

In shock announcement, Trump says US wants to take over Gaza Strip

Washington(News Desk) President Donald Trump said the US would take over the war-ravaged Gaza Strip and develop it economically after Palestinians are resettled elsewhere, actions that would shatter decades of US policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Trump unveiled his surprise plan, without providing specifics, at a joint press conference on Tuesday with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The announcement followed Trump's shock proposal earlier on Tuesday for the permanent resettlement of the more than two million Palestinians from Gaza to neighbouring countries, calling the enclave — where the first phase of a fragile Israel-Hamas ceasefire and hostage release deal is in effect — a "demolition site". Trump can expect allies and foes alike to strongly oppose any US takeover of Gaza, and his proposal raises questions whether Middle East power Saudi Arabia would be willing to join a renewed US-brokered push for a historic normalisation of relations with US ally Israel. The US taking a direct stake in Gaza would run counter to longtime policy in Washington and for much of the international community, which has held that Gaza would be part of a future Palestinian state that includes the occupied West Bank. "The US will take over the Gaza Strip, and we will do a job with it too," Trump told reporters. "We'll own it and be responsible for dismantling all of the dangerous unexploded bombs and other weapons on the site." "We're going to develop it, create thousands and thousands of jobs, and it'll be something that the entire Middle East can be very proud of," Trump said. "I do see a long-term ownership position".

CIA's entire staff offered buyouts: report

Washington(News Desk) The US Central Intelligence Agency offered buyouts to its entire workforce on Tuesday, the Wall Street Journal reported. The move would make it the first intelligence agency to join a voluntary redundancy programme initiated by US President Donald Trump for federal employees. The agency is also freezing the hiring of job seekers already given a conditional offer, the paper reported, citing an aide to CIA Director John Ratcliffe. The anonymous aide said some of those frozen offers are likely to be rescinded if the applicants do not have the right background for the agency's new goals, which include targeting drug cartels, Trump's trade war and undermining China, according to the Journal. The move is part of a massive overhaul of the US government by Trump, who has vowed to radically downsize the federal workforce in the name of efficiency and frugality that has sent shock waves through Washington. The report on the buyout offers at the CIA — whose work gathering foreign intelligence is vital to US national security — came just hours after Trump announced an extraordinary scheme for the United States to "take over the Gaza Strip". The CIA did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

Trump admin considers adding Shein, Temu to 'forced labour' list: report

Washington(News Desk) The United States is discussing whether to add Chinese ecommerce retailers Shein and Temu to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) "forced labour" list, Semafor reported on Tuesday. The Trump administration has not made a final decision on the matter and could ultimately decide not to list either, the report said, citing two sources familiar with the discussions. Both companies denied the use of forced labour. "We are not aware of any such consideration," Shein said in an emailed statement to Reuters. The company is in full compliance with the US UFLPA (Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act), it added. "Temu strictly prohibits the use of forced labour and enforces our Third-Party Code of Conduct, which bars all forms of involuntary labour," Temu said in an email. The move comes after China imposed targeted tariffs on US imports and put several companies, including Alphabet Inc's Google, on notice for possible sanctions, in a measured response to US President Donald Trump's levies, which came into effect on Tuesday. Temu, Shein targeted as EU cracks down on unsafe ecommerce imports. In a separate development, Temu and Shein will be liable for the sale of unsafe and dangerous products on their platforms, the European Commission said today as part of a crackdown against the flood of cheap ecommerce imports into the European Union. The EU executive also said it would coordinate a joint investigation by the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Network of national consumer authorities into Shein based on suspicions that the company infringes EU consumer protection rules. The measures by the EU executive echoed a similar push by the US government which ended a trade provision this week used by retailers including Temu and Shein to ship low-value packages duty-free to the United States. The European Commission said its concerns were triggered by some 4.6 billion low-value items below €22 imported into the EU last year, equal to 12 million parcels per day, 91 per cent of which came from China.



Displaced Palestinian child plays with a toy retrieved from under the rubble of their house, after returning to Gaza amid a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip, January 30, 2025

Iran is willing to give Trump diplomacy 'another chance', senior Iranian official says

Tehran(News Desk) Iran is ready to give the United States a chance to resolve disputes between the arch foes, a senior Iranian official told Reuters on Wednesday, a day after President Donald Trump restored his "maximum pressure" campaign on the country. Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said that US concerns about Iran developing nuclear weapons were

not a complicated issue and could be resolved given Tehran's opposition to weapons of mass destruction. "The clerical establishment's will is to give diplomacy with Trump another chance, but Tehran is deeply concerned about Israel's sabotage," said the senior official. The official said Tehran wanted the United States to "rein in Israel if Washington is seeking a deal" with the

Islamic Republic. Trump said on Wednesday he preferred a verified nuclear peace agreement with Iran, according to a post on his Truth Social account. Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran includes efforts to drive its oil exports down to zero in order to stop Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Tehran has long said its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful and it has no intention to build nuclear weapons. But with its regional allies either dismantled or gravely weakened since the start of the Hamas-Israel conflict in Gaza in October 2023, and mounting discontent among many Iranians at the state of the economy, analysts say the clerical establishment has few options other than to strike a deal with Trump.

Modi takes 'holy dips' at Kumbh Mela, week after stampede killed dozens

Delhi(News Desk) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took holy dips in sacred river waters in the northern city of Prayagraj on Wednesday as he joined millions of people at the Maha Kumbh Mela, a week after dozens died in a stampede at the event. Authorities said 30 people were killed in the stampede on the six week-long Hindu festival's most auspicious day on January 29,

as more than 76 million people converged on the river to take a 'royal dip'. Sources said the death toll was more than 50. Devout Hindus believe that taking a dip during the Maha Kumbh at the confluence of three sacred rivers — Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati, which is believed to flow underground — absolves people of sins and brings salvation from the cycle of

birth and death. Live visuals broadcast on state and private news channels showed Modi — dressed in a saffron sweatshirt and black sweat pants with saffron stripes on the side — holding on to a thick yellow rope for support as he took three dips in the knee-deep water. "I had the supreme fortune of worshipping at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj today," Modi later posted on X. "Receiving the blessings of Mother Ganga has brought immense peace and contentment to my heart. I prayed for the happiness, prosperity, health, and well-being of all countrymen." Security personnel stood in the water nearby while thousands of people crowded the banks to watch the prime minister perform the rituals.



US President Donald Trump welcomes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the entrance of the White House in Washington, US on Feb 4, 2025

US military plane deporting Indian immigrants lands in India

Washington(News Desk) A US military plane carrying illegal Indian immigrants landed in India's northern city of Amritsar on Wednesday, a Reuters witness said, deporting an unspecified number of people as part of President Donald Trump's immigration agenda. Some local media reported that the

flight was bringing 205 people back, while others put the number at 104, and that they were mainly from the northern state of Punjab, where Amritsar is located, and the western state of Gujarat. The Trump administration has increasingly turned to the military to help carry out its immigration agen-

da, using military aircraft to deport migrants and opening military bases to house them. Although illegal Indian immigrants have been deported home 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. Reuters 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 news TV channels showed the aircraft taxiing.

Jenin camp going in 'catastrophic direction', says UN agency

GENEVA: (News Desk) The Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank is heading in a "catastrophic direction", the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said on Tuesday, adding that residents had "endured the impossible". The Israeli military launched a major offensive in the West Bank on January 21 aimed at rooting out Palestinian groups from the Jenin area. On Sunday, the army said that it had killed at least 50 fighters since it launched the operation, while the Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah said Israeli forces have killed 70 people in the territory since the start of the year. The operation has also seen troops levelling buildings in a refugee camp adjacent to Jenin. "The camp is going into a catastrophic direction," UN-RWA spokeswoman Juliette Touma told reporters in Geneva. "Large parts of the camp were completely destroyed in a series of detonations by the Israeli forces. It is estimated that 100 houses were destroyed or heavily damaged," she said, speaking from Amman. "The residents of this particular camp have endured the impossible."

Returning Fakhar struggles to make impact in scenario match

LAHORE: (News Desk) Pakistan's preparations for their Champions Trophy title defence as well as the preceding tri-nation series began in earnest when their training camp began in the serene surroundings of the Ghani Glass ground on Tuesday. Tucked in the centre of a housing community, all eyes at the venue were on returning Pakistan opener Fakhar Zaman but he showed signs of rust as the squad played two scenario matches in the afternoon. All-rounder Faheem Ashraf, whose selection was widely panned, also failed to make an impact, giving away plenty of runs while Khushdil Shah, whose return was questioned, showed some batting form. Fakhar, making a comeback to the team for the first time since the ODI World Cup in November 2023, made just 11 and 13 in his two tryouts with the bat — being caught both times. The 34-year-old, who starred in the final of the last edition of the Champions Trophy, will likely open the innings for Pakistan alongside Babar Azam after the hosts were rocked by injury to dashing youngster Saim Ayub while Abdullah Shafique was axed. Babar had mixed outings. The star batter was dismissed for a duck in the first, lbw to Shaheen Shah Afridi, but then turned on the style in the second game, belting 40 off 31 balls with seven hits to the fence. Kamran Ghulam was the highest scorer across the two matches with an innings of 79 off 40 balls with three sixes and 11 fours while Khushdil made 42 in the lone innings he played, belting three sixes and four fours.

Eliasch offers 'hope' and big revenue growth for IOC

PARIS: (News Desk) Johan Eliasch has told AFP that if elected Olympics chief he would offer an essential quality in a "divisive world" — that of "hope" — and also the hard-headed business sense to significantly increase the revenues of a "phenomenal brand". The 62-year-old president of the International Ski Federation (FIS) was the surprise candidate when seven declared their desire to succeed Thomas Bach as president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), probably the most powerful person in global sport. The Anglo-Swedish billionaire businessman and noted environmentalist says the campaign is likely his "last hurrah" and he will learn if he has been successful when the 100-plus IOC members vote on March 20 in Greece. While he hopes for a positive outcome personally — he was "very encouraged" by the feedback after his presentation to fellow members last Thursday — hope is also his message to the sporting world. "Sport has a magic ability to unite people in peace, working together, doing things together," he said in an interview during a stopover in Paris on his way to the World Skiing Championships in Saalbach, Austria. "Hope is the other big thing for me here, and that is the belief that anything is possible."

Gill says World Cup triumph, not Australia loss, defines India

NAGPUR: (News Desk) Reigning T20 World Cup champions India have been in top form across all formats, vice-captain Shubman Gill said on Tuesday, dismissing his side's Test defeat in Australia as a one-off. Rohit Sharma's men clinched the T20 crown in South Africa last year, seven months after they ended the most recent ODI World Cup at home as runners-up. But a 3-0 Test whitewash at home to New Zealand in October-November, followed by the 3-1 defeat in Australia last month, saw star cricketers including Sharma and Virat Kohli come under scrutiny for their poor batting form. "One series does not define the form of the whole team," Gill told reporters ahead of the first of three One-day Internationals against England starting in Nagpur on Thursday. "Definitely we did not play as per our expectations in the Australian series, but still we played some good cricket," the top-order batsman said. "One match and one day doesn't define us... we should keep all those things in mind." The three ODI matches, which follow India's 4-1 T20 series victory over England, come ahead of the 50-over Champions Trophy starting on February 19. Sharma and Kohli, who both retired from T20 cricket after the World Cup win, return to the ODI set-up and Gill said the team is upbeat. However, he also warned the three matches against a "good" England team were not a practice run for the Champions Trophy. Gill, 25, is seen as a potential future leader for India whenever Sharma, 37, retires from ODI and Test cricket. He said being deputy to Sharma had been one of the main challenges of his international career since 2019. "I take it as a challenge to lead my way, firstly with my performance and then definitely in the field if Rohit bhai would want my opinions," Gill said. "What are the plans for certain batsmen, certain bowlers, how to take on certain oppositions — just learning that is a big curve for me." Wrist-spinner Varun Chakravarthy has been added to the ODI squad after he was named player of the series in the T20s with 14 wickets in five matches against England.

World backs two-state solution after Trump's stunning takeover plans for Gaza

Gaza(News Desk) The world reacted with derision and insisted upon the creation of a Palestinian state on Wednesday on the heels of a shock announcement by US President Donald Trump on taking over the occupied Gaza Strip alongside a grinning Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump's extraordinary plan envisions the United States 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." Trump made the stunning proposal to audible gasps during a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom he was hosting at the White House for talks. But the world was not as receptive to Trump's proposal — even long-term allies on US policy like Australia, who said their

policy on the two-state solution remained unchanged. Saudi Arabia In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, with whom both Washington and Tel Aviv have expressed optimism on the establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel, stressed today that it will not formalise ties with Israel unless a Palestinian state is established. "Saudi Arabia will continue its relentless efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state with

East Jerusalem as its capital, and will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without that," the Saudi foreign ministry said in a statement on X. Saudi Foreign Ministry's statement on Netanyahu's optimism on the normalisation of ties. — Saudi Foreign Ministry/@KSAmo-faEN Both US President Donald Trump and his predecessor Joe Biden have backed Israel and Saudi Arabia having diplomatic relations. Riyadh paused

tentative talks on the matter early in the Gaza conflict and hardened its rhetoric as the war continued. The foreign ministry's statement came swiftly after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said establishing formal relations "is not only feasible, I think it's going to happen". His government remains opposed to the internationally backed two-state solution. Saudi Arabia does not recognise Israel, but since

2020 has been negotiating rapprochement in exchange for a US defence pact and Washington's help on a civilian nuclear programme. Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the country's support for a two-state solution in the Middle East "remains the same". Albanese said he would not give a "daily commentary" on statements by Trump. Australia's position "remains the same", Albanese told reporters.