

‘History will not forgive’ us
Says WHO chief on pandemic deal

AFP, Geneva

The head of the UN's health agency warned Friday that history would not forgive countries if they failed to strike a pandemic treaty at the last hurdle.

World Health Organisation leader Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus made the comments with progress slow and time running out for the talks.

But with only five more days of formal negotiations left, scheduled for April 7-11, countries agreed to hold informal meetings in March to try to find compromises on the trickiest issues.

"History will not forgive us if we fail to deliver," he warned urging more action from countries.



People take part in a rally ahead of the 78th anniversary of the “228 incident” in Taipei yesterday. The “228 incident”, which took place on February 28, 1947, led to the massacre of thousands of people as security forces violently quashed an anti-government uprising.

PHOTO: AFP

Scholz hits back at US over Ukraine, free speech

AFP, Dortmund

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has stressed his support for Ukraine's sovereignty and defended Germany's commitment to free speech in a pushback against recent broadsides from the Trump administration.

As US President Donald Trump has reached out to Russia, feuded with Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky and threatened to sideline Europe, Scholz said that "Germany and Europe must stick to their own positions".

Speaking at his last major campaign event before today's elections, Scholz pledged that "we won't leave Ukraine alone and decide things over their heads and we will ensure that Ukraine is a country that can choose its own government".

Scholz also pushed back at accusations from Trump's inner circle, including tech billionaire Elon Musk and Vice President JD Vance who called Germany's policies against online hate crime "Orwellian".

Musk has strongly supported the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and, on the day of Trump's inauguration, performed a right-arm gesture that some interpreted as a Nazi salute.

"I have nothing against people becoming billionaires but becoming a billionaire because you want the right to insult people and break the law is not acceptable," Scholz said.

"We in Europe will stick to our rules, for example that Nazi symbols are banned in Germany."

‘See you in court’
Trump, governor spar over trans rights

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump had a heated exchange with a Democratic governor Friday over his order barring transgender athletes from women's sports.

The Republican president was making televised remarks to a gathering of the country's governors at the White House when he raised the executive order he signed earlier this month.

"Two weeks ago I signed an executive order banning men from playing in women's sports. Many Democrats are fighting me on that, I hope you continue because you'll never win another race," he said.

"Are you not going to comply with it?" he asked Janet Mills, governor of Maine.

"I'm complying with state and federal laws," Mills responded.

"Well, we are the federal law... You better do it, because you're not going to get any federal funding at all if you don't," the president said.

"See you in court," she responded.

"Good, I'll see you in court. I look forward to that. That should be a real easy one. And enjoy your life after governor, because I don't think you'll be in elected politics," a visibly angry Trump replied.

AP sues White House officials over denial of access

AFP, Washington

The Associated Press filed a lawsuit against three White House officials on Friday after the news agency was barred from some of US President Donald Trump's events.

The AP, in the suit filed in a federal court in Washington, said the denial of access violates the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and of the press.

The White House began blocking AP journalists from the Oval Office 10 days ago over the news agency's refusal to follow Trump's executive order renaming the Gulf of Mexico the "Gulf of America."

The ban on AP reporters was later extended to Air Force One.

The news group said it was bringing the suit against three Trump administration officials -- White House chief of staff Susan Wiles and deputy chief of staff Taylor Budowich and White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt.

"We'll see them in court," Leavitt said Friday at the Conservative Political Action Conference.

I will explain to him [Donald Trump] that between allies, you don't make each other suffer with tariffs. I will talk to him about this because we need to calm things down.

French President EMMANUEL MACRON

GAZA CEASEFIRE DEAL
 Hamas frees 5 hostages

AFP, Palestinian Territories

Palestinian militants yesterday freed five Israeli hostages, among the last living captives to be released under the first phase of a fragile truce that is also expected to see Palestinian prisoners released.

Freedom for the captives caps an emotional two days in Israel, where the family of another hostage, Shiri Bibas, earlier on Saturday confirmed receipt of her remains.

Bibas and her two young sons had become symbols of the ordeal suffered by Israeli hostages since the Gaza war began.

The releases came under the first phase of a ceasefire deal which began on January 19 and is due to expire in early March.

The Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group said Israel would free 602 inmates, most of them Gazans arrested during the war, yesterday as part of the exchange.

The ceasefire has so far seen 24 living Israeli hostages freed from Gaza in exchange for more than 1,100 Palestinian prisoners released from Israeli jails. There are 62 hostages still in Gaza, including 35 the Israeli military says are dead.

Since October 7, 2023, Israel's military campaign has killed at least 48,319 people in Gaza, the majority of them civilians, according to figures from the health ministry in the Hamas run territory that the United Nations considers reliable.

On Friday, Arab leaders met in Riyadh to craft a plan for Gaza's post-war reconstruction to counter Donald Trump's proposal for the United States to take over the territory without its Palestinian residents.

Trump's plan has united Arab states in opposition to it, but disagreements remain over who should govern Gaza and how its reconstruction can be funded.

A photo from the meeting showed the kingdom's de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman with the leaders of other Gulf Arab states, as well as Egypt and Jordan.

A source close to the Saudi government confirmed the meeting had finished. He said he did not expect a final statement to be issued as the "discussion was confidential".

Trump triggered global outrage when he proposed the United States "take over" the Gaza Strip and relocate its more than two million residents to Egypt and Jordan.

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