

WHO chief says turmoil creates **chance for reset**

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

The head of the World Health Organization said Monday that the dramatic cuts of 2025 as the United States headed for the exit created the chance to forge a leaner, re-focused WHO.

Washington, traditionally the UN health agency's biggest donor, has slashed foreign aid spending under President Donald Trump, who on his first day back in office in January 2025 handed the WHO his country's one-year withdrawal notice.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the agency's annual executive board meeting that 2025 was "undeniably one of the most difficult years



US President Donald Trump

in our organisation's history", with many donors tightening their belts.

"Significant cuts to our funding left us with no choice but to reduce the size of our work-

force," he said.

Last week, he said 1,241 posts had gone, while 1,162 staff had left or would be leaving through retirement, voluntary early retirement or moving elsewhere.

Tedros said the WHO's remodelling was all but finalised.

"We have now largely completed the prioritisation and realignment. We have reached a position of stability and we are moving forward," he insisted.

"Although we have faced a significant crisis in the past year, we have also viewed it as an opportunity. It's an opportunity for a leaner WHO to become more focused on its core mission."

He urged member states to keep gradually increasing their membership fees, to reduce the

WHO's reliance on voluntary contributions.

The aim is for membership fees to eventually cover half of the agency's budget, to secure its "long-term stability, sustainability and independence".

"I don't mean independence from member states. Of course, WHO belongs to you and always will," Tedros stressed.

"I mean non-dependence on a handful of donors; I mean non-dependence on inflexible, unpredictable funding; I mean a WHO that's no longer a contractor to the biggest donors.

"I mean an impartial, science-based organisation that's free to say what the evidence says, without fear or favour."



The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialised agency of the United Nations, founded in 1948, and is responsible for directing and coordinating international public health efforts across 194 member states.

Air India says fuel switch 'defect' grounds Boeing 787 jet

AFP | New Delhi, India

Air India grounded a Boeing 787 aircraft on Monday after a pilot reported a "possible defect" in its fuel control switch, the airline said, a similar issue to that involved in a deadly crash last year.

"We are aware that one of our pilots has reported a possible defect on the fuel control switch of a Boeing 787-8 aircraft," an Air India spokesperson said in a statement.

"We have grounded the aircraft and are involving the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) to examine the pilot's concerns on a priority basis," the spokesperson said.

Air India did not specify where the aircraft was grounded. Some Indian media reports said it had been scheduled to fly from London to the city of Bengaluru in India's south.

A London-bound Boeing 787



An Air India aircraft stands on the tarmac at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi

Dreamliner operated by Air India crashed shortly after takeoff from Ahmedabad in June last year, killing all but one of the 242 people on board and 19 on the ground.

A preliminary report by India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) into the Ahmedabad crash did not assign blame.

However, it said fuel supply

to the jet's engines was cut off moments before impact, raising questions about possible pilot error.

According to the AAIB, one pilot was heard asking the other why fuel had been cut off, to which the second pilot replied that he had not done so.

Two major Indian commercial pilots' associations, as well as the father of one of the dead pilots, have rejected suggestions that human error caused the crash.

Air India has said it informed the civil aviation regulator, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, about the reported fuel switch issue.

It also said it had checked fuel control switches across its Boeing 787 fleet after the June crash and found no problems.

Indian authorities have yet to release a final report into the crash.

Iran arrests four foreigners for 'participation in riots': state TV

Tehran, Iran

Iranian authorities have arrested four foreigners of undisclosed nationalities for "participation in riots", state television said Monday.

"These individuals were apprehended during a raid on their hideout" in Tehran province, national television said, without specifying the date of the arrests.

"During a search of one suspect's bag, four homemade stun grenades, used during the

riots and unrest in the area, were discovered," it added.

Iranian authorities accuse Israel and the United States of having had a hand in "riots".

NGOs based abroad have accused the security forces of intentionally targeting protesters in a movement that rocked the Islamic republic in January.

On January 24, the official IRNA news agency reported that two foreigners had been arrested in western Iran.

Russian captain found guilty in fatal North Sea crash



Smoke rises from the MV Solong cargo ship in the North Sea, off the coast of Withernsea, east of England, on March 11, 2025, after it collided with the MV Stena Immaculate tanker. Right, Vladimir Motin



AFP | London, United Kingdom

London's Old Bailey court. He was remanded in custody and will be sentenced on Thursday.

The Russian captain of a cargo ship that hit an anchored oil tanker in the North Sea last year was on Monday found guilty by a UK court of killing a crew member.

After eight hours of deliberation, the jury convicted Vladimir Motin of the manslaughter by gross negligence of Filipino sailor Mark Angelo Pernia.

The seaman, 38, who was married with a young child, was lost at sea following the crash in which Motin's cargo ship, the Solong, collided with the oil-laden Stena Immaculate, triggering a fiery blaze off the eastern UK coast.

Pernia's body has never been recovered.

Motin, from Saint Petersburg, showed no emotion as he was convicted by a jury at

"It's a miracle that there weren't more fatalities or serious injuries," he said.

Prosecutor Tom Little told the court Pernia's wife -- who was seven months pregnant with their second child at the time of his death -- lived in a remote area of the Philippines.

She would need to make arrangements to travel somewhere with good internet access to watch the sentencing remotely. "This was a tragic, and entirely avoidable death of a member of crew caused by truly, exceptionally bad negligence," said prosecutor Michael Gregory.

Europe must overcome divisions to become 'genuine power': Draghi

AFP | Brussels, Belgium

Europe needs to bridge "old divisions" to become a "genuine power" -- or risk remaining "subordinated" to the United States and China, former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi warned Monday.

Draghi, who authored a landmark 2024 report on the EU economy, warned that the 27-nation European Union had to get its act together to survive under a "now defunct global order".

"Of all those now caught between the US and China, Europeans alone have the option to become a genuine power themselves," the ex-Italian prime minister said in a speech at a university in Leuven, Belgium.

"So we must decide: do we remain merely a large market, subject to the priorities of others? Or do we take the steps necessary to become one power?" he asked.

Draghi is invited to join an informal gathering of European leaders focusing on strengthening Europe's competitiveness on February 12 in Alden, Belgium.

The meeting is supposed to steer Brussels' reform agenda over the coming months. Part of



Italian economist and former European Central Bank (ECB) president Mario Draghi (L) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (R)

this will involve implementing more of the hundreds of recommendations from Draghi's 400-page report -- few of which have become reality nearly 18 months on.

On Monday the 78-year-old Italian, who received an honorary doctorate from the KU Leuven university, did not go into details but pointed the way.

Europe was caught between

a tariff-imposing United States that threatened its territorial interests and a China willing to exploit its control of global supply chains for leverage, he said.

"This is a future in which Europe risks becoming subordinated, divided, and deindustrialised -- at once," Draghi cautioned.

"And a Europe that cannot defend its interests will not

preserve its values for long," he said, warning US President Donald Trump's administration had made "clear" it sees "European political fragmentation as serving its interests".

To avoid that, he said the EU had to diversify trade relations by concluding deals with like-minded countries and move from a loose confederation to a European federation.

"Where Europe has federated -- on trade, on competition, on the single market, on monetary policy -- we are respected as a power and negotiate as one," he said.

"Where we have not -- on defence, on industrial policy, on foreign affairs -- we are treated as a loose assembly of middle-sized states, to be divided and dealt with accordingly."

Integration could proceed at different speeds, with only some countries initially signing up to some initiatives, but was necessary, he argued.

"We are all in the same position of vulnerability, whether we see it yet or not," Draghi said. "The old divisions that paralysed us have been overtaken by a common threat."