

Trump pushes endgame narrative as war remains midgame

Threats of tougher strikes accompany quick end assurances, leaving conflict direction uncertain

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

US President Donald Trump spoke for nearly 19 minutes, but the address felt less like a turning point and more like a recap of familiar warnings, recycled grievances, and well-worn talking points repackaged for the prime-time audience.

The line the White House clearly wanted to land was simple. America's "core strategic objectives are nearing completion." Trump true to himself, doubled down, insisting the US is "very close" and will "finish it very fast." The message was aimed squarely at an increasingly war-weary public.

The core problem is that the so-called "finish line" is still undefined. President Trump speaks of objectives being nearly complete, but those goals have never been clearly or consistently spelled out. Are they about crippling Iran's military, forcing regime change, securing shipping lanes, or just playing along with Israeli objectives or all of the above?

There is one inherent danger. When the objectives are so broad and shifting, "success" becomes subjective. It can be declared politically rather than demonstrated strategically.

That might leave the key question unresolved—what concrete outcome actually marks the end of this war, and who gets to make that call and when?

That ambiguity was undercut further by a competing tone in the speech. Alongside assurances of a near-term end came threats of intensified force, with Iran warned of "extremely hard" strikes and even more sweeping destruction in the weeks ahead. The dual messaging—closure on one hand, escalation on the other, left the picture blurred.

The speech underwhelmed largely because expectations had spun out of control beforehand. Speculation ranged from



Donald Trump points at journalists after speaking at a televised address on the conflict in the West Asia from the Cross Hall of the White House in Washington | AFP

a dramatic NATO rupture to the possibility of US ground operations targeting Iran's nuclear assets. None of that materialised. Instead, Trump returned to familiar ground.

He spoke of Iran's history of hostility, criticism of the Obama-era nuclear deal, and claims of success in degrading Tehran's military capabilities.

For anyone following the conflict, there was little new. What did shift, however, was the market reaction. And that may matter more to Trump than the immediate political reviews.

Oil prices surged sharply after the speech, with global benchmarks jumping as traders digested the lack of a clear off-ramp and the more aggressive rhetoric. US stock futures also slid, signaling broader unease. The market response reflects a simple concern— not just how this war ends, but whether anyone in Washington can clearly articulate that end.

Rising fuel costs are already feeding domestic pressure. Gas prices have climbed significantly since the conflict began, even

as Trump frames the increase as temporary and blames Iran's actions in regional oil routes.

The administration's bet is that economic pain will be short-lived. At the centre of it all is the unresolved issue of control over a critical global shipping artery. Trump projected confidence, suggesting it would reopen "naturally" once the conflict ends. That optimism stands in stark contrast to Iran's stated intent to keep it closed and to the caution shown so far by the US military in avoiding direct confrontation there.

Even on alliances, where tensions had been widely anticipated, Trump pulled his punches. His critique of other nations was pointed but restrained by his standards, stopping short of a full-scale rupture while still nudging allies to shoulder more of the burden.

The speech showed less about the war's end than a confident, ambiguous stance between escalation and exit. The finish line remains unseen.

Iran claims 7 million citizen ready to fight

Tehran: Iran's parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said 7 million citizens are ready to fight any US ground invasion. He cited a rapid national campaign, though the figure remains unverified. State media and text campaigns urge volunteers, while retired soldiers are being called up. The Basij paramilitary has also begun accepting children as young as 12 into its ranks.

China in talks with 'all parties' about Hormuz

BEIJING: China said it is in contact with all parties to restore stability in the Strait of Hormuz, calling for an early ceasefire. It blamed US and Israeli actions for the disruption, urging an end to hostilities. China and Pakistan have proposed peace talks and measures to ensure safe navigation through the vital waterway, stressing that escalation serves no one and dialogue is essential for lasting regional stability.

Iran calls nuclear weapons claims 'lie'

Vienna: Iran told the UN nuclear watchdog it is not enriching uranium to bomb-grade levels, calling US-Israeli claims a "lie". Envoy Reza Najafi also termed strikes on the Bushehr plant a war crime, warning of civilian risk. The IAEA reported no radiation leak after recent attacks, as it urged restraint around nuclear sites in the ongoing West Asia conflict and stressed need to avoid escalation.

Iran fires missiles at Tel Aviv, warns of 'crushing' attacks on US and Israel

DUBAI

IRAN on Thursday threatened "crushing" attacks on the US and Israel, firing missiles at Tel Aviv after Donald Trump vowed to bomb the Islamic republic "back to the Stone Ages". Iran's response to Trump's press address was immediate, with Israeli air defences pressed into action and police responding to "several" impact sites, as four people were reportedly lightly injured in the Tel Aviv area.

The war continues to disrupt oil and shipping, with British Foreign Minister Yvette Cooper stressing the "urgent need" to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, where one-fifth of the world's oil usually passes.

Blasts hit Tehran, plants shut

Meanwhile, in Tehran, AFP journalists reported a series of loud explosions hitting the Iranian capital, shaking buildings

and sending reverberations across the city. The targets were unclear. The country's two largest steel plants have meanwhile been forced offline by several waves of US and Israeli attacks, the companies said.

People gather for Sizdeh Bedar

Despite the bombardments, Iranian families gathered at Tehran's Melat park for the 13th day after Nowruz, the Persian New Year, when people traditionally picnic outdoors, AFP journalists said.

In Israel, Jewish Israelis were also celebrating Passover, which some were forced to do underground due to Iran's attacks.

Pro-government Iranians voiced defiance as they marched in Tehran at the funeral of a Revolutionary Guards naval commander killed in an Israeli strike. The country's health ministry said the Pasteur Institute of Iran, a century-old medical

centre in Tehran, had been extensively damaged in a strike.

Lebanon seeks global support

In Lebanon, militant group Hezbollah said its fighters launched drones and rockets at northern Israel Thursday, with the Israeli military's Home Front Command saying air raid sirens were activated. "We will spare no effort to mobilise Arab and international support," Nawaf Salam said Thursday, calling for intensified diplomatic efforts to stop the war.

Austria denies US overflights

Austria has rejected US military overflight requests since the West Asia conflict began, citing neutrality, a defence ministry spokesman said.

Colonel Michael Bauer said such requests were refused from the outset and are always denied if they involve a country at war. AFP



Iranian women hold portraits of Iran's supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei while gathering in front of Tehran's Mellat park during Sizdeh Bedar (Nature Day), the 13th day after the Nowruz Persian New Year | AFP

Don sacks Bondi, Blanche named as new acting AG

WASHINGTON

US president Donald Trump said on Thursday that Pam Bondi is out as his attorney general, ending the contentious tenure of a loyalist who upended the Justice Department's culture of independence from the White House, oversaw large-scale firings of career employees and moved aggressively to investigate the Republican president's perceived enemies.

The announcement follows months of scrutiny over the Justice Department's handling of files related to Jeffrey Epstein's sex trafficking investigation that made Bondi the target of angry conservatives even with her close relationship with Trump. She also struggled to satisfy Trump's demands to prosecute his political rivals, with multiple investigations rejected by judges or grand juries or yet to produce charges. Trump named Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche as the acting attorney general. AP

INDONESIA

QUAKE KILLS ONE, TRIGGERS TSUNAMI

A magnitude 7.4 undersea earthquake struck the Molucca Sea, toppling buildings, killing one person and triggering a small tsunami, officials said. Strong tremors sent residents fleeing as damage hit homes and a church. Dozens of aftershocks followed, including a 6.2 tremor. A 70-year-old woman died in a building collapse, while others were injured. Tsunami waves of up to 75 cm were recorded before authorities lifted warnings. Assessments continue, especially in remote areas, as teams race to determine full extent of damage, with rescue efforts ongoing.

ASIA MATTERS



THAILAND

10 TEACHERS HELD FOR NO WORK PERMITS

Authorities raided an unlicensed international school in Bangkok's Prawet district, arresting 10 foreign teachers working without permits. The school, operating for over a year with more than 100 students, lacked official approval. Those detained included nationals from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nigeria. Officials warned parents to verify school licences, noting such institutions risk closure. Authorities also stressed that hiring foreign workers must follow visa and permit rules, urging public vigilance and strict compliance with employment and education laws.

OIL SUPPLY STABLE, BACKUP PLANS READY

Petroleum supply remains stable, with contingency plans in place to manage disruptions from the global energy crisis, officials said. Authorities are monitoring supply chains and may source from alternative markets if needed. A command centre has been set up to coordinate response as rising oil prices and Strait of Hormuz risks heighten uncertainty.

EXPRESS READ

Machete-wielding man attacks nursery school, 4 children killed

KAMPALA: A man killed four children in a machete attack at a nursery school in Uganda's capital, Kampala, police said. Disguised as a parent, he entered the school, locked the gate and attacked the children. Police arrested the suspect as an angry crowd gathered, with officers firing in the air to disperse them.

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited
(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001)
Corporate Identity Number U40109PB2010SGC033813, Website : www.pspcl.in
(Contact Number 9646117607)

Tender Enquiry No. 160/CHP/EMC-484/GHTP/2026 Dated: 02.04.2026

Dy.CE/MM-IV/GHTP, Lehra Mohabbat invites E-tender for the work of "CHP-GHTP STAGE-I, (2X210 MW) & STAGE-II (2X250 MW) Breakdown, Shutdown, Preventive & Routine Maintenance of electrical system as per Tender Specifications under Coal Handling Plant / Electrical Maintenance Cell on lump sum basis at GHTP. For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 06.04.2026, 17:00 PM onwards.

Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

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Corporate Identity Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813, Website : www.pspcl.in
(Contact No. 96461-36447)

(SHORT TERM TENDER NOTICE)

Tender Enquiry No. 02/ASR/GC/TS/PSPCL/2026-27 Dated: 01.04.2026

Adtl. S.E., Grid Construction Division, Amritsar has invited e-tender for Outsourcing work of erection, testing and commissioning of New 66kV S/S/GADLI (Jandiala) with 01 No. 20 MVA Power Transformers along with associated Bay & 01 No. 66kV line bay completed with all indoor and outdoor equipment including 66kV Bus Bar.

For more details please refer to website <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 06.04.2026, 1:00 pm onwards.

Note : Corrigendum and addendum if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> only.

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1079/12/2026-27/10157

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
HARBOUR WORKS DIVISION No.1,
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE

e-TCN No. CE/HWD/ACCTS-19/25/98, dtd.01.04.2026

Name of the work: "Cleaning of debris from Roads, berms, backup space & disposal of dredged materials from Port area i.e. from Gate No.4 area to MPB junction, MPB Junction to W-1 via CQ, SQ and EQ area, connecting Road from T-junction to New IGB in ICHP area and 3-B road (4 lane) leading from ICHP to Wagon Tippler (one year)". Put to tender value: Rs.1,19,22,303.20 plus GST as applicable. Last date & time of submission of tender through online bidding is 23.04.2026 up to 17:15 Hrs. For details, please log on to the Website: <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

Sd/- Executive Engineer,
Harbour Works Division-I,
Paradip Port Authority
PP/APR/01/2026-2027 dtd. 02.04.2026

CREW BREATHES EASY

Loose ends tied as lunar loo issues get flushed out after liftoff

CAPE CANAVERAL

NASA's moonbound astronauts have reason to celebrate, and not just because their launch went so well. Their toilet is now working. The so-called lunar loo malfunctioned as soon as the Artemis II crew reached orbit on Wednesday evening. Mission Control guided astronaut Christina Koch through some plumbing tricks and she finally got it going.



the moon for a lunar fly-around. It will be Mission Control's first translunar injection since Apollo's swan song in 1972.

Until then, the astronauts are savoring the views of Earth from tens of thousands of miles (kilometers) high. Koch told Mission Control that they can

make out the entire coastlines of continents and even the South Pole, her old stomping ground.

"It is just absolutely phenomenal," radioed Koch, who spent a year at an Antarctic research station before joining NASA.

The mission is due to end with a Pacific splashdown on April 10. NASA is counting on the test flight to kickstart the entire Artemis program and lead to a moon landing by two astronauts in 2028. Orion's toilet may need some design tweaks before that happens.

Located in the floor with a door and curtain for privacy, the capsule's lone toilet is based on an experimental commode that launched to the International Space Station in 2020. That station toilet has been unused and out of order for years. AP

China hosts Pakistan, Afghan Taliban peace talks

ISLAMABAD

PAKISTAN on Thursday confirmed it was holding peace talks with Afghanistan's Taliban government in China, where Beijing is mediating to broker a lasting ceasefire after weeks of fighting that have killed hundreds, disrupting trade and cross-border travel.

The confirmation of the new round of talks came a day after officials from the two sides told The Associated Press that representatives from the two countries had traveled to Urumqi in northern China, where they held the first round of talks. It remains unclear who is representing Pakistan and Afghanistan in the latest negotiations in China. In Islamabad, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi told a news briefing that the talks are ongoing.

"Yes, Pakistan has sent a delegation to Urumqi, in line with its consistent position and longstanding practice of supporting a credible process that can help find a durable solution to cross-border terrorism from Afghanistan," he said.