



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw with CEO (Electronics) Merck Kai Beckmann, on the WEF sidelines, in Davos, Switzerland



Syria's new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa (R) welcoming Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan in Damascus



The Netherlands' PM Dick Schoof addresses a press conference following the weekly council of ministers in The Hague



Russia's President Vladimir Putin visits the Moscow State University (MSU), in Moscow

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PTI



Indian mountaineer Bhawna Dehariya is seen after summiting Mount Aconcagua in Argentina, the highest peak in South America

Confirmation hearing for Kash Patel as FBI Director set for Jan 30

WASHINGTON: Kash Patel will appear before a US Senate committee on January 30 for a confirmation hearing to be the next director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Patel, 44, is the highest-ranking Indian-American nominated by President Donald Trump in his administration. If confirmed, he would be the first-ever Indian American to lead the most powerful American investigation agency. "The Nomination of Kashyap Pramod Patel to be Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation" has been scheduled for January 30, the Senate Judiciary Committee announced on Thursday. Patel would replace Christopher Wray. He is considered to be a loyal supporter of Trump. "I love the American dream. My story's pretty simple, it's unique, and some of you share in it," Patel, the former federal prosecutor, said during an inauguration event for Trump early this week.

Detentions in deadly Turkish ski resort fire rise to 14

ANKARA: The number of suspects detained in connection with the deadly hotel fire at a ski resort rose to 14 on Friday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday. Erdogan also reiterated his commitment to ensuring that anyone who may have caused the blaze by prioritising profit over safety is brought to justice. The fire, which tore through the 12-story Grand Kartal hotel, in Kartalkaya, in northwestern Bolu province early Tuesday, trapped many of the registered 238 guests inside, leaving 78 people dead and dozens of others injured. It struck at the start of a two-week winter break for schools, and 36 of the victims were children, local media reports said.

Governor of Congo's province dies of his injury in fighting with rebels

GOMA (CONGO): The governor of eastern Congo's North-Kivu province died from injuries sustained on the front line Thursday as M23 rebels close in on Goma, authorities said on Friday. M23 made significant territorial gains in recent weeks, encircling Goma, which has around 2 million people and is a regional hub for security and humanitarian efforts. The circumstances around the death of Maj Gen Peter Cirimwami remain unclear but Cirimwami, who led army operations in the restive North Kivu, visited troops on the front line in Kasengezi, around 13 kilometers from Goma, on the day of his death. His death was confirmed by a governmental source, a military source and a UN source Friday, all of whom spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak on the matter publicly.

London court clears way to extradite US mother accused of killing 2 of her kids

LONDON: A London judge on Friday rejected a US mother's challenge to be extradited to Colorado to face murder charges in the deaths of two of her young children. Judge John Zani said in Westminster Magistrates' Court that it would now be up to the British Home Secretary to order Kimberlee Singler returned to the US. Singler, 36, is accused of two counts of first-degree murder in the December 2023 shooting and stabbings of her 9-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son, and one count of attempted murder in the slaying of her 11-year-old daughter with a knife. She also faces three counts of child abuse and one count of assault.

Taliban reject court move to arrest top officials for persecuting Afghan women

KABUL: The Taliban Friday rejected a court move to arrest two of their top officials for persecuting women, accusing the court of baseless accusations and misbehaviour. The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor Karim Khan announced Thursday he had requested arrest warrants for two top Taliban officials, including the leader Hibatullah Akhundzada. Since they took back control of the country in 2021, the Taliban have barred women from jobs, most public spaces and education beyond sixth grade. A Foreign Ministry statement condemned the ICC request. The court was making baseless accusations against Afghanistan's leadership at a time of peace in the country and people had "breathed a sigh of relief".

Putin says he is ready for talks with Trump on Ukraine

AFP, MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday he was ready for talks with US counterpart Donald Trump on Ukraine, praising him as a "smart" leader who might have prevented the conflict from starting in 2022.

Kyiv reacted quickly, warning against being excluded from negotiations.

The Russian leader did not say when talks would take place, and the Kremlin said earlier it was still waiting for 'signals' from Washington, despite Trump announcing Thursday he was willing to meet Putin 'immediately'.

"We have always said, and I want to emphasise this once again, that we are ready for these negotiations on Ukrainian issues," Putin told a reporter from Russian state TV.

Praising Trump as a "smart" and 'pragmatic' man, Putin also repeated the Republican's unfounded claim that he won the US presi-

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— Vladimir Putin, President, Russia

dential election against Joe Biden in 2020.

"I cannot but agree with him that if he had been president – if his victory hadn't been stolen in 2020 – then maybe there would not have been the crisis in Ukraine that emerged in 2022," Putin said.

Pressure from Trump

The nearly three-year Ukraine conflict has plunged relations between the two nuclear powers to their lowest levels since the Cold War.

Trump, who was inaugurated on Monday, has called the conflict "ridiculous" and threatened Russia with tougher economic sanctions if it does not agree to stop its offensive.

"If they don't settle this war soon, like almost immediately, I'm going to put massive tariffs on Russia, and

massive taxes, and also big sanctions," the Republican said during a Fox News interview on Thursday.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos on the same day, Trump said he would ask Saudi Arabia and OPEC to lower oil prices, claiming: "If the price came down, the Russia-Ukraine war would end immediately."

Putin pushed back at Trump's claim that lower oil prices might expedite the end of the conflict.

"I have a hard time imagining there will be decisions taken that are detrimental to the American economy," Putin said Friday.

'Come back to reality'

Neither side has shown signs of de-escalating hostilities since Trump's inauguration, despite the President claiming he would end

the conflict in "24 hours" once in power.

Kyiv on Friday warned against being excluded from any talks.

"He (Putin) wants to negotiate the fate of Europe -- without Europe. And he wants to talk about Ukraine without Ukraine," the head of Ukraine's presidential office Andriy Yermak said.

"This is not going to happen. Putin needs to come back to reality himself, or he will be brought back. This is not how it works in the modern world."

Russian aerial attacks near Kyiv killed three people and wounded several others, Ukrainian officials said Friday, while Ukraine fired 120 drones at least 12 Russian regions, including the capital Moscow.

The Kremlin has launched drone or missile attacks at Kyiv almost every day since sending troops into Ukraine in February 2022, ostensibly targeting military and energy facilities.

Mathur takes charge as Consulate General of India in Shanghai

PTI, BEIJING: Pratik Mathur assumed charge as the Consulate General of India in Shanghai on Thursday, according to an official announcement by the Consulate.

He succeeds Dr N Nandakumar.

Mathur, an Indian Foreign Service officer of the 2007 batch served as Deputy Secretary in the office of Prime Minister Narendra Modi from August 2019 to September 2020.

Most recently, he served as Minister (Political) at India's Mission to the United Nations in New York from September 2020 to December 2024.

He also served on the India team representing the country in the UN Security Council from January 2021 to December 2022.

His previous assignments included postings in the Indian embassies in Washington D C and Beijing.

Trump signs order to boost US global AI dominance

PTI, WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order to enhance America's global dominance in artificial intelligence and make it "free from ideological bias or engineered social agenda" by eliminating the Biden administration's policies in the matter.

It called for departments and agencies to revise or rescind all policies, directives, regulations, orders, and other actions taken under the Biden AI executive order that are inconsistent with enhancing US leadership in artificial intelligence.

EXECUTIVE ORDERS

The executive order was signed by Trump in the Oval Office in the presence of David Sacks, his Artificial Intelligence and Crypto Czar.

"It is the policy of the United States to sustain and enhance America's global AI dominance in order to promote human flourishing, economic competitiveness, and national security," the order stated.

It revokes the Biden AI Executive Order which, the Trump administration claimed, hampered the private sector's ability to innovate by imposing unnecessarily burdensome requirements for companies developing and deploying AI.

Noting that the US must act decisively to retain leadership in AI and enhance US economic and national security, the executive order establishes the country's commitment to sustain and enhance its

Forms internal working group on cryptocurrencies

PTI, WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order to form an internal working group on crypto aimed at making America the world capital in crypto. It also prohibited the establishment of central bank digital currencies.

Chaired by White House AI and Crypto Czar David Sacks, the working group would be tasked with developing a federal regulatory framework governing digital assets, including stablecoins, and evaluating the creation of a strategic national digital assets stockpile.

The other members of the group include the secretary of the treasury and the chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

dominance in AI to promote human flourishing, economic competitiveness and national security.

As the US president signed the order, Sacks said, "We're basically announcing the administration's policy to make America the world capital in artificial intelligence and to dominate and to lead the world in AI."

The executive order stated that American development of AI systems must be free from ideological bias or engineered social agendas and with the right government policies, the US can solidify its position as the leader in AI and secure a brighter future for all Americans.

PRO LIFE



Members of Patriot Front rally on the National Mall in Washington, DC, during the annual "March for Life," on Friday. Patriot Front is considered a white supremacist and neo-fascist group

Federal judge blocks Trump bid to restrict birthright citizenship

AFP, LOS ANGELES: A federal judge blocked Donald Trump's attempt to restrict birthright citizenship in the United States on Thursday as liberal states scored their first victory against the new president's headline agenda.

The ruling imposes a 14-day stay on the enforcement of one of the most controversial executive orders Trump signed in the hours after he was sworn into office for a second term.

"This is a blatantly unconstitutional order," US District Judge John Coughenour was reported as saying during the hearing in Washington state.

"I've been on the bench for over four decades, I can't remember another case where the question presented is as clear as this one is," said Coughenour, who was appointed by a Republican president, Ronald Reagan.

Trump told reporters his administration would "obviously" appeal the ruling, while the Department of Justice said it would defend the executive

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— US District Judge John Coughenour

order, which a spokesman said "correctly interprets" the US Constitution.

"We look forward to presenting a full merits argument to the court and to the American people, who are desperate to see our nation's laws enforced," the spokesman said.

Birthright citizenship is enshrined in the US Constitution under the 14th Amendment which decrees that anyone born on US soil is a citizen.

It says, in part: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the

State wherein they reside."

Trump's order was premised on the idea that anyone in the United States illegally, or on a visa, was not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the country, and therefore excluded from this category.

An incredulous Coughenour chided Justice Department attorney Brett Shumate over his assertion that Trump's order was constitutional.

"Frankly, I have difficulty understanding how a member of the bar could state unequivocally that this is a constitutional order," Coughenour said.

"It just boggles my mind."

The ruling comes after a flurry of lawsuits filed by 22 states, two cities and numerous civil rights groups.

It was hailed by states that took part in the legal actions.

"No president can change the constitution on a whim and today's decision affirms that," Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes said.

China's Lunar New Year travel rush kicks into high gear, 9 b trips expected

AP, BEIJING: China's Lunar New Year travel rush has kicked into high gear, with billions of trips expected in coming days for the peak of the 40-day annual mass migration — the world's biggest annual movement of humanity.

EPIC SCALE

The actual new year holiday, which marks the start of the year of the snake in the 12-month lunar calendar, comes on Wednesday, while New Year's Eve on Tuesday is reserved for family gatherings and traditionally fireworks displays.

Many began travelling on Jan 14 and the rush will reach a peak over the weekend. In total,

9 billion trips — mostly by car — are expected over the 40-day travel rush.

Trips by train will surpass surpass 510 million, with another 90 million travelling by air. The government didn't say how the travel figures compared with any other 40-day period during the year.

Trips are now far more comfortable than in past years, when travellers often crammed into train cars for trips that could last days — if they were fortunate enough to buy a ticket, which are now mostly sold online.

Traditionally the festival has been a time for families to gather, with members of China's huge migrant worker population using



People buy tickets as they return to their hometowns for the Chinese Lunar New Year reunions at a train station in Beijing, on Friday

up all their vacation time on the annual visit that for many offers the only chance to see parents and children.

Rising prosperity and the decline in family customs in recent years has prompted those with the means to travel overseas, mostly to South East Asia, but also Japan and South Korea. Cross-border trips are expected to rise by nearly 10%, including foreign tourists willing to risk the crowds to take in the spectacle.

The government grants eight public holiday days from Jan 28 to Feb 4. While fireworks have been all but eradicated under President Xi Jinping, traditional events such as temple markets draped in auspicious bright red colours continue to draw visitors in their millions.