

# Trump threatens Panama to lower transit fees or US will take back control of canal

## Warns Of Potential Chinese Influence On The Passage

West Palm Beach: President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday accused Panama of charging excessive rates for use of the Panama Canal and said that if Panama did not manage the canal in an acceptable fashion, he would demand the US ally hand it over.

"Our Navy and Commerce have been treated in a very unfair and injudicious way. The fees being charged by Panama are ridiculous," he said in a post on his Truth Social platform. "This complete 'rip-off' of our Country will immediately stop." The Panama Canal, which was completed by the US in 1914, was returned to the Central American country under a 1977 deal signed by Democratic president Jimmy Carter. Panama took full control in 1999.

"It was solely for Panama to manage, not China, or anyone else," Trump said. "We would and will NEVER let it fall



The Panama Canal, which was completed by the US in 1914, was returned to the Central American country under a 1977 deal signed by Democratic president Jimmy Carter. Panama took full control in 1999

into the wrong hands!" He continued that if Panama could not ensure "the secure, efficient and reliable operation" of the channel, "then we will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to us, in full, and without question."

The post was an exceedingly rare example of a US president saying he could push a sovereign country to hand over territory. It also underlines an expected shift in US diplomacy under Trump, who has not historically shied away from threatening allies and using bellicose rhetoric when dealing with counterparts.

"The fees being charged by Panama are ridiculous, especially knowing the extraordinary generosity that has been bestowed to Panama by the

US," Trump wrote in his Truth Social post. "It was not given for the benefit of others, but merely as a token of cooperation with us and Panama. If the principles, both moral and legal, of this magnanimous gesture of giving are not followed, then we will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to us, in full, and without question." The Panamanian embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

An estimated five percent of global maritime traffic passes through the Panama Canal, which allows ships traveling between Asia and the US East Coast to avoid the long, hazardous route around the southern tip of South America. The main users of the pas-

## 'Apprentice' creator is special UK envoy

President-elect Donald Trump named **Mark Burnett** — the man who created the television show *The Apprentice*



that helped catapult him to the presidency — as a special envoy to the UK. "With a distinguished

career in television production and business, Mark brings a unique blend of diplomatic acumen and international recognition to this important role," Trump said in a post on Truth Social. The position of special envoy to the UK doesn't currently exist. It's unusual because special envoys are usually sent to trouble spots. **BLOOMBERG**

sage are the US, China, Japan and South Korea.

The Panama Canal Authority reported in Oct that the waterway had earned record revenues of nearly \$5 billion in the last fiscal year. **AGENCIES**

# B'desh: Rohingya repatriation stalled amid Myanmar border tensions

**Dhaka:** Bangladesh hasn't been able to repatriate Rohingya refugees from Myanmar as the situation has worsened after the anti-junta Arakan Army took control of the entire border between the two countries, reports **Ahsan Tasnim**.

Bangladesh foreign affairs adviser M Touhid Hossain revealed this Sunday at a seminar in Dhaka. He highlighted the complexities stemming from the ongoing civil war in Myanmar, which has displaced 1.2 million Rohingya from Rakhine state under severe atrocities. These refugees have been sheltered in Bangladesh for over 7 years.

Hossain attended recently an informal consultation in Bangkok, invited by the Thai foreign minister. Foreign ministers of Myanmar and Laos, China's deputy foreign minister, and India's foreign secretary were also present. "I told them in no uncertain terms that peace and order will not be possible in Myanmar, and consequently in the region, unless the Rohingya can return to their homes with security and rights."

# Crippling IAF gaps force govt to set up panel for new road map

## Move Comes As China Boosts Its Air Power At Bases Facing India

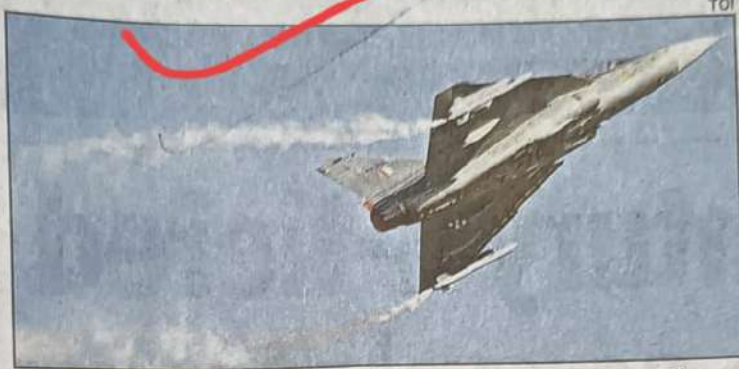
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**New Delhi:** With the IAF grappling with an acute shortage of fighter aircraft as well as force-multipliers, the govt has constituted a high-level committee under defence secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh to chalk out a roadmap to plug the major operational gaps in the force.

The committee will examine the IAF's overall capability development through several indigenous design and development as well as direct acquisition projects. "Among the three Services, IAF has the most critical capability voids. The committee will submit its report by the end of Jan," a source said.

DRDO chief Samir V Kamat, secretary (defence production) Sanjeev Kumar and IAF deputy chief Air Marshal Tejinder Singh, among others, are the members of the committee.

The need to fast-track projects has been reinforced by the way the Chinese air force has deployed additional fighters, bombers, reconnaissance aircraft and drones at all its air-bases facing In-



IAF is grappling with an acute shortage of fighter aircraft as well as force-multipliers. The panel headed by the defence secretary will chalk out a road map to plug the major operational gaps in the force

dia, like Hotan, Kashgar, Gargunsa, Shigatse, Bangda, Nyingchi and Heping, after upgrading them with new runways, hardened shelters, fuel and ammunition storage facilities.

With the IAF currently making do with just 30 fighter squadrons when 42.5 are authorised to tackle the threat from China and Pakistan, one of the major challenges before the committee will be to break the logjam over the long-pending project to manufacture 114 new 4.5-generation fighters, at an initial estimate of Rs 1.25 lakh crore, with foreign collaboration. "Some jets will be directly acquired,

while the bulk will be produced in India," a source said.

Then, there is also the induction of indigenous Tejas Mark-1A fighters, which has taken a hit primarily because of the continuing delay in supply of engines by US major General Electric.

Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) will be able to deliver only two to three Tejas Mark-1A fighters instead of 16 promised to the IAF in the 2024-25 fiscal, under the Rs 46,898 crore deal for 83 such single-engine jets inked in Feb 2021. The order for another 97 Tejas Mark-1A fighters for Rs 67,000 crore is also in the pipeline.

Meanwhile, GE has promised to begin the deliveries of the contracted 99 GE-F404 turbofan jet engines by March 2025 now, around two years behind schedule.

HAL and GE, of course, are now also conducting the final techno-commercial negotiations for co-production of the more powerful GE-F414 aero-engines in India for the planned induction of at least 108 Tejas Mark-II fighters, with 80% transfer of technology for around \$1 billion.

Induction of force-multipliers is also crucial. IAF, for instance, has just six IL-78 mid-air refuelers, inducted in 2003-04, when it requires at least 18 such aircraft to extend the operational range of its fighter jets.

In the "eyes in the sky" arena, India is even behind Pakistan, let alone China. IAF has just three indigenous 'Netra' airborne early-warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft, apart from the three Israeli Phalcon AWACS inducted in 2009-11. Consequently, the plan to develop six Mark-1A and six Mark-2 versions of the Netra aircraft also needs to be fast-tracked.

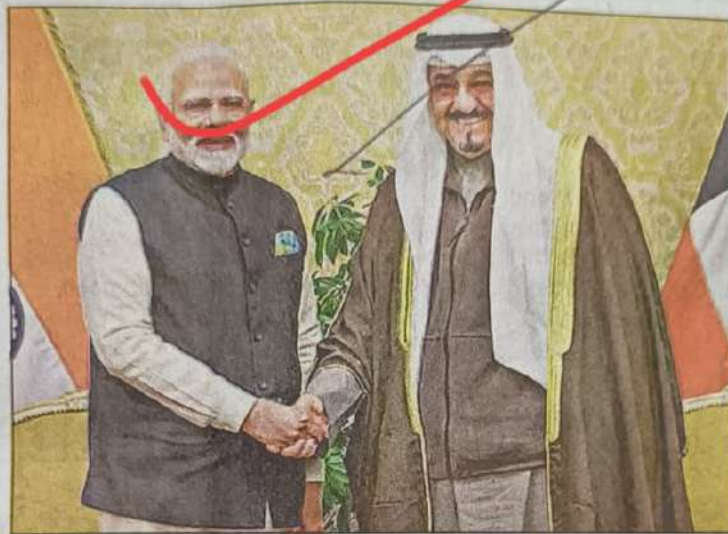
# India, Kuwait believed to have discussed West Asia situation

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During his Kuwait visit, PM Modi also met the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.

Modi's visit to Kuwait took place in the middle of renewed efforts for a ceasefire in Gaza. Kuwait, which holds the GCC presidency, strongly called for a temporary ceasefire at a recent GCC summit it hosted. While neither side officially said anything on Gaza or the overall West Asia situation, it's believed there was a discussion on the issue with Indian govt reiterating its support for a ceasefire and also two-state solution.

On Modi's meeting with the Amir, Indian govt said that the leaders recalled the strong historical and friendly ties between the two countries and re-affirmed their full commitment to further expanding and deepening bilateral cooperation. "In this context, they agreed to elevate the bilateral relationship to a 'strategic partnership'," said an Indian read-



PM Narendra Modi with the PM of Kuwait, Sheikh Ahmed Abdullah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, during a meeting on Sunday

out. Modi also thanked him for ensuring the well-being of over 1 million-strong Indian community in Kuwait and invited him to visit India.

"The Kuwaiti side as the current Chair of GCC assured full support for deepening of India-GCC cooperation under the recently adopted 'joint action plan' in areas, including health, trade, security, agriculture and food security, transportation, energy, culture, amongst others. Both sides also stressed the importance of early conclusion of India-

GCC Free Trade Agreement," said a joint statement.

Both sides also noted that trade has been an enduring link between the two countries and emphasised on the potential for further growth and diversification in bilateral trade. "They also emphasised on the need for promoting exchange of business delegations and strengthening institutional linkages," said the statement, adding Kuwait agreed to explore investment opportunities in India in a range of areas.

## Modi conferred with Kuwait's highest honour

**New Delhi:** PM Modi was on Sunday conferred with Kuwait's highest honour, the Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer. This accolade marks the 20th international honour bestowed upon him. The Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer is awarded to heads of state, foreign sovereigns and members of royal families as a gesture of friendship and recognition of their contributions to international relations.

International figures who have received this honour include former US presidents Bill Clinton and George H W Bush, and the UK's Prince Charles. Among Modi's list of honours are Saudi Arabia's King Abdulaziz Sash, Afghanistan's Amir Amanullah Khan Award, Grand Collar of the State of Palestine, Papua New Guinea's the Companion of the Order of Logohu, Companion of the Order of Fiji, France's Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour and Egypt's Order of the Nile. TNN

# Russia never abandoned desire to normalise relations with the United States, says Putin

MOSCOW, Dec 22 (ANI)

A COUPLE of weeks prior to US President-elect Donald Trump assuming office, Vladimir Putin said that Russia is ready to normalise relations with the United States and other Western countries provided that such efforts do not compromise Russian interests, the State media reported on Sunday.

In an interview with Russian TV and radio outlet VGTRK, Putin said, "It is possible to do everything if there is desire. We have never abandoned this desire."

The Russian President was responding to a question about the possibility for Russia and the United States to normalise their relations, as reported by the



Russian news agency TASS.

Everything changes in international relations and only interests remain invariable, in this case, "the interests of Russia and its people," the Russian leader stressed.

"If we see that the situation changes in a way that there are opportunities and prospects for

building relations with other countries, then we are ready for that. It is not a question of us but it's a question of them. But this should be without detriment to the interests of the Russian Federation," Putin emphasised.

Putin drew from the 19th and 20th centuries to emphasise the changes in international relations and recalled that after the Crimean War of 1853-1856, when a series of restrictions were imposed on Russia, then-Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire Alexander Gorchakov sent out a letter with the following words: "Russia is not angry. Russia is concentrating."

"Gradually, as Russia was concentrating, it returned all its rights

in the Black Sea as well, grew stronger and so on," Putin was cited as saying by TASS.

Putin also drew attention to the fact that some historians described the Crimean War as 'World War Zero' as practically all the European powers participated in it against Russia. However, the Russian President said that the situation changed and these same countries were already Russia's allies during World War I.

Previous generations of politicians ruined Russia by choosing to join the so-called civilised world but this was what the West wanted, Putin said in an interview with VGTRK journalist Pavel Zarubin, state media reported.

# ISRO to study how **crops** grow in space on PSLV-C60 mission

NEW DELHI, Dec 22 (PTI)

DEMONSTRATION of seed germination in outer space, a robotic arm to catch a tethered debris there, and testing of green propulsion systems are some of the experiments planned on the POEM-4 -- the fourth stage of ISRO's PSLV rocket that remains in orbit after launching a satellite.

The PSLV-C60 mission, slated for an yearend launch, is scheduled to place the twin satellites 'Chaser and Target' to demonstrate the space docking technologies that are crucial for building India's space station.

The PSLV Orbital Experiment Module (POEM) will carry 24 experiments -- 14 from various ISRO labs and 10 from private universities and start-ups -- to demonstrate various technologies in space.

ISRO plans to grow eight cowpea seeds from seed germination and plant sustenance until the two-leaf stage in a closed-box environment with active thermal control as part of the Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies (CROPS) developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre.

The Amity Plant Experimental Module in Space (APEMS), developed by Amity University, Mumbai, plans to study the growth of spinach in a micro-gravity environment.

Two parallel experiments will be carried out simultaneously -- one on POEM-4 in space and



one on the ground at the university.

The experiment's outcome will provide insights into how higher plants sense the direction of gravity and light.

The Debris Capture Robotic Manipulator, developed by VSSC, will demonstrate the capturing of tethered debris by a robotic manipulator using visual sensing and object motion prediction in the space environment.

The robotic manipulator will be capable of capturing free-floating debris and refuelling tethered and free-floating spacecraft in future POEM missions.

Mumbai-based start-up Manastu Space will test Vyom-

2U, the green propulsion thruster, that uses a blend of hydrogen peroxide and in-house additives as fuel, with the goal of providing a safer and higher-performing alternative to hydrazine for space applications.

The Varuna payload, developed by Piersight Space-Ahmedabad, is an in-orbit demonstration of a Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) in a CubeSat form factor.

This mission marks the initial step towards establishing a constellation of SAR and Automatic Identification System (AIS) satellites, aiming to provide persistent, near real-time monitoring of all human and industrial activity at sea.