

Taj Mahal, Village People and elephants

Rubio leads US foreign policy as diplomacy on Iran goes down to the wire

AFP | Agra, India

Marco Rubio leads US foreign policy as diplomacy on Iran goes down to the wire, but he is also making time for cultural attractions as divergent as the Taj Mahal and the Village People.

Rubio, who serves as President Donald Trump's secretary of state and national security advisor, took a day for sightseeing in India on Monday, touring the Taj Mahal, the renowned monument to love.

"It's one of the wonders of the world," Rubio said of the imposing mausoleum in Agra.

"I think it's important to show respect to the culture of the countries that you visit."

Rubio travelled to the Taj Mahal with his wife Jeanette, who usually shuns the spotlight. He put his arm gently around her as they posed on a bench that featured the iconic shot of Princess Diana in 1992.

Jeanette was not the only person to take pictures with Rubio at the Taj.

He also posed with members of the Village People, the disco group originally associated



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio poses alongside his wife Jeanette at the Taj Mahal in Agra

with the camp New York gay underground but whose cultural meaning has been transformed entirely by Trump after he adopted their song "YMCA".

They flew in to perform Sun-

day night at a gala party in New Delhi for the 250th anniversary of US independence, where they serenaded Rubio with "Happy Birthday" over a towering four-storey cake. Rubio turns 55

on Thursday.

The party was the brainchild of the US ambassador to India, Sergio Gor, a high-octane former aide to Trump, who eagerly joined the Rubios at the Taj

Mahal.

Crowds were kept 100 metres away, but the Taj Mahal did not go into a full shutdown as it did for Vice President JD Vance.

The Rubios, joined by Gor and senior aides, later flew to the desert city of Jaipur, where they took open-windowed jeeps up a ragged road to tour the imposing Amber Fort, the former residence of the Rajput maharajas that stares down on a lake.

Rubio was welcomed at the fort by twirling dancers in red turbans pounding drums, to which he gave a fist of approval.

After a brief tour, he was welcomed at his hotel, a converted palace, by assembled elephants, white horses and camels as peacocks fluttered in the garden.

Wooing India

The excursion is unusual for Rubio, who in nearly a year and a half on the job has preferred short, business-like trips and rarely done events outside of government meetings.

Rubio said he was taking advantage of a one-day break in his schedule before a meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday of the Quad -- Australia, India, Ja-

pan and the United States. He will also stop in Armenia on Tuesday on his way home.

The hectic pace comes as Rubio comments daily on Iran, predicting chances of an imminent breakthrough.

The Taj Mahal was built in the 17th century on orders of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as a mausoleum for his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal who died in childbirth.

Rubio is visiting four cities over four days in India as he seeks to revive ties with a country successive US administrations saw as a like-minded partner in a world dominated by China's rise.

Trump has shaken up that approach since returning to office, temporarily imposing high tariffs, warming to both China and India's historic adversary Pakistan, curbing visas used by Indian professionals, and reposting insulting language about Indian immigrants.

In remarks Sunday by speakerphone to the party, Trump insisted he was on board with the relationship, telling the crowd: "We've never been closer to India, and India can count on me 100 percent".

Pope calls for 'disarming' AI in first major manifesto

Agencies

Pope Leo XIV yesterday used his first major manifesto to urge governments to "disarm" artificial intelligence and ensure it serves the common good rather than power or profit.

The first US-born pontiff warned that while AI could be a valuable tool, it also posed serious risks to humanity.

"Artificial Intelligence now demands to be disarmed, freed from logics that turn it into an instrument of domination, exclusion and death," the pope said during a special Vatican presentation of the document, known as an encyclical.

Titled Magnifica Humanitas ("Magnificent Humanity"), the encyclical follows years of Vatican study on AI and emerging technologies. Encyclicals are regarded as authoritative teachings addressed to the Catholic Church's 1.4 billion followers.



Pope Leo XIV

Leo was particularly critical of the use of AI in warfare, saying autonomous weapons systems had made conflict "more feasible". He stressed that lethal decisions must never be entrusted to machines and said any military use of AI should face strict ethical limits.

At the same time, the pope

said "disarming" AI did not mean rejecting technology, but preventing it from dominating humanity. He called for AI to remain accessible, transparent and subject to public debate.

Warning against the concentration of power in the hands of a few technology companies, Leo said influential groups

could shape information, consumer behaviour and democratic processes for their own benefit. He urged governments to impose strong legal safeguards and independent oversight on AI systems.

The Vatican presentation was attended by several AI experts, including Anthropic co-founder Chris Olah, who acknowledged that commercial pressures in the AI industry could sometimes conflict with ethical decisions.

The pope also warned that the growth of AI was creating "new forms of slavery", citing exploitative labour conditions faced by content moderators and children mining rare earth minerals for the digital economy.

In a rare move, Leo apologised for the Vatican's historical role in the transatlantic slave trade, calling it "a wound in Christian memory". "For this, in the name of the Church, I sincerely ask for pardon," he wrote.

India orders migrant detention centres



Representative image

AFP | New Delhi, India

India's ruling party has ordered detention centres for undocumented Bangladeshis and Rohingyas in West Bengal state.

The order calls on local authorities to set up "holding centres" for "apprehended foreigners" awaiting deportation, as part of a broader crackdown on illegal migration.

The government has defend-

ed its "detect, delete, deport" principle, saying those targeted are migrants living illegally in the country.

"Illegal migration has security and socio-economic ramifications which are often well beyond law enforcement," read the order, issued last week.

The planned centres in West Bengal have raised concern because of the state's porous border with Bangladesh and its long history of migration.

Jet carrying UK defence secretary had signal jammed near Russia: ministry

● **The incident disabled the plane's GPS for the three-hour journey, forcing pilots to use alternative navigation systems**

AFP | London, United Kingdom

A British Royal Air Force plane carrying UK Defence Secretary John Healey had its signal jammed and GPS disabled when it flew near the Russian border last week, the defence ministry confirmed yesterday.

The Times newspaper first reported that the RAF jet had its signal knocked out as Hea-



Defence Secretary John Healey visited Estonia earlier this week

ley was returning to the UK on Thursday after visiting British soldiers stationed in Estonia.

The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) confirmed to AFP that the report was accurate, adding:

"This is reckless Russian interference, but the RAF is well prepared to deal with this activity."

It did not confirm who was behind the incident and whether Healey's plane was targeted on purpose.

The incident disabled the plane's GPS for the three-hour journey, forcing pilots to use alternative navigation systems, the newspaper reported.

The Times, whose reporter was accompanying Healey, said electronic devices were unable to connect to the internet and parts of the dashboard malfunctioned. It comes after the MoD last week said two Russian jets "repeatedly and dangerously" intercepted a British surveillance aircraft over the Black Sea

in April.

Healey condemned that incident as "dangerous and unacceptable" behaviour by Russian pilots in international airspace, adding that it would not "deter the UK's commitment to defend NATO, our allies and our interests from Russian aggression".

Officials said the Black Sea encounter was the most serious involving a UK Rivet Joint since 2022, when a Russian aircraft fired a missile near a British plane over the same region.

Relations between Russia and the UK are in deep freeze, with Britain one of the staunchest backers of Ukraine since Moscow's 2022 invasion.

In 2024, an RAF plane carrying then-defence secretary Grant

Shapps had its signal temporarily jammed near Russian territory on its return journey from Poland.



GPS satellites orbit Earth at about 20,200 kilometres (12,550 miles) above the planet and travel at nearly 14,000 km/h, yet can pinpoint a location on Earth with accuracy down to a few metres – or even centimetres with advanced systems.