

Saudi Arabia plans \$600bn in new US investment, trade over four years

Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told President Donald Trump that the kingdom wants to put \$600 billion into expanded investment and trade with the United States over the next four years, the Saudi State news agency said early on Thursday.

In a phone call between the two leaders, the crown prince said the Trump administration's expected reforms could create "unprecedented economic prosperity", the state news agency reported. The report said Saudi Arabia wants its investments to capitalise on these conditions. It did not detail the source of the \$600bn, whether it would be public or private spending nor how the money would be deployed. The investment "could increase further if additional opportunities arise", the agency quoted Bin Salman as telling Trump. Trump fostered close ties with Gulf states including Saudi Arabia during his first term. The country invested \$2bn in a firm formed by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and former aide, after Trump left office. Trump said following his inauguration on Monday that he would consider making Saudi Arabia his first destination for a foreign visit if Riyadh agreed to buy \$500bn worth of American products, similar to what he did in his first term. "I did it with Saudi Arabia last time because they agreed to buy \$450bn worth of our product. I said I'll do it but you have to buy American product, and they agreed to do that," Trump said, referring to his 2017 visit to the Gulf kingdom.

47 Pakistani varsities in 2025 world rankings

LAHORE: (News Desk) A total of 47 universities from Pakistan have made it to the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings for 2025.

Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad is ranked between 401 and 500 in the rankings, followed by several other institutions ranked between 601 and 800.

These include Air University Islamabad, Capital University of Science and Technology, COMSATS University Islamabad, Government College University Faisalabad, National University of Sciences and Technology Islamabad, Sukkur IBA University, University of Engineering and Technology Taxila and University of Malakand Dir Lower.

Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, International Islamic University Islamabad, Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology Rahim Yar Khan, Lahore University of Management Sciences, PMAS Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, University of Central Punjab Lahore, University of Engineering and Technology Peshawar, University of Gujrat, University of Lahore, University of Management and Technology Lahore, University of the Punjab Lahore and University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences Lahore are ranked between 801 and 1000.

Twelve universities are ranked between 1001 and 1200, eight others between 1201 and 1500, and five institutions fall in the 1501+ range. Another 48 universities are listed as "reporters," meaning they provided the necessary data but did not meet the eligibility criteria for ranking.

UK teen faces sentencing over Southport girls' murders that sparked riots

London (News Desk) A UK judge is due on Thursday to sentence a teenager who brutally murdered three young girls in a stabbing spree last year that sparked the country's worst riots in over a decade.

Axel Rudakubana, 18, pleaded guilty earlier this week to the killings, as well as to 10 counts of attempted murder and possessing a blade, at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport, northwest England.

He also admitted production of a biological toxin, ricin, as well as possessing an Al-Qaeda training manual.

Judge Julian Goose is scheduled to sentence the teenager at Liverpool Crown Court from 11:00am (1100 GMT), after his guilty plea Monday halted his impending trial. Goose has warned that he faces a long custodial sentence.

Rudakubana's multiple appearances in court to date have been marked by his uncooperative behaviour, with the defendant repeatedly refusing to speak and declining to stand in court on Monday, where he muttered "guilty" to each of the charges.

Family members of the victims are expected in court for the sentencing.

The teenager's rampage last July shocked the UK, triggering anti-immigrant riots in more than a dozen English and Northern Irish towns and cities, amid viral misinformation that a Muslim asylum seeker was responsible. Rudakubana was in fact born in Cardiff to parents of Rwandan origin, and lived in Banks, a village northeast of Southport. His Christian church-going parents, both ethnic Tutsis, came to Britain in the years after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, according to UK media. The attack has not been treated as a terror incident and he was never charged with terrorism offences — prompting criticism from some. Prime Minister Keir Starmer vowed Tuesday to update terror legislation "if the law needs to change", to recognise what he called the new threat of individuals intent on "extreme violence, seemingly for its own sake".



Firefighters battle the Hughes Fire near Castaic Lake, north of Santa Clarita, California, US on January 23

Donald Trump to take virtual centre stage in Davos at World Economic Forum

Washington (News Desk) Banking and oil executives will quiz Donald Trump at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Thursday as the US president makes a much-anticipated online appearance to the gathering of global elites. Trump's name has come up in almost every conversation in the Swiss Alpine village this week — in formal panel discussions,

in shuttles ferrying people up and down the mountain, and in exclusive parties along the promenade. Davos will finally hear from the man himself during a live video appearance, with banking and oil industry CEOs given the chance to lob questions at Trump, himself a businessman who made his fortune in real estate. One of the Republican

president's biggest cheerleaders on the world stage, Argentina's libertarian President Javier Milei, took the stage hours before Trump, delivering a fiery speech against "the mental virus of woke ideology". Milei said Argentina was "re-embracing the idea of freedom" and "that is what I trust President Trump will do in this new America". He praised

like-minded leaders such as Trump, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele. "Slowly an international alliance has been formed of all those nations that want to be free and that believe in the ideas of freedom," he said.

Mass evacuations after explosive new fire erupts near Los Angeles

LA (News Desk) An explosive new wildfire erupted north of Los Angeles on Wednesday, forcing tens of thousands of people to evacuate their homes and setting nerves jangling in an area still reeling from two deadly blazes. Ferocious flames devoured hillsides near Castaic Lake, spreading rapidly to cover more than 9,400 acres in just a few hours. The fire was fanned by strong,

dry Santa Ana winds racing through the area, pushing a vast pall of smoke and embers ahead of the firefront. Evacuations were ordered for 31,000 people around the lake, which sits 56 kilometres north of Los Angeles, and close to the city of Santa Clarita. "I'm just praying that our house doesn't burn down," one man told broadcaster KTLA as he packed his car. Kalliope Sidnam, 14,

her father, Chief Sidnam, brother, Flynn Sidnam, 8, and mother Melissa Sidnam, wait in a parking lot, at a Red Cross evacuation centre at Hart High School as firefighters and aircraft battle the Hughes Fire near Castaic Lake, north of Santa Clarita, California, US on January 22. — Reuters

The Hughes Fire came as the greater Los Angeles area was on edge after two enormous fires tore through America's second largest metropolis, killing more than two dozen people and wrecking billions of dollars of devastation. As California faces a massive rebuild, President Donald Trump repeated his false claim that the state was improperly diverting water away from the site of the emergency, threatening to withhold federal funds as a result.



Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman meets President Donald Trump

ICC prosecutor seeks arrest of Taliban leaders over persecution of women

Washington (News Desk) The International Criminal Court's (ICC) chief prosecutor on Thursday said he was seeking arrest warrants against senior Taliban leaders in Afghanistan over the persecution of women, a crime against humanity. Karim Khan said in a statement that there were reasonable grounds to suspect that

Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada and Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani "bear criminal responsibility for the crime against humanity of persecution on gender grounds". Khan said that Afghan women and girls, as well as the LGBTQ community, were facing "an unprecedented, unconscionable and ongoing perse-

cution by the Taliban." "Our action signals that the status quo for women and girls in Afghanistan is not acceptable," added Khan. ICC judges will now consider Khan's application before deciding whether to issue an arrest warrant — a process that could take weeks or even months. The court, based in The Hague, was set up

to rule on the world's worst crimes such as war crimes and crimes against humanity. It has no police force of its own and relies on its 125 member states to carry out its arrest warrants — with mixed results. In theory, this means that anyone subject to an ICC arrest warrant cannot travel to a member state for fear of being detained.

India tribunal suspends antitrust ban on WhatsApp-Meta data sharing

Delhi (News Desk) An Indian appeals tribunal on Thursday put on hold the antitrust authority's five-year data sharing ban between WhatsApp and owner Meta Platforms' other applications such as Facebook and Instagram for advertising purposes.

Meta is seeking to quash the Competition Commission of India's (CCI) November directive that imposed a five-year ban on WhatsApp on sharing data with Meta entities for advertising purposes, arguing it would have a negative impact on its business in the country.

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) ordered a suspension of the ban while it hears a challenge by Meta and WhatsApp to the antitrust order. The ban "may lead to a collapse" of WhatsApp's business model, the appeals tribunal noted. In its challenge to the ban, Meta told the appeals tribunal that WhatsApp may have to "roll back or pause" some features in India and curb its ability to offer users personalised ads on Facebook and Instagram.

A Meta spokesperson said it welcomed the interim ruling and "will evaluate next steps." The Competition Commission of India did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the ruling.

Trump policy reversals cause upheaval across America

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) US President Donald Trump ordered federal employees of diversity offices to be put on paid leave by Wednesday night, and called a Washington bishop "nasty" after she asked him to "have mercy" for migrants and LGBTQ children.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt confirmed that US government workers in diversity offices must be put on paid leave by 5pm Wednesday as the new administration moved from day one to shutter programs intended to bolster minority groups.

The US Justice Department has also threatened to prosecute local and state authorities if they fail to cooperate with the new immigration policies, which include a pledge to deport millions of undocumented immigrants.

Trump also indicated he may impose fresh sanctions on Russia if President Vladimir Putin refuses to negotiate a deal to end the war in Ukraine. The Republican also defended his sweeping pardons of US Capitol rioters, including key figures from the far-right Proud Boys and Oath Keepers groups who were released from jail a day earlier. Trump promised retribution as part of what he says is a bid to overhaul Biden's "deep state." His administration fired Coast Guard chief Linda Fagan — the first woman to lead a US military service — with an official blaming her "leadership deficiencies" and an "excessive focus" on diversity programs.

Rubio prioritises ties with India to counter China

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) Following the inauguration of Donald Trump, India has flexed its muscle in the US, with its foreign minister being among the first to meet the newly-minted secretary of state, and efforts already underway to arrange a meeting between the new US president and Narendra Modi. Indian Foreign Minister Dr S. Jaishankar, whose meeting with Marco Rubio marked the latter's first bilateral engagement after taking office, also held a press conference, where he dismissed the possibility of resuming trade with Pakistan any time soon. Rubio's tenure began with a clear focus on countering China's expanding influence, underscoring the US reliance on India as a strategic counterbalance in the Asia-Pacific region. On his first day in office, Rubio's multilateral meetings prioritised the Quad nations — India, Japan, and Australia. US media outlets interpreted these moves as a signal that Rubio's foreign policy agenda aims to elevate India's role as a pivotal US partner in the Asia-Pacific. Analysts predict this shift will carry significant implications for US relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan. He further claimed about the situation between the neighbours: "We never stopped trade. Any steps taken to stop trade with India were taken from their side in 2019."

Swiatek locks in Keys semi-final, Sinner sizzles at Australian Open

MELBOURNE: (News Desk) Iga Swiatek booked her second Australian Open semi-final with another spectacular display on Wednesday while Americans reached the last four of the men's and women's singles at Melbourne Park for the first time in 16 years.

Defending champion Jannik Sinner was also at his impressive best as he dismantled local favourite Alex de Minaur 6-3, 6-2, 6-1 for his 10th victory over the eighth seed in as many matches and returned to the last four at Melbourne Park.

"I felt like today was a great match from my side," said Sinner, who battled illness in the previous round but looked unstoppable on a cool evening at Rod Laver Arena.

"I served very well. Breaking quite early in each set was very important for me and for my game. So, yeah, for sure was the best match of the tournament so far."

Polish world number two Swiatek mowed down eighth seed Emma Navarro 6-1, 6-2 at Rod Laver Arena and faces another American in Madison Keys, who overhauled Elna Svitolina 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Ben Shelton wore down Italian Lorenzo Sonego 6-4, 7-5, 4-6, 7-6(4) in a highlight-laden clash and ensured the United States has players in the men's and women's semi-finals for the first time since Andy Roddick and Serena Williams in 2009. Searching for her first Grand Slam title, Keys will be hard-pressed to go further than Swiatek, who has crushed all five of her opponents at this tournament and is the only woman in the semi-finals to avoid dropping a set. A throbbing ball of energy from the first point to the last, the five-times Grand Slam champion broke Navarro to love in the first game and was not prepared to concede a point — even when good sportsmanship might have warranted it. In the fifth game of the second set and under pressure on serve, Swiatek bolted forward to retrieve a drop that bounced twice before her racket scooped it up. Play went on, though, with Swiatek winning both the point and the game with a passing shot, leaving Navarro to remonstrate fruitlessly with the chair umpire.

Hamas returns to ruined Gaza streets as Israeli forces pull out

GAZA: (News Desk) Uniformed Hamas personnel returned to the ruined streets of Gaza hours into a ceasefire, defying Israel's vow to crush them. After months of negotiations, a ceasefire has paused the devastating war, but it risks collapsing as a result of deep distrust between Israel and Hamas and the multi-phased nature of the deal. With Hamas back, Israeli forces were withdrawing from the territory's densely populated areas, but the destruction they left behind was staggering.

The health ministry has put the death toll at more than 47,100, the majority being civilians. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump's envoy for the region said on Wednesday he would travel to the Middle East to be part of what he described as an inspection team deployed in and along the Gaza Strip to ensure ceasefire compliance. Trump envoy says will personally monitor Gaza ceasefire; 10 dead as Tel Aviv continues West Bank raid

In an interview with Fox News, Steve Witkoff also said he believed all countries in the region could get "on board" to normalise ties with Israel. Asked to identify specific countries, he singled out Qatar, saying the Gulf country was a critical player in reaching the Gaza ceasefire deal. Doha, which mediated the talks along with the United States and Egypt, has expressed hope the six-week truce and prisoner exchange will become permanent. However, that outcome

is far from certain with the releases timetabled at a glacial pace in comparison to a previous truce agreement. The ceasefire is being monitored by the mediators via an "operations room" in Cairo, Qatari foreign ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari told Al-Jazeera. He said they are watching to see if the delicate terms of the deal are being implemented — including the entry of aid into Gaza, the prisoner and hostage exchanges, the withdrawal of Israeli troops

from densely populated areas and the return of displaced people to their homes. RAFAH: Palestinians stand among the rubble of buildings destroyed by Israeli strikes. — Reuters

The ceasefire covers the cessation of hostilities for an initial six-week phase, during which 33 Israeli hostages are to be freed in exchange for 1,900 Palestinians being held in Israeli custody. What comes next, however, will be trickier to see through. The terms of a second phase, aimed at bringing