

China-built airport in Pak's Gwadar welcomes 1st flight

Omer Farooq Khan | TNN

Islamabad: The first commercial flight landed at Pakistan's new Gwadar International Airport on Monday following a months-long delay in the opening of the Beijing-funded facility in volatile Balochistan province.

The airport's opening was postponed from Aug 14 to the end of 2024 due to a security review sparked by a series of deadly attacks by separatist militants in Balochistan, in Pakistan's southwest. Then, on Jan 10, the airport was due to open, but this was again delayed.

"The \$246-million Chinese-backed project is expected to grow into one of Pakistan's biggest airports and serve both domestic and international travel," the Pakistan Aviation Authority (PAA) said in a statement.

"Pakistan achieved a landmark moment in its aviation history on Monday as the first commercial flight successfully landed at the new Gwadar International Airport," it read, adding the new airport is poised to play a key role in connecting Pakistan to global markets and facilitating trade, tourism, and economic development.

PIA Flight PK-503 departed from Karachi at 9.50 am and touched down at the airport at 11.15 am, carrying 46 passengers. In a video shared by PAA, the PIA flight was seen being greeted by a traditional water salute by water bowers as it landed.

China has pledged more than \$65 billion for infrastructure, energy, and other projects in Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). As part of President Xi Jinping's Belt

and Road Initiative (BRI), Pakistan is also creating a deep-water port near the new Gwadar airport, a joint venture between Pakistan, Oman, and China that is nearing completion. Chinese people and projects have been frequently attacked in the past by separatists who view Beijing as a foreign invader trying to gain control of impoverished but mineral-rich Balochistan, the site of a decades-long insurgency.

Recent attacks, including one in Oct 2024 in which two Chinese workers were killed in a suicide bombing in Karachi, have forced Beijing to publicly criticise Pakistan for security lapses. In recent months, the media has widely reported that China wants its own security forces on the ground to protect its nationals and projects, a demand Islamabad has long resisted.

Message to China: Quad opposes unilateral acts to forcibly alter status quo

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New Delhi: Hours after the inauguration of US President Donald Trump, Quad nations sent out a clear message to China in the form of a joint statement in which their foreign ministers strongly opposed any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion.

While this formulation is not new, it's significant coming as it does amid fears in the Indo-Pacific region about the potentially erratic nature of President Trump's foreign policy that have been exacerbated by his recent courting of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

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China: Claims on SCS completely justified

China Wednesday said its activities and claims over South China Sea are legitimate and "completely justified", reacting to the Quad foreign ministers' statement. Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning also reiterated her opposition to Quad. PTI

End war or face curbs: Trump to Putin

Trump told his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to make a deal to end the Ukraine war "now" or face tariff hikes. "If we don't make a 'deal', I have no other choice but to put high levels of taxes, tariffs, and sanctions..." Trump said. **P 21**

Trump announces a \$500bn AI infra investment in US

Says Open To Musk or Larry Ellison Purchasing TikTok

President Trump on Tuesday announced a joint venture between OpenAI, SoftBank and Oracle to create at least \$100 billion in computing infrastructure to power artificial intelligence.

The venture, called Stargate, adds to tech companies' significant investments in US data centres. Stargate could eventually invest as much as \$500 billion over four years. The three companies plan to contribute funds to the venture, which will be open to other investors and start with 10 data centres already under construction in Texas.

The announcement of the joint venture was an early trophy for Trump. Trump has promised to accelerate the production of American-made AI to compete against China, and on Monday he rolled back an executive order from ex-President Biden that imposed standards on safety and other requirements for govt use of AI.

During a news briefing Tuesday, Trump said he would remove barriers to allow for the creation of more data centres. He said he would make "emergency declarations" to allow Stargate to generate its own electricity, without providing details. "This monumental undertaking is a resounding declaration of confidence in America's potential," Trump said from the White House's Roose-



Trump with (from L) Oracle's Larry Ellison, SoftBank Corp. CEO Junichi Miyakawa, and OpenAI's Sam Altman at the White House

Musk slams plan

Elon Musk on Wednesday cast doubt on a \$500 billion AI project, saying the money promised for the investment actually wasn't there. The comments were a rare instance of a split between the Musk and Trump. In a post on X, Musk said the main investors "don't actually have the money." "SoftBank has well under \$10B secured. I have that on good authority," Musk added. Musk's sideswipe could be particularly targeted at OpenAI, which is one of the world's highest valued startups, but loses money on the high costs of turning out its expensive tech. According to WSJ, Oracle, has about \$11bn in cash & securities. SoftBank has roughly \$30bn of cash on hand. AFP

velt Room. OpenAI's chief executive, Sam Altman; SoftBank's chief, Masayoshi Son; and Oracle's founder, Larry Ellison, were at the White House announcement with Trump.

Trump separately addressed questions from reporters about the potential sale of TikTok. On Monday he signed an

'Will impose 10% tariffs on Chinese imports on Feb 1'

Washington: President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he intended to impose a 10% tariff on Chinese imports into the US from Feb 1, a decision that is sure to escalate trade tensions. Speaking at the White House, Trump said that the tariffs were in response to China's role in America's fentanyl crisis. Trump said that China was sending fentanyl to Canada and Mexico, from where it would be transported into the US.

The tariff threat comes after Trump said he planned to impose a 25% duty on imports from Canada and Mexico.

Those tariffs on China would come on top of levies that Trump imposed on more than \$300 billion worth of Chinese imports during his first term. Those tariffs were kept in place by President Biden. Trump's pledge to hit China, Canada and Mexico with tariffs is expected to result in retaliatory action against US industries. NYT

EO that aims to stall enforcement of a law that forces a sale or bans the app in the US. When asked if he would be in favour of Elon Musk buying TikTok, Trump said, "I would be, yeah." Then he turned to Ellison and said Oracle could also purchase TikTok. "I have the right to make a deal," he said. NYT

Tech giants watching, Trump backs H-1B for 'competence'

Says It Brings In 'Wine Experts, Quality Waiters'

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: US President Donald Trump once again threw his weight behind H-1B guest worker visas, enraging his MAGA warriors with the suggestion that the programme can also be used to bring high-quality waiters and wine experts to America.

After baiting the MAGA

FULL COVERAGE: FLAP INSIDE, P 21 & EDIT PAGE

masses with executive orders to curtail immigration, Trump bizarrely opened a new front by canvassing for wider use of the H-1B programme to attract top global talent beyond STEM areas. "We want competent people coming into our country. H-1B, I know the programme very well. I

DAY 2 DRAMA: TEAM AI IN, DEI OUT

Photo: Reuters

- > Powers of immigration, customs officers expanded to **swiftly remove some undocumented immigrants**
- > Officials trying to resist immigration enforcement to face **criminal investigation**
- > **Refugees** from various parts of the world who had **already been approved to travel to US barred**
- > Staff of **DEI** (diversity, equity, inclusion) put on **paid leave**
- > **JV** among OpenAI, SoftBank and Oracle to create **\$100bn AI computing infrastructure**

"There are gay, lesbian, transgender children... I ask you to have mercy, Mr President, on those in our communities whose children fear their parents will be taken away..."

—Bishop Mariann Budde



"She brought her church into the world of politics in a very ungracious way... She was nasty in tone, and not compelling or smart. She & her church owe the public an apology!"

—Prez Donald Trump

use it... maitre d's, wine experts, even waiters, high-quality waiters. You got to get the best people," Trump said, mischaracterising the visa at a White House event where Oracle's Larry Ellison, Open AI CEO Sam Altman, and Softbank's Masayoshi Son, among others, were present.

"People like Larry, he needs engineers, Nasa also needs engineers like nobody's ever needed them," Trump said. The unscripted remarks were "proof that Trump is just doing the bidding of his donors on H-1B", said one critic.

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Rush for pre-term deliveries in US

Maternity clinics and gynaecologists in US are fielding an increasing number of queries and requests for pre-term delivery following Trump's bid to end birthright citizenship. "I am trying to tell couples that a preterm birth poses significant risk... In the past two days, I have spoken to 15 to 20 couples," said a gynaecologist in Texas. **INSIDE FLAP**

Trump signals 10% tariff on China

President Trump widened his tariff threats to include China and the European Union on his second day back in office after day one saw Canada and Mexico in his sights. "We're talking about a tariff of 10% on China..." Trump said at a White House event, specifying Feb 1 as a possible date. TNN

PoK seeks more investment from China in region

Omer Farooq Khan | TNN

Islamabad: Pakistan-occupied Kashmir's president Sultan Mehmood Chaudhry has invited Chinese businesses to invest heavily in the disputed region, state media reported on Wednesday after the director of China's Yunnan Sunny Road and Bridge Company met him in Muzaffarabad the previous day to discuss "massive opportunities" across sectors. Li Ping, whose company specialises in building tunnels and highways, purportedly briefed Chaudhry on a blueprint for multiple projects in PoK. The duo also spoke about the region's tourism potential and abundance of natural resources, Associated Press of Pakistan said. Beijing has already pledged investments in PoK under the CPEC initiative. India, which claims PoK & Gilgit-Baltistan as part of its territory, views the CPEC projects as an infringement.

EAM makes early headway in meeting Trump team members

Engages With New Secretary Of State & NSA To Boost Ties

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: The rhetoric is grating but the reception is upbeat. Amid verbal salvos from President Donald Trump against almost every region of the world as part of his America First agenda, India's external affairs minister S Jaishankar got a head start on managing, if not elevating US-India ties, after talks with top Trump aides including secretary of state Marco Rubio and national security adviser Michael Waltz, among others.

It was Rubio's first meeting with a foreign counterpart hours after he was confirmed as secretary of state by the Senate and Trump took the oath of office on Monday, and arguably the fastest any administration has gotten off the blocks. In a boilerplate post on X, Jaishankar said Rubio and he "exchanged views on a wide range of regional and global issues", and he looked forward to closely working with him "to advance our strategic cooperation".

He also made a brief reference to Rubio being a "strong advocate" of the extensive bilateral ties between the two countries, an allusion to the US-India Defence Cooperation Act in which then senator Rubio called for India to be treated on a par with US allies such as Japan, Israel, and Nato members with regard to technology transfers and military collaboration.

Rubio also hosted a meeting of Quad foreign ministers soon after the bilateral with his counterparts — Jaishankar, Japan's Takeshi Iwaya, and Australia's Penny Wong.

"Our wide-ranging discussions addressed different dimensions of ensuring a free, open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific," Jaishankar said, adding that they "agreed on the importance of thinking bigger, deepening the agenda, and intensifying our collaboration."

Jaishankar said it was



EAM Jaishankar meets US secretary of state Marco Rubio in Washington on Wednesday. It was Rubio's first meeting with a foreign counterpart hours after he was confirmed as secretary of state by the senate

As US raises illegal migration, Jaishankar says 'always been open to their return'

One of the issues secretary of state Marco Rubio raised with EAM S Jaishankar was irregular migration, underlining the Trump administration's position on the issue. Jaishankar said India's position on legal mobility and illegal migration has been consistent with all countries and "US is no exception".

"We have always taken the view that if there are any of our citizens who are not here legally and if you are sure that they are our citizens, we've always been open to their legitimate return. So, it's not a position unique to the US. We have been consistent, we have been very principled about it and that remains our position, and I conveyed that very clearly to secretary Rubio," Jaishankar said at a press meet. He warned against quoting numbers, saying India first has to validate that the individuals concerned are of Indian origin.

During the meeting with Rubio, Jaishankar raised the issue of delay in visas for Indian nationals. He said the delay constrained people-to-people contacts that act as the very basis of the relationship. Jaishankar said the relationship is not well served if there's a delay of "400 days" in issuing visas to Indian nationals. TNN

"significant" that the Quad foreign minister's meeting took place within hours of the inauguration of the Trump administration, and "this underlines the priority it has in the foreign policy of its member states".

"The meeting today sends a clear message that in an uncertain and volatile world, the Quad will continue to be a force for global good," he added.

Separately, Jaishankar also met Trump's new NSA Michael Waltz and said they discussed "strengthening our friendship to ensure mutual benefit and enhance global stability and prosperity".

The customary statements belied Trump's verbal

rampage in which he has been dissing countries across the world, including many allies, insisting they have been ripping off the US on trade, and threatening tariffs to level the playing field as per his metrics.

From bullying neighbours Canada and Mexico, to threatening to take over the Panama Canal and Greenland, to warning Nato allies that the US will not protect them unless they ponied up more money for mutual defence, no one has been spared. Not even Russia and Israel. Trump has scorched the foreign policy turf that countries nurture carefully with the broad assertion that the world needs America more than

America needs the world.

But India and other Quad members — despite wrinkles in the trade front — are in a slightly different basket stemming from US fears of being overtaken by China in the global sweepstakes. Given Rubio's hawkish views on China, which may well be tempered by Trump's mercurial penchant for sudden 'deal-making', Washington's early outreach to the Quad, rather than Nato or its neighbours, signals a major shift in its foreign policy orientation.

Both sides have plenty of time to work on this. Trump's second term will almost be co-terminus with Modi's third term, both having around four years in office, till Jan 2029 and May 2029 respectively, if they choose to stay till the end of the term.

Jaishankar also met two prominent Indian-Americans in Trump's inner circles — Vivek Ramaswamy and putative FBI director Kash Patel — on the sidelines of several presidential galas on Monday. He also met US House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate majority leader John Thune, effectively quashing social media trolls who posted misleading videos to say he was insulted at the Trump inauguration.

Jaishankar had a front row seat at the inauguration, arguably one of the best seats in front of the oath-taking ceremony (the billionaires were behind Trump), but left-liberal activists in India widely shared a clip showing a volunteer walk towards the EAM and point towards the exit. But the volunteer was addressing a photographer squattling behind Jaishankar, asking her to move back and not obstruct views. Jaishankar did not even hear or notice that interaction, and his subsequent engagements in the city showed that US-India ties are chugging along steadily — with the inevitable wrinkles — notwithstanding the change of guard in Washington DC.