

Year begins with warmest January despite shift towards cooling La Nina

Washington (News Desk) Last month was the world's warmest January on record, continuing a streak of extreme global temperatures despite a shift towards the cooling La Nina weather pattern, European Union scientists said on Thursday.

January extended a run of extraordinary heat, in which 18 of the last 19 months saw an average global temperature of more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times, the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said in a monthly bulletin.

That was despite the world shifting from the El Nino warming pattern — which helped make 2024 the world's warmest year on record — and turning towards its cooler La Nina counterpart, which involves the cooling of equatorial Pacific waters, and can curb global temperatures.

"The fact that we're still seeing record temperatures outside of the influence of El Nino is a little surprising," said Samantha Burgess, Strategic Lead at the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, which runs the C3S service.

El Nino peaked more than a year ago, Burgess noted. The global average temperature in January was 1.75C higher than in pre-industrial times. Copernicus assesses that La Nina has not yet fully developed, and the world is currently in neutral conditions between the two phases. Other data models can vary, with US scientists indicating last month that La Nina conditions had formed.

Loon-like waterfowl from dinosaur-era is oldest

VEGA ISLAND (News Desk) Near the end of the age of dinosaurs, a bird resembling today's loons and grebes dove for fish and other prey in the perilous waters off Antarctica. Thanks to a nearly complete fossil skull, scientists now have identified this waterfowl as the oldest-known member of the lineage spanning all birds alive today. The new fossil unearthed on Vega Island near the Antarctic Peninsula of the ancient bird named Vegavis iaai dates to about 69 million years ago, approximately three million years before the asteroid strike at the end of the Cretaceous Period that wiped out the dinosaurs, aside from their avian descendants. Fossils of Vegavis were first described two decades ago. But without sufficient cranial remains its place on the bird family tree had remained ambiguous. The researchers now were able to diagnose Vegavis as nesting among the anatomically modern birds based on two cranial characteristics — the bones of its upper beak and the shape of its brain. "Both of those features are observable in the new Vegavis specimen," said evolutionary biologist Chris Torres of the University of the Pacific in California, lead author of the research published in the journal Nature. Vegavis was an early waterfowl, a group that also includes ducks and geese. Vegavis appears to have been ecologically specialised to pursue fish and other prey underwater in a shallow marine ecosystem. Antarctica at the time was not the desolate land of snow and ice that it is today, but rather a forested landscape with a temperate climate.

US military plane flies 104 illegal immigrants to India

AMRITSAR (News Desk) A US military plane carrying 104 deported Indian illegal immigrants landed in India on Wednesday, authorities said, part of President Donald Trump's immigration agenda a week before he is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Washington.

Migration has been among the key issues discussed by India and the US since Trump assumed office last month, and is also expected to come up during Trump's talks with Modi.

Although illegal Indian immigrants have been deported by previous US administrations, it is the first time Washington has used a military aircraft for the purpose. It is also the farthest destination so far for such flights using a military aircraft. The US aircraft that landed in the Sikh holy city of Amritsar, in the northern Indian state of Punjab, returned 104 Indian immigrants, said Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, Punjab's minister for Non-Resident Indian Affairs. Punjab police said 33 immigrants each were from Gujarat, Modi's home state and the northern state of Haryana, while 30 were from Punjab. They underwent hours of scrutiny at the airport before police escorted them out in small groups in police vehicles. The Indian foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment. The Trump administration has increasingly turned to the military to help carry out its immigration agenda, using military aircraft to deport migrants and opening military bases to house them. This news agency reported on Tuesday that the C-17 aircraft with migrants on board had departed for India but would not arrive for at least 24 hours. The flight did not show up on public flight trackers but local media reported that it was coming from San Antonio in Texas. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also 'emphasised' the Trump administration's desire to work with India to address "concerns related to irregular migration" when he met Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar last month. New Delhi has since said it will take back such illegal immigrants after verifying their details. The US is India's largest trading partner and the two countries are forging deeper strategic ties as they look to counter China.



Protesters set fire to the Dhanmondi-32 residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, father of the ousted PM Sheikh Hasina, in Dhaka, Bangladesh February 5, 2025

FO condemns Trump's 'deeply troubling and unjust' Palestinian displacement plan

Islamabad (News Desk) The Foreign Office (FO) on Thursday condemned US President Donald Trump's "deeply troubling and unjust" remarks that the United States would take over the Gaza Strip and develop it economically after Palestinians were resettled elsewhere.

Trump unveiled his surprise plan, without providing specifics, at a joint press conference on Tuesday with

visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The plan envisions the US taking over Gaza, resettling Palestinians in other countries — seemingly whether they wanted to leave or not — and turning the territory into "the Riviera of the Middle East." The world reacted with derision and insisted upon the creation of a Palestinian state following the shock announcement. US Secretary of State Marco

Rubio clarified today that Trump's proposal to resettle Gaza's population would only be temporary, according to the BBC. Trump, however, had said on Tuesday the displacement would be permanent. Reacting to the development, the FO said in a press release issued today: "The proposal to displace the people of Gaza is deeply troubling and unjust. The Palestinian land belongs to the Palestinian

people and the only viable and just option is the two-state solution, in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions." The FO said Pakistan would continue to stand by the people of Palestine in their "just struggle for self-determination", as well as for the establishment of a sovereign, independent and contiguous Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Bangladesh protesters torch home of country's founding leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Dhaka (News Desk) Thousands of protesters set fire to the home of Bangladesh's founding leader, as his daughter, ousted former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina delivered a fiery social media speech calling on her supporters to stand against the interim government.

Witnesses said several thousand protesters, some armed with sticks, hammers, and other tools,

gathered around the historic house and independence monument, while others brought a crane and excavator to demolish the building.

The rally was organised alongside a broader call, dubbed "Bulldozer Procession", to disrupt Hasina's scheduled 9pm online address on Wednesday. Protesters, many aligned with the "Students Against Discrimination" group,

had expressed their fury over Hasina's speech, which they viewed as a challenge to the newly formed interim government.

Tensions have been escalating in Bangladesh since August 2024, when mass protests forced Hasina to flee to neighbouring India. The interim government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, has struggled to maintain control as

protests and unrest have continued. Demonstrators have attacked symbols of Hasina's government, including the house of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which was first set ablaze in August.

A symbol of the country's establishment, the house is where Bangabandhu (friend of Bengal), as he is popularly known, declared Bangladesh's independence in 1971.



US President-elect Donald Trump greets Tesla CEO and X owner Elon Musk during a rally the day before Trump is scheduled to be inaugurated for a second term, in Washington, US

South Africa defends independent stance in global affairs after US' G20 snub

Capetown (News Desk) South African Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola on Thursday reaffirmed the country's commitment to human dignity, equality, and democratic values, emphasising its independent stance in global affairs. South Africa is "championing non-racialism and non-sexism while placing our constitution and the rule of law at the forefront," Lamola said

on X. His remarks came after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced he would not attend the upcoming G20 summit in Johannesburg. Rubio accused South Africa of expropriating private property and using its G20 presidency to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives alongside climate

South Africa defends land policies, global leadership. Lamola defended the country's recently adopted Expropriation Act, saying it is "similar to the Eminent domain laws" and ensures private property is not arbitrarily seized. He stressed that South Africa's G20 presidency prioritizes more than just climate change, aiming to secure fair

treatment for Global South nations and establish a more equitable global system. "We remain committed to engaging the government of the USA," he added. Separately, South Africa's presidency said on X: "By settling land claims, we are working to correct the injustices of the past and provide fair opportunities for all South Africans."

Argentina follows Trump, quits WHO

BUENOS AIRES (News Desk) Argentina said on Wednesday it will pull out of the World Health Organisation, following in the footsteps of the United States and citing similar complaints over the UN body's management of the Covid-19 pandemic.

President Javier Milei's spokesman announced the decision two weeks after President Donald Trump, an ideological ally and hero of the Argentine leader, announced Washington's planned exit from the agency. Milei's decision was based on "deep differences regarding health management especially during the pandemic," spokesman Manuel Adorni told reporters, adding Argentina would not "allow an international body to interfere in our sovereignty." He cited the "longest lockdown in the history of humanity" and "a lack of independence (at the WHO) in the face of the political influence of some states," without naming names.

Adorni insisted the measure gave Argentina "greater flexibility to implement policies adapted to the context" locally, while ensuring "greater availability of resources." WHO data shows Argentina contributed some \$8.75 million in membership fees to the organisation across 2022 and 2023 — 0.11 per cent of the total budget. It is slated to contribute \$8.25 million for the two-year 2024/25 cycle.

Trump's proposal for Gaza takeover sparks global outrage

WASHINGTON (News Desk) President Donald Trump's proposal for the US to take over Gaza and create a "Riviera of the Middle East" after resettling Palestinians elsewhere has shattered US policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sparking widespread condemnation.

The shock move from Trump, a former New York property developer, drew rebukes on Wednesday from Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany, which said it would bring new suffering and new hatred. Saudi Arabia rejected the proposal outright.

Trump provided no specifics as he announced his proposal while welcoming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House on Tuesday.

He said he and his team had been discussing the possibility with Jordan, Egypt and other regional countries.

Netanyahu would not be drawn into discussing the proposal, other than to praise Trump for trying a new approach. President Trump, in his first major Middle East policy announcement, said he envisioned building a resort where international communities could live in harmony after over 15 months of Israeli bombardment devastated the tiny coastal enclave and killed more than 47,000 people. It was not clear whether Trump will go ahead with his controversial proposal or is simply taking an extreme position as a bargaining strategy. Trump said that he plans to visit Gaza, Israel and Saudi Arabia, but did not say when he will go.

Cummins 'heavily unlikely' for Champions Trophy, says Australia coach

MELBOURNE (News Desk) Australia captain Pat Cummins is all but ruled out of the Champions Trophy while fellow paceman Josh Hazlewood is also a doubt for the One-day International tournament, coach Andrew McDonald said on Wednesday.

Cummins missed the Test tour of Sri Lanka due to the birth of his second child but has been troubled by an ankle injury that flared up after the Test series win over India at the beginning of last month.

"Pat Cummins hasn't been able to resume any type of bowling so he's heavily unlikely," McDonald told Australian radio station SEN.

"So that would mean that we do need a captain. Steve Smith and Travis Head are the two that we've been having conversations with while we've been building out that Champions Trophy team."

Hazlewood missed three of the five India Tests and the Sri Lanka tour with side and calf injuries. McDonald said he was battling to be fit and a decision would be made once medical information landed in coming days.

All-rounder Mitchell Marsh has already been ruled out of the Champions Trophy with a back injury. The tournament starts on Feb 19 and is being co-hosted by Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

PFF elections on hold as FIFA continues to push for constitutional amendments

KARACHI (News Desk) It has now been made clear by FIFA that elections of the Pakistan Football Federation will not be held unless the congress accepts the constitutional amendments proposed by the global football body.

It is turning out to be a mockery of democracy after the PFF Congress members overwhelmingly rejected the amendments during its extraordinary meeting last month.

"As a result, the electoral process, sporting development, and international participation could be suspended until the elected congress adopts the proposed amendments," the PFF Normalisation Committee, installed by FIFA in September 2019 after years of crisis in the country's football governing body, said in a statement on Wednesday.

A letter by PFF NC chairman Haroon Malik to the congress members, a copy of which is available with Dawn, stated a "deadlock has been created".

"FIFA and the Asian Football Federation in the strongest terms have opined that while the congress members want to be part of the FIFA family, they do not wish to align with the spirit and principles of FIFA and the AFC, and the newly-elected congress members have created a deadlock," wrote Haroon in the letter. "During numerous discussions, both virtual and physical, FIFA has been unwavering on the need for the constitutional amendments to align with the FIFA principles." Stressing that the amendments were "for the future of Pakistan football", he added that "FIFA's commitment to compliance is non-negotiable" and that he planned to set up meetings with the congress members to resolve the issue. During last month's extraordinary congress meeting, which was held virtually after another one planned for November was postponed, FIFA and the AFC had presented an "all or nothing" offer to the congress members with amendments to be made in entirety or none at all. While most amendments had been agreed to, the disagreement centred around Article 38 of the PFF Constitution regarding the candidacy of the president.

Musk creates new power base in Washington with takeover of agencies

WASHINGTON (News Desk) Elon Musk's rapid takeover of two US government agencies has enabled the South African-born billionaire to exert unprecedented control over America's 2.2-million-member federal workforce and begin a dramatic reshaping of government.

The world's richest man and an ally of President Donald Trump, Musk, 53, has in two weeks created a new centre of power in Washington as he ex-

ecutes Trump's cost-cutting initiative to reduce the size of the US government.

The CEO of Tesla and founder of SpaceX, Musk has acted swiftly since Trump's Jan 20 inauguration, deploying teams of current and former employees of his companies as his agents. Musk's actions have fostered a wave of panic among government workers and public protests in Washington and at times have threatened to overshadow

Trump's own agenda. Musk's efforts are part of a massive government restructuring by Trump, who has fired and sidelined hundreds of civil servants in his first steps toward downsizing the bureaucracy and installing more loyalists.

Americans are witnessing "an extraordinary centralisation of power in someone who lacks a top-level security clearance and has not been subject to any Senate confirmation process," said Don Moynihan,

a professor at the Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan. "Musk has unprecedented and centralised control of the basic plumbing of government," he added. Asked who they are more worried about when it comes to the prospect of being fired, an employee of the General Services Administration that manages federal property and services said: "Musk. No one is really talking about Trump." Trump has put Musk in charge

of what both men call the Department of Government Efficiency. Despite its name, it is not a department, Musk does not draw a government salary, and DOGE's creation immediately drew lawsuits from government unions, watchdogs and public interest groups. Exactly who makes up DOGE is unclear. The Trump administration has not released a list of DOGE employees. Nor has it said how they are being paid, how many have entered

each agency, and whether they are government workers. That raises questions about who they are answerable to — Musk or Trump as head of the executive branch. Musk and his DOGE lieutenants have taken over the Office of Personnel Management and the General Services Administration along with their computer systems. OPM is the human resources arm of the US government, overseeing 2.2 million government workers.