd.

He then took aim at official broadcaster Channel Nine, whose reporter Tony Jones had mocked him and his fans when they were out in force cheering the Serb two days earlier.

"Novak he's over-rated, Novak's a has-been. Novak kick him out. Oh, I'm glad they can't hear me," Jones had said.

Jones had already been taken to task by American Danielle Collins, who he called a "brat" for her on-court behaviour. Djokovic said he had not received a public apology from the broadcaster and would continue boycotting them until he does. "Since they're official broadcasters, I chose not to give interviews for Channel Nine," Djokovic told reporters, adding he had made his feelings clear to tournament director Craig Tiley. "I told him, 'If you guys want to fine me for not giving an on-court interview, that's okay'. I'll accept that, because this is something that needs to be done. That's all there is to it."