

India's Modi invited to meet with Trump next week: White House official

Washington (News Desk) US President Donald Trump has invited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit the White House next week, a White House official said, hours after a US military plane departed to return deported migrants to the country.

Trump spoke with Modi on Jan 27, when he discussed immigration and stressed the importance of India buying more American-made security equipment and fair bilateral trading ties.

India, a strategic partner of the United States in its efforts to counter China, is keen to enhance trade relations with the US and make it easier for its citizens to get skilled worker visas.

It is also keen to avoid tariffs that Trump has threatened in the past, citing India's high tariffs on US products.

The United States is India's largest trading partner and two-way trade between the two countries surpassed \$118 billion in 2023/24, with India posting a trade surplus of \$32 billion. US military flight deporting migrants to India, official says. A US military plane is deporting migrants to India, a US official said on Monday, the farthest destination of the Trump administration's military transport flights for migrants. President Donald Trump has increasingly turned to the military to help carry out his immigration agenda, including sending additional troops to the US-Mexico border, using military aircraft to deport migrants and opening military bases to house them.

Australian cricketer Khawaja backs journalist fired over Gaza stance

Melbourne (News Desk) Australia batsman Usman Khawaja has condemned a radio station's decision to drop cricket journalist Peter Lalor from its coverage of the Sri Lanka test series over social media posts related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Australian radio station SEN confirmed on Tuesday it had parted ways with Lalor, the former chief cricket writer of The Australian newspaper, after dialogue with him about some of the commentary on his social media.

Lalor's feed on X includes re-posts of news stories about Israeli attacks in Gaza and accusations of genocide levelled at the Israeli government.

Pakistan-born Khawaja, who has been vocal in his support for Palestinians and on Instagram that Lalor "deserved better". "Standing up for the people of Gaza is not anti-Semitic nor does it have anything to do with my Jewish brothers and sisters in Australia, but everything to do with the Israeli government and their deplorable actions," Khawaja said. "It has everything to do with justice and human rights. Unfortunately hatred towards the Jewish and Muslim community will always exist." Australia has been grappling with a series of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic attacks on places of worship, buildings and cars since the beginning of the Israel invasion of Gaza in late-2023.

Sri Lanka president vows to end island's 'corrupt' image

Colombo (News Desk) Sri Lanka's leftist president marked the anniversary of independence from Britain on Tuesday with a pledge to change the impoverished island nation's image as a "corrupt" country.

Self-avowed Marxist Anura Kumara Dissanayake dispensed with the usual elaborate military pageantry of jet flyovers and horse parades to mark the 1948 handover of power.

His government instead staged a scaled-down military march in keeping with his pledge to pare lavish spending on government officialdom.

"We are committed to transforming Sri Lanka's global image from a country known for corrupt governance," he said in a message to the nation.

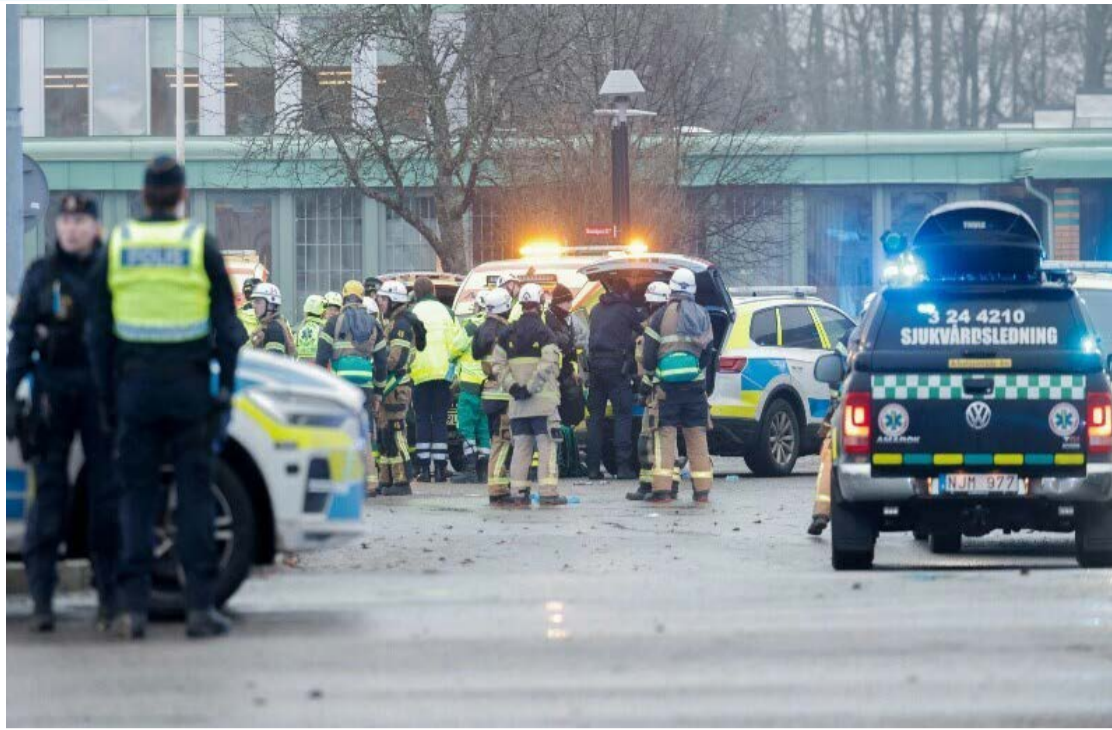
"Despite countless obstacles and the deep-rooted flaws of the past corrupt political system, the people's government, built by the collective will of the citizens, is steadily progressing forward."

Dissanayake's government concluded a long-delayed debt restructuring with both bilateral and private creditors late last year, ending Sri Lanka's status as a bankrupt nation.

Sri Lanka had defaulted on its \$46 billion external debt in April 2022 after running out of foreign exchange to finance the import of food, fuel, medicines and other essentials.

The unprecedented economic meltdown forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down. His successor, Ranil Wickremesinghe, secured a \$2.9bn bailout loan from the International Monetary Fund.

Dissanayake, who defeated Wickremesinghe in elections last September, is maintaining the tough austerity measures introduced under his predecessor's administration and has vowed to continue the four-year IMF bailout programme. "As the new government, over the past four months, we have laid the foundation for a stable economy and introduced a new political culture," Dissanayake said.



Members of the emergency services work at the scene of the Risbergska School in Orebro, Sweden, on February 4, following reports of a serious violent crime

Fly Jinnah secures Bangladesh nod to operate Karachi-Dhaka route soon: reports

Karachi (News Desk) Fly Jinnah, a low-cost air carrier for domestic routes, has secured the nod from Bangladesh to operate flights from Karachi to Dhaka, it emerged on Tuesday.

The development comes after Bangladesh High Commissioner to Pakistan Mohammad Iqbal Hussain announced last week that direct flights between the two countries were expect-

ed to begin within the next few months. He had also revealed that cargo flights between Dhaka, Karachi and Lahore would also commence soon, further facilitating trade and business exchanges.

Bangladeshi media outlet The Daily Star reported a day ago that Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) Chairman Air Vice Marshal Monjur Kabir Bhuiyan told it:

"They (Fly Jinnah) applied to us, and we have approved it."

He further said: "Now they (Fly Jinnah) will appoint a GSA (General Sales Agent). Once they request slots and frequencies, we will provide them. Our part is currently complete." Indian media outlet ANI also reported that a direct air link between the two countries would be set up soon after the launch

of a direct shipping line between Chittagong and Karachi.

"CAAB has approved a proposal of Fly Jinnah to operate direct flights between Bangladesh and Pakistan. We will sign a deal to resume Dhaka-Karachi direct flights," the outlet quoted the said Abdul Naser Khan, additional secretary to Bangladesh's Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, as saying.

Five people wounded in Sweden school shooting

Sweden (News Desk) Five people were shot and wounded at a school in the central Swedish city of Orebro on Tuesday, police said, urging the public to stay away from the area as a large operation was underway.

Images from the scene showed a large police presence with multiple ambulances and emergency vehicles outside the school. Several media, including tabloid Expressen and news agency TT, reported

that the suspected shooter had shot himself dead, however, the police later said that the suspect was among the five wounded, adding that they had not ruled out the possibility of other suspects. "One of the injured persons is a person whom we suspect may be the assailant," Orebro police chief Roberto Eid Forst told a press conference, adding: "We can't rule out other suspects, and that's something we are continuing to work on in this in-

tensive phase now — why it happened and if there are other possible suspects." School attacks are relatively rare in Sweden, which has in recent years grown more accustomed to shootings and bombings linked to gang violence that kills dozens of people each year. "The extent of the injuries is unclear. The operation is ongoing," police said in an earlier statement. Police initially said that four people had been shot, but updated the

tally minutes later to five. A teacher at the school said he was in the school when he heard gunfire. "I heard shots fired, so I've barricaded myself and am waiting for news. We have an alarm on our security app and I'm communicating with my colleagues," Petter Krafling told the online union newspaper Vi Lare. According to media reports, the attack took place at the Campus Risbergska school, a secondary school for adults.



Cargo shipping containers sit on the Evergreen Ever Fame container ship docked at a container terminal at the Port of Los Angeles in Los Angeles, California on February 3.

China hits back with tariffs on US goods after Trump imposes new levies

Hongkong (News Desk) China on Tuesday slapped tariffs on US imports in a rapid response to new US duties on Chinese goods, renewing a trade war between the world's top two economies as President Donald Trump sought to punish China for not halting the flow of illicit drugs. Trump on Monday sus-

ended his threat of 25pc tariffs on Mexico and Canada at the last minute, agreeing to a 30-day pause in return for concessions on border and crime enforcement with the two neighbouring countries. But there was no such reprieve for China. Trump's additional 10 per cent tariff across all Chinese

imports into the US came into effect at 12:01am ET on Tuesday (10:01am PKT). Within minutes, China's Finance Ministry said it would impose levies of 15pc for US coal and LNG and 10pc for crude oil, farm equipment and some autos. The new tariffs on US ex-

ports will start on February 10, the ministry said. Separately, China's Commerce Ministry and its Customs Administration said the country is imposing export controls on tungsten, tellurium, ruthenium, molybdenum and ruthenium-related items to "safeguard national security interests".

Ex-British soldier jailed for spying for Iran

LONDON: (News Desk) A former British soldier who sparked a manhunt after escaping from prison before his trial was sentenced by a UK court on Monday to 14 years for spying for Iran.

Daniel Khalife, 23, was found guilty in November of espionage and terrorism charges as well as for escaping prison.

A judge at Woolwich Crown Court in southeast London sentenced him to 14 years and three months jail for embarking on a "dangerous and fantastical plan" that involved passing sensitive information to Iranian intelligence for cash.

Khalife, whose mother is Iranian, gathered information, including the names of elite special forces personnel, over a two-and-a-half-year period while posted in the UK and United States before being arrested and charged in 2023.

"The mere fact that you started on this dangerous and fantastical plan demonstrates your immaturity and lack of wisdom," said Justice Bobbie Cheema-Grubb.

Prosecutors accused Khalife of playing a "cynical game", making contact with a man linked to Iranian intelligence after joining the British army. He subsequently told British intelligence he wanted to be a double agent, in what his defence lawyer termed a "hapless" ploy.

Syria's Sharaa says elections could take five years

DAMASCUS: (News Desk) Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa said on Monday organising elections could take up to five years, the week after he was appointed interim president and less than two months after ousting Bashar al-Assad.

"My estimate is that the period of time will be approximately between four and five years until the elections," Sharaa said in a pre-recorded interview broadcast on a private Syrian television channel, adding that the infrastructure for the vote "needs to be re-established, and this takes time".

In late December, he told Al Arabiya TV the election process could take four years. The infrastructure for the vote "needs to be re-established, and this takes time", Sharaa added on Monday.

Pakistan set to begin preparations for tri-nation series, Champions Trophy today

LAHORE: (News Desk) Building on a strong winning streak in their recent One-day International (ODI) series, Pakistan are set to begin their preparations for the upcoming tri-nation series and Champions Trophy. A training camp will be held at the Ghani Glass Ground here on Tuesday, marking the first time the national team will practice at the venue. The tri-nation series featuring South Africa, New Zealand along with the hosts will kick off in Lahore on February 8. Following that, the team will also focus on preparations for the Champions Trophy, which is set to begin in Karachi with the opening match between Pakistan and New Zealand on February 19. In an interesting development, the camp will feature the addition of Hina Munawar as the team operations manager. Hina, on deputation from the Punjab Police, will become the first woman to join the men's national team's management. This is the first time a female official will serve in a men's cricket team management role, a departure from the previous practice of female staff working exclusively with the national women's team. The upcoming tri-series will also be the first international event to be held at the newly renovated Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore, and at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi, where final touches are being made ahead of the event. Despite recent struggles in Test and Twenty20 International formats, Pakistan's performance in the past three ODI series has raised hopes. The team has been impressive, defeating world champions Australia 2-1, Zimbabwe 2-1, and most recently South Africa 3-0. As hosts of both the tri-series and the Champions Trophy, Pakistan will benefit from home advantage.

Arsenal thrash Manchester City to boost title challenge

LONDON: (News Desk) Arsenal's 5-1 demolition of Manchester City on Sunday kept the Gunners still within reach of Liverpool in the Premier League title race.

In the battle between the top two for the past two seasons, the Gunners prevailed to move within six points of leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand.

"It is a great day for us, especially with the necessity that we had to win the game," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta.

A day to savour for Arsenal against the side that has denied them the title in each of the past two seasons was lit up by goals from academy graduates Myles Lewis-Skelly and Ethan Nwaneri.

The teenagers became the youngest players to score in the Premier League against the reigning champions since Wayne Rooney announced his arrival for Everton against Arsenal in 2003.

Lewis-Skelly would have been banned had his controversial red card against Wolves last weekend not been rescinded.

The left-back made the most of that reprieve with a barnstorming performance that was capped by his first goal for the club.

He rounded it off with a cocksure celebration as he mimicked City striker Erling Haaland's trademark meditation pose.

Nwaneri completed the rout with his seventh goal of the season and is thriving in the extra minutes offered by Bukayo Saka's injury layoff.

The vibrancy of Arsenal's youth contrasted sharply with an ageing City side, whose best days are clearly behind them and need a refresh if Pep Guardiola is to make them contenders again next season.

"It's happened all season, we are giving away too many things," said City manager Guardiola. "You cannot lose the control, it's 95 minutes. You cannot finish in the way we played."

Arsenal were gifted the perfect start inside two minutes as Manuel Akanji lost possession and Kai Havertz squared for Martin Odegaard to open the scoring.

Saudi Arabia, UAE seen as venues for Trump-Putin summit

MOSCOW: (News Desk) Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are seen by Russia as possible venues for a summit between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, two Russian sources with knowledge of the discussions said.

Trump has said he will end the war in Ukraine as soon as possible and said he is ready to meet with Putin. Putin congratulated Trump on his election and stated he is ready to meet Trump to discuss Ukraine and energy.

Russian officials have repeatedly denied any direct contacts with the US about preparations for a phone call between Trump and Putin, which would precede an eventual meeting later this year. However, senior Russian officials have visited both Saudi Arabia and the UAE in recent weeks, according to the Russian sources.

One source said there was still some opposition to the idea in Russia as some diplomats and intelligence officials were pointing to the close mil-

itary and security links that both the Kingdom and the UAE have with the United States. But both Trump and Putin have developed friendly relations with rulers of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Trump said on Sunday that his administration had "meetings and talks scheduled with various parties, including Ukraine and Russia." When asked about those remarks, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that contacts were "apparently planned". Saudi Crown Prince Mo-

ammed bin Salman was the first foreign head of state Trump called after taking office. He described the Crown Prince as "a fantastic guy" during his speech via video link to an audience at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Putin, who visited Saudi Arabia and the UAE in 2023, said last September that he was grateful to Mohammed bin Salman for helping to organise the biggest US-Russian prisoner swap since the Cold War. Putin and Mohammed

bin Salman, also known as MbS, have fostered a close personal relationship since 2015 when the prince visited Russia for the first time. Putin and MbS's relationship has helped the leaders of the world's two biggest oil exporters conclude and maintain the Opec+ energy deal. Trump called on Saudi Arabia and Opec to lower oil prices, a potential bargaining chip for Russia in the talks. Both Mohammed bin Salman and UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al

Nahyan have maintained neutrality throughout the Ukraine war, refraining from joining the West in criticising and sanctioning Russia. Both leaders have also maintained regular contacts with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited Russia several times during the war, saying during his last visit in Oct 2024 that he was ready to support efforts to find peace in Ukraine. The UAE also successfully mediated prisoner exchanges.