



Janet Murguia, president and CEO of UnidosUS, speaks during a Congressional Hispanic Caucus news conference in Washington, DC



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani prior to their talks in Doha, Qatar



Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi during a visit to the 3rd Division of the French Army at Fort Ganteaume, in France



Britain's Queen Camilla (L) meets with British actor Lenny Henry to celebrate BBC's creative writing competition at Buckingham Palace, in London

allovertheworld



A man prays at the statue of John Paul II outside the Gemelli hospital where Pope Francis is hospitalized with pneumonia, in Rome, on Thursday

Pope Francis shows further slight improvement as he battles pneumonia: Vatican

ROME: The Vatican said Wednesday that Pope Francis has shown further slight improvement as he battles double pneumonia, but doctors still say his prognosis is still guarded. A CT chest scan taken Tuesday evening showed the "normal evolution" of an infection as it is being treated. Blood tests have confirmed an improvement, according to the Vatican's late update. The slight kidney insufficiency detected a few days ago has receded, and Francis is continuing to receive respiratory physiotherapy. It was the first time the Vatican has said Francis was receiving physiotherapy to help him expel fluid from his lungs. Francis resumed work in the afternoon, after receiving the Eucharist in the morning. He was sitting upright and receiving therapy, the Vatican said, as Argentines, Romans and others have kept up the steady stream of prayers for his recovery.

Bosnian Serb leader Dodik convicted, sentenced for separatist activities

SARAJEVO: A court in Bosnia on Wednesday sentenced the pro-Russia Bosnian Serb president, Milorad Dodik, to one year in prison and banned him from politics for six years over his separatist actions as tensions mount in the fragile Balkan state. The landmark ruling in Sarajevo came after a yearlong trial on charges that Dodik disobeyed the top international envoy overseeing peace in the country. The judgment becomes final after the expected appeal process. Dodik and his lawyers weren't in court during the sentencing. He has said he would disobey any conviction and threatened "radical measures" in response, including eventual secession of the Serb-run entity in Bosnia called Republika Srpska from the rest of the country. Dodik has repeatedly called for the separation of the Serb-run half of Bosnia to join with neighbouring Serbia, which prompted the former US administration to impose sanctions against him and his close allies. Dodik was also accused of corruption and pro-Russia policies.

American Airlines flight discontinues landing to avoid departing plane at Washington National

ARLINGTON: An American Airlines plane arriving at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport discontinued its landing, performing a go-around at an air traffic controller's instruction to avoid getting too close to another aircraft departing from the same runway, the Federal Aviation Administration said. The maneuver involving American Flight 2246 from Boston occurred around 8:20 a.m. Tuesday, less than two hours before another plane attempting to land at Chicago's Midway Airport was forced to climb back into the sky to avoid another aircraft crossing the runway. Southwest said Flight 2504 from Omaha, Nebraska, safely landed "after the crew performed a precautionary go-around to avoid a possible conflict with another aircraft that entered the runway," an airline spokesperson said in an email. "The crew followed safety procedures and the flight landed without incident."

Iran accelerates production of near weapons-grade uranium, IAEA says

VIENNA: Iran has accelerated its production of near weapons-grade uranium as tensions between Tehran and Washington rise after the election of US President Donald Trump, a report by the United Nations' nuclear watchdog seen by The Associated Press on Wednesday showed. The report by the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency said that as of Feb. 8, Iran has 274.8 kilograms of uranium enriched up to 60%. That's an increase of 92.5 kilograms since the IAEA's last report in November. That material is a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%. A report in November 2024 put the stockpile at 182.3 kilograms. It had 164.7 kilograms last August. "The significantly increased production and accumulation of high enriched uranium by Iran, the only non-nuclear weapon State to produce such nuclear material, is of serious concern," the confidential report stated.

Zelensky coming to US to sign critical minerals deal: Trump

AP, WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said Wednesday that Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky will visit the White House on Friday to sign a long-sought minerals deal that will closely tie the two countries together for years to come.

Trump made the announcement at the start of the first Cabinet meeting of his second term, hailing the deal as "a very big agreement." The Republican president has long complained that the United States has spent too much taxpayer money to support Ukraine in the war with Russia that began when the Kremlin invaded three years ago. Trump has framed the emerging deal that would give the US access to Ukraine's deposits of so-called rare earth minerals — used in the aerospace, defence and nuclear industries — as a chance for Kyiv to pay back the US for aid already sent for the war effort under Democratic President Joe Biden.

"The previous administration put us in a very bad position, but we've been able to make a deal where we're going to get the money back and a lot of money in the future," Trump said. Zelensky said a news conference early Wednesday in Kyiv that a framework of an economic deal had been reached, but that it did not yet include US security guarantees, which his country sees as vital. The full agreement could hinge on the upcoming talks in Washington. The framework is a preliminary step toward a comprehensive pack-



US President Donald Trump delivers remarks during a Cabinet Meeting at the White House in Washington, on Wednesday

age that will be subject to ratification by the Ukrainian parliament, Zelensky said. Ukraine needs to know first where the US stands on its continued military support, Zelensky said. He said he expected a wide-ranging conversation with Trump. The economic agreement "may be part of future security guarantees, but I want to understand the broader vision. What awaits Ukraine?" Zelensky said. But Trump, in announcing the meeting, was noncommittal about any coming American security guarantees. "I'm not going to make security guarantees ... very much," Trump

said. "We're going to have Europe do that." He said a US presence working on mineral extraction would amount to "automatic security because nobody's going to be messing around with our people when we're there." "It's a great deal for Ukraine too, because they get us over there and we're going to be working over there," Trump said. "We will be on the land." Trump also said Ukraine "could forget about" joining NATO, the Western military alliance, and he hopes to soon speak face to face with Russian President Vladimir Putin about reaching an agreement to end the war in Ukraine that began when Moscow invaded in Feb-

ruary 2022. The Republican president declined to detail what concessions he would ask the two sides to make, but he underscored his administration's position that Ukraine's aspiration to join NATO, the Western military alliance, is not tenable. "NATO, you can forget about it," Trump said. "I think that's probably the reason the whole thing started." Since returning to office last month, Trump let Ukraine know that he wanted something in return for tens of billions of dollars in US help for Ukraine. The White House has applied heavy pressure on Ukraine to grant American access to its vast reserves of the minerals.

Stage for federal worker layoffs set with new Trump memo

AP, WASHINGTON: Federal agencies must develop plans to eliminate employee positions, according to a memo distributed by President Donald Trump's administration that sets in motion what could become a sweeping realignment of American government.

The memo expands the Republican president's effort to downsize the federal workforce, which he has described as bloated and impediment to his agenda. Thousands of probationary employees have already been fired, and now his administration is turning its attention to career officials with civil service protection.

Agencies are directed to submit by March 13 their plans for what is known as a reduction in force, which would not only lay off employees but eliminate the position altogether. The result could be extensive changes in how government functions. "The federal government is costly, inefficient, and deeply in debt," said the memo from Russell Vought, director of the White House's Office of Management and Budget, and Charles Ezell, acting director of the Office of Personnel Management, which functions as a human resources agency.

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FATE OF FLYOVER CLOUDS DABOLIM'S FUTURE OPS

"The construction of pillars from MES College junction to MO Goa junction is approximately around 20.8 metres high when the maximum height permissible for safe landing of an aircraft is nine metres. What NHAH has built is more than double the height," said a shocked petitioner and retired Indian Navy officer Cdr Atul Pant. "The distance of the flyover that is detrimental to the survival of the Dabolim Airport is approximately around 1.8 to 2.2 kilometres and this needs to be demolished," disclosed Cdr Pant.

An engineer on condition of anonymity said, "This is another classic case of the government thinking that they can keep lying to people that the Dabolim Airport will not shut down. If so, why was the NHAH allowed to build the flyover despite four objections by the Navy whose NOC is mandatory?" "The maximum permissible height, according to the ICAO guidelines adhered by the ministry of Aviation is 150 metres, following height table is indicative only and in no way assures the height permissible at a given site," reads the notification.

Despite four attempts by the Navy warning NHAH of the need to follow aviation procedures, the latter refused to seek the necessary permission from the former thus implying undercurrents to silently bring commercial operations at Dabolim airport to an end. "Delhi may put enormous pressure on FOGA to give NOC, but one has to realise that they would be dealing with a bunch of people for whom the integrity of the country is paramount," stated a retired bureaucrat on condition of anonymity. "This is a continuous effort of the BJP government to close down the Dabolim airport surreptitiously so that all business goes to GMR, a private firm close to the BJP," alleged Viriato Fernandes, South Goa Member of Parliament.

"All property around Mopa airport has been bought by casino operators and a lot of them have stakes in the hospitality industry. By getting this flyover built without necessary permission, the government intends that all commercial operations will be stopped," the MP confirmed.

From April 2, 2024 till February 15, 2025, according to Airport Authority of India (AAI) figures, 7.33 million passengers landed at the Dabolim airport and the authorities expect the figure to cross the eight million mark.

Businesses located within the vicinity of the Dabolim Airport and all over South Goa started soaking in the news of stay granted by the Goa Bench of the High Court with hurt feelings.

"It is shocking that the government allowed the highway authorities to go ahead with the work despite the Navy writing to Mormugao Planning Development Authority (MPDA) not to permit it. When questioned, we were told the flyover is being built to ease traffic," shuddered transport operator Tari Lamani.

A businessman on condition of anonymity said, "I have been running my family business and it frightens me that our government is at any cost trying to shut this airport. Our MLA (Mauvin Godinho) keeps promising us that Dabolim Airport will not be closed. If so, why have they allowed this flyover without the permission of the Navy?"

"The BJP is only looking at the closure of Dabolim Airport from the business point of view. It is not the government, but the friends of BJP who stand to gain. Nowhere have two airports in such close proximity ever been able to survive. Even one of the airports at Hyderabad had to close," stated Fernandes.

If the government wants the people to believe that the Dabolim airport is here to stay, it will have to ask the NHAH to demolish approximately the 1.8-2.2 km flyover stretch from MES College to MO Goa junction or realign work on this stretch or face the wrath of people from South Goa.

MOLLEM LAND ACQUISITION: HC NOTICES TO RLAYS, SURVEY DEPT

This includes the entire length of the existing railway track through the village as well as large tracts of land on either side. Significant portion of the land declared part of the SWR in this fashion falls within the wildlife sanctuary. Recently, a large number of trees falling within the sanctuary area of this new survey number appear to have been marked for felling.

The petition challenges the powers of the SWR and of the DSLR to either acquire lands within the wildlife sanctuary or pass any orders relating to the status of lands within the wildlife sanctuary. Such orders are de hors Wildlife Act, 1972.

Notwithstanding the protections afforded by the WLP, the order of the Supreme Court and ongoing proceedings for the settlement of the rights, the wildlife habitat is still under threat from human encroachment. These activities are impinging about the wildlife habitat and its security, and therefore, the wildlife in the sanctuary as well.

The Court adjourned the matter to Tuesday, March 4, for further orders in view of the plea for a restraint against felling of any trees within the sanctuary limits.

Adv Anamika Gode together with Adv Sherwyn Correia appeared for the Goa Foundation.

MLA EXTORTION: ARRESTED MAN SEEKS TO QUASH FIR IN HC

He then sent the video to the MLA, demanding money in exchange for not releasing it publicly.

The MLA transferred Rs 55,000 to Routs's bank account. However, Routs continued to extort money, demanding Rs 5 crore, and threatened to post the morphed video on social media if his demands were not met.

The Crime Branch has registered the case against Routs under Section 384 of the Indian Penal Code and Sections 66-C, 67, and 67-A of the Information Technology Act, 2008.

HIT-AND-RUN HORROR AT SIOLIM, MOTHER-SON HURT

Anjuna Police responded promptly and tracked down Chawla, leading to his arrest. It was revealed that there were six occupants in the vehicle, including four girls, at the time of the accident. The injured were initially taken to Siolim Primary Health Centre and later transferred to North Goa District Hospital in Mapusa for further treatment.

A large crowd gathered at the Anjuna Police Station, demanding strict action against the accused. The police have registered an offence under Sections 281 and 125(a) of the BNS Act, as well as Sections 134(a) and (b) of the Motor Vehicle Act, for rash and negligent driving and over-speeding.

This is the second hit-and-run incident to occur in Siolim within a week. A similar accident last Tuesday left the victim, Judith, with grievous injuries. The police also confirmed that the tourists involved in that accident were on holiday in Goa and heading towards Morjim.

At the time of reporting, the accused had not undergone a medical examination, and the victim had not yet received a copy of the FIR. Authorities noted that, as the offense is bailable, Chawla could be released within 24 hours if all bail conditions are met.

HC STAYS 'CONVERSION' OF CHOPDEM LAND

These have added 130 per cent (3,86,376 sq mts) more than existing settlement area in the village merely within eight months from March 2024 to October 2024 and in six Gazette changes admeasuring 3,69,480 square metres thus making the existing Regional Plan 2021 of the Agarwada-Chopdem village obsolete and effectively revising

the Regional Plan of the village, without public consultation and government approvals, under the guise of correction of inadvertent/incoherent/inconsistent errors in the RP 2021. Conversion of No Development Slope (NDS), natural cover, command areas and orchard to settlement has been conveniently carried out under the guise of correction under Section 17 (2) of the TCP Act, they said.

The existing population of the Chopdem village is less than 1,000 people and such large scale addition to settlement areas in the small village is beyond imagination and absurd. The entire characteristics of the Regional Plan of the village stands altered resulting in making it obsolete by these illegal and unconstitutional notifications. The permanent and long-lasting damage will be caused to the ecosystem, environment and demography of the village.

Stating that leopards were sighted in the village, they said that converting the natural cover and eco-sensitive zones of the village into settlement will be further detrimental to the near extinct wildcat, a protected species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

The petitioners alleged that changes in zones have been made entirely for private interest. The entire process appears to be based on "one pays and gets the desired zones", they mentioned.

In one case, the petitioners stated that total of 1,92,955 sq mts of area of total 2,64,197 sq mts of land Survey No. 17/1 was converted to settlement in three instalments largely comprising of part orchard, part Command Area, part natural cover, part natural cover with NDS, part orchard with NDS, part Command Area with NDS and Disaster Management Site marked.

The information obtained under Right To Information (RTI) Act mentioned that the Expert Committee recommended the application submitted by Bengaluru-based Brahm Agro terra projects Ltd for correction without evaluating the contour plans of the area, without report from forest, without site inspection and without even engineer's report being available for them to make the decision.

But the minutes of meeting provided in the Legislative Assembly to an unstarred question on July 18, 2024, clearly showed that the Expert Committee had deferred the decision since the application does not consist of a professional report and also the site is not inspected. This exposes the blatant manipulations and corruption being done by the TCP Department while handling application under Section 17(2) of TCP Act, the petitioners stated.

VERDICT ON TCP ACT SEC 17 (2) IN MARCH

PANJIM: The High Court of Bombay at Goa on Wednesday concluded the hearings of several public interest litigation (PIL) writ petitions challenging the validity and vires of Section 17(2) of the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Act, 1974, which enables the State government to correct errors in the Regional Plan 2021.

The judgment is now reserved and will be delivered on March 13.

The Goa Foundation, the Khazan Society of Goa and the Goa Bachao Abhiyan (GABA) and three public-spirited citizens Pravinshinh Shedgaonkar of Betim, Mayur Shetgaonkar of Morjim and Swapnesh Sherlekar of Mulgao-Bicholim had filed PIL writ petitions challenging Section 17(2) and the orders allowing changes from orchard and other zones to settlement on grounds of errors in RP 2021. The Section 17 (2) of the TCP Act was inserted by way of an amendment to the Act on March 1, 2023.

The PILs seek an order to quash and set aside the added Section 17 (2) of the TCP Act, allowing ad-hoc and arbitrary conversions of privately owned plots in the Regional Plan, based simply on individual applications from such parties on the grounds of alleged errors that need to be corrected in the said Plan, on payment of set fees and charges.