

MUSTREAD

US Senate confirms Lutnick as Secy of Commerce

Washington: The US Senate voted on Tuesday to confirm Howard Lutnick as the Secretary of Commerce. During the confirmation vote, 51 senators supported Lutnick's nomination, while 45 spoke out against him.

5 automakers in S Korea to recall some 76k vehicles

Seoul: Five domestic and foreign automakers in South Korea will voluntarily recall some 76,000 vehicles for manufacturing defects, the transport ministry said Wednesday.

No good news for Ukrainians in coming days

Moscow/Kyiv: Ukrainians should not expect any positive news in the coming days as the country faces a hard period, ex-Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba has said.

2 dead, 4 hospitalized in Sydney house fire

Sydney: Two people have died and four more have been hospitalized after a house fire in western Sydney in Australia's state of New South Wales (NSW).

30 terrorists killed in operation in NW Pakistan

Islamabad: Thirty terrorists were killed during an Intelligence-Based Operation (IBO) in Pakistan's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military said on Tuesday.

Brazil joins OPEC+ charter on energy cooperation

Brasilia: Brazil has joined the charter of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which paves the way for its participation in extended OPEC talks.

US and Russia forge ahead on peace talks

Agencies, Riyadh

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration said it had agreed to hold more talks with Russia on ending the war in Ukraine after an initial meeting that excluded Kyiv.

As the 4-1/2-hour meeting in the Saudi capital was underway, Russia hardened its demands, notably insisting it would not tolerate the NATO alliance granting membership to Ukraine.

Later on Tuesday, Trump said he was more confident after the talks and he would probably meet with Putin before the end of the month.

"Russia wants to do something," Trump told reporters in Palm Beach, Florida. He brushed aside Ukraine's concern about being left out of the meeting and said Kyiv should have entered talks much earlier.

"I think I have the power to end this war," said Trump.



The talks in Riyadh were the first time U.S. and Russian officials met to discuss ways to halt the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two.

Olaf Scholz reiterated "there must be no decision over the heads of Ukraine."

Even before the talks took place, some European politicians accused Trump's administration of handing free concessions to Moscow last week by ruling out NATO member-

ship for Ukraine and saying it was an illusion for Kyiv to believe it could win back the 20% of its territory now under Russian control.

U.S. National Security Adviser Mike Waltz told reporters in Riyadh

- US says both countries will name high-level teams
Trump says he is confident after the talks, will probably meet Putin before end of month
Ukraine not at the talks, rejects deals without its consent
Rubio says Russians ready to engage, no one will be sidelined

that the war must come to a permanent end, and this would involve negotiations over territory.

"Just a practical reality is that there is going to be some discussion of territory and there's going to be discussion of security guarantees," he said.

Philippines' VP Duterte challenges impeachment before SC



Agencies, Manila

Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte has asked the Supreme Court to nullify an impeachment complaint against her, making her first legal move to fight the case that could lead to her removal and lead to a lifetime ban from public office.

The lower house impeached Duterte on February 5 on accusations such as budget anomalies, amassing unusual wealth and an alleged threat to the lives of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

The daughter of the country's firebrand former leader, Duterte is seen as a strong candidate for the 2028 presidential election.

She has repeatedly denied wrongdoing, saying the move to impeach her, amidst a bitter rift with Marcos, was politically motivated.

In a petition to the Supreme Court, Duterte accused the lower house of "grave abuse of discretion" when it "deliberately circumvented" a constitutional safeguard against more than one impeachment proceeding against the same official within a year.

Trump signs executive order to expand access to IVF

Agencies, Washington

President Donald Trump signed an executive order aimed at expanding access to in vitro fertilization (IVF) for Americans, with a focus on reducing the high costs associated with the treatment.

The White House in a factsheet titled 'President Donald J. Trump Expands Access to In Vitro Fertilization (IVF),' said, "today, President Donald J. Trump signed an Executive Order expanding access to in vitro fertilization (IVF) for Americans."

It added, "priority will also be placed on addressing any current policies, including those that require legislation, that exacerbate the cost



of IVF treatments. The Order recognizes the importance of family formation and that our Nation's public policy must make it easier for loving and longing mothers and fathers to have children."

The factsheet further stated that the cost of IVF treatments can range from USD 12,000 to USD 25,000 per cycle and multiple cycles may be needed to get pregnant.

Trump cuts target next generation of scientists, public health leaders

New York: U.S. President Donald Trump's plan to shrink the size of the federal work force dealt blows to thousands of civil servants in the past few days, but the cuts to the Department of Health and Human Services, coming on the heels of the coronavirus pandemic, the worst public health crisis in a century, have been especially jarring.

"Experts say the firings threaten to leave the country exposed to further shortages of health workers, putting Americans at risk if another crisis erupts," noted the report.

Gunmen kill 7 passengers



Islamabad (UNI)

At least seven passengers were killed by unidentified gunmen in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province, an official confirmed on Wednesday.

The attack occurred at 11:45 p.m. on Tuesday (1845 GMT) at a highway in the Barkhan district of the province, where around 11 armed assailants stopped a passenger bus, police sources from the dis-

trict told Xinhua.

The passengers were traveling from the provincial capital city of Quetta to Faisalabad district of eastern Punjab province.

"The gunmen appeared to have specific intelligence about their targets, as they only stopped this particular vehicle and selectively killed the victims," the sources added.

The assailants fled the scene before security forces arrived.

Barkhan is a bordering district between Punjab and Balochistan, making it a key transit route for travelers between the two provinces, the sources added.

Following the incident, law enforcement agencies launched a search operation in the area to track down the perpetrators.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack yet.

Brazilian prosecution accuses Bolsonaro of attempted coup

Buenos Aires: Brazil's Office of the Prosecutor General has accused Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro of an attempted coup over rots of 2022, the G1 news portal reported on Wednesday.

The former president also stands accused of the violent abolition of the democratic rule of law and participating in a criminal organization, the portal added.

If the accusations are accepted by the Brazilian Supreme Court, Bolsonaro will become a plaintiff in a criminal case.

Despite being barred from running for office, Bolsonaro reportedly plans to run in Brazil's 2026 presidential election. He expects Trump to pressure Brazilian judges to delay enforcement of his political ban.

Italian police seize 788 kg of cocaine in major drug bust



Rome (UNI)

Italian finance police seized a record 788 kg of cocaine in a large-scale anti-drug operation on Tuesday, marking one of the largest drug hauls ever intercepted by the country's authorities.

The operation, conducted by the Guardia di Finanza in collaboration with Italy's National Customs Agency, took place at the southern port of Gioia Tauro in the Calabria

region, police confirmed in a statement.

The cocaine was concealed in three shipping containers arriving from South America, destined for various ports in Italy and Spain. Investigators found the drugs hidden inside hundreds of pallet bags and in the engine compartment of a container carrying frozen fish.

According to officials, the seized cocaine had an estimated street value of approximately 126 million euros (131.6 million U.S. dollars).

Gioia Tauro, covering a total area of 440 hectares, is Italy's largest transshipment port and ranks as the ninth-largest container port in Europe. It is considered a major gateway for international drug trafficking, particularly cocaine.

US Treasury Secy believes Kiev to agree to exchange its resources for aid

Washington: US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent expressed the opinion that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will agree to sign an agreement with the United States on access to Ukrainian natural resources in exchange for assistance.

The agreement will be long-term and will benefit both parties, Bessent told the Fox News broadcaster on Tuesday, adding that the deal will also help strengthen Ukraine's security.

On February 3, US President Donald Trump said that the US expected Ukraine to provide access to its rare earths in return for financial and military assistance. Last week, the Washington Post reported that US negotiators suggested at the meeting with Zelenskyy in Munich that he sign a document that would transfer the rights to 50% of Ukraine's yet-to-be-extracted mineral resources to the US.

Anxiety rises in DR Congo capital as M23 rebels advance in east

Agencies, Kinshasa

As Rwanda-backed rebels strolled through the streets of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's second-largest city, President Felix Tshisekedi's office claimed it was actually still controlled by his army and "valiant" allied forces.

It was the latest jarring move from the 61-year-old leader that has fuelled a sense of worry and panic 1,600 km (1,000 miles) away in the capital Kinshasa, where some residents are looking to move their families abroad amid open talk of a coup.

"There was never any question of fighting in Bukavu. It was clear to all the people on the ground that the Rwandans and their auxiliaries were going to make their entry," said one

army general who expressed bafflement at a statement issued by the president's office on Sunday.

Tshisekedi, he added, "doesn't have the right sources."

- President claims army still control city
Anxiety grips people in capital
Rebel advance latest episode in long-running conflict
Tshisekedi faces criticism for lack of action

Anxiety is visible on the streets of Kinshasa as the army puts up limited resistance against the M23 group's advance and residents question whether Tshisekedi grasps the risk it poses.

Embassies have begun using armoured vehicles for trips to the airport and sending some staff across the Congo River to Brazzaville, capital of Republic of Congo.

Three Kinshasa-based government officials told Reuters they were making arrangements to get their families out of the country.

Banker Matondo Arnold said he had already sent his family to Brazzaville after the rebels seized Goma, eastern Congo's biggest city, in late January. "We never imagined Goma could fall," he said.

As talk about a possible coup spread, Justice Minister Constant Mutamba said on X that Congolese "will not accept any coup that involves the Rwandan army to destabilize the country's institutions."

Russian military plane detected near Alaska

Washington: The US North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) said on Wednesday that it has identified and tracked a Russian military plane in airspace near Alaska.

"The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) detected and tracked Russian military aircraft operating in the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) on Feb. 18, 2025. The Russian aircraft remained in international airspace and did not enter American or Canadian sovereign airspace," the command said in a statement.

The activities of the Russian plane in the Alaskan ADIZ are not seen as a threat by the US, the statement added. The Russian Defense Ministry has repeatedly stated that all of its flights are carried out in strict conformity with international law concerning the use of airspace over neutral waters.

Ukrainian forces knock out N Korean self-propelled howitzer

Agencies, Kyiv

Ukrainian forces have struck and destroyed a North Korean self-propelled howitzer on the eastern front of the nearly three-year-old war with Russia, Ukraine's military said on Tuesday.

"In Luhansk region, fighters of the 412th separate regiment of Nemesis drones struck a very rare M-1978 North Korean self-propelled artillery vehicle with a gun caliber of 170mm," the statement posted on Telegram said.

The post was accompanied by a video showing a military target being blown up, and said the Koksan had first been observed in the war in Oc-



tober 2024. Reuters could not independently confirm the report.

North Korea's military aid to Russia has included about 200 long-range artillery pieces and a significant amount of ammunition, South Korea's defence ministry told a parliament committee last week.

Luhansk region, mostly occupied

by Russian forces, is one of four that Russia formally annexed in 2022, moves that Ukraine and its allies have not recognised.

Ukraine and Western military experts say up to 12,000 North Korean troops were deployed in southern Russia's Kursk region alongside Russian forces and have also reported military equipment from Pyongyang being used.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last week that Russia could send up to 3,000 more North Korean troops to Kursk region, where Ukrainian forces hold a chunk of territory more than six months after launching a cross-border incursion.

North Korean security agents are monitoring and controlling their country's troops in Kursk, telling them that the South Korean military are flying the drones attacking them.

Musk says will bring Starliner astronauts back in 4 weeks

Washington: The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) head billionaire Elon Musk announced that he plans to bring back the astronauts who came to the International Space Station (ISS) on the ill-fated Boeing Starliner in about a month.

"I think it's about four weeks to bring them back," Musk said when asked by President Donald Trump during their joint interview on Fox News when he plans to launch.

Trump pointed out that Musk's team now has a go-ahead from him to fly the astronauts back to the earth.

"At the president's instruction, we are accelerating the return of the astronauts, which was postponed, kind of to a ridiculous degree," Musk said.



"They're left up there for political reasons, which is not good"

The Starliner was launched on June 5 and docked to the ISS the next day. US astronauts Barry Wilmore and Sunita Williams were expected to stay in orbit for eight days and return to Earth on the same spacecraft.