

Xi holds phone talks with Trump

Sends VP Zheng to attend Trump's inauguration

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Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday held phone talks with US president-elect Donald Trump, Chinese state media reported.

CCTV said the phone call happened "on the evening of January 17", without providing any immediate further details.

Earlier yesterday, China announced Xi would send Vice President Han Zheng to attend Trump's inauguration next week, reports AFP.

India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is set to represent India at the swearing-in ceremony. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said that Jaishankar will also have meetings with representatives of the incoming Trump administration during his visit to the US, reports The Hindu.

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Japan and Australia will be represented by their respective Foreign Ministers Takeshi Iwaya and Penny Wong. Argentina's President, Javier Milei, a strong supporter of Trump, has said he will attend, according to reports. Another Trump backer, Hungary's Viktor Orban, has said he is considering coming.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has said she hopes to attend the inauguration.

Hard-right Eurosceptic Nigel Farage, who leads the Reform UK party, is due to be at the ceremony, as is French far-right politician Eric Zemmour.

Trump waged a bitter trade war with China during his first term, slapping onerous tariffs on imports from the world's second-largest economy.

He has threatened to impose more severe measures this time around, accusing Beijing of unfair trade practices and contributing to a devastating fentanyl crisis in the United States.

4 journos

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in a popular uprising.

Countries were ranked based on the number of journalists jailed, with Bangladesh tying with Nigeria at 14th place.

With three journalists jailed, India was ranked at 15. Afghanistan jailed fewer journalists than Bangladesh and India.

China, Israel, and Myanmar emerged as the world's three worst offenders, jailing 50, 43 and 35 journalists respectively.

Asia remained the region with the highest number of journalists behind bars in 2024.

A global total of at least 361 journalists were incarcerated as of December 1, 2024, the report said.

Globally, reporters or journalists covering politics made up the highest number of jailed journalists, the report said.

"Governments holding journalists without charge must cease the practice of arbitrary detention and immediately release arbitrarily detained journalists," said the report.

It also urged governments to end the misuse of anti-state and financial crime laws to punish journalists.

It also asked governments to repeal existing laws or reform them to ensure that they contain appropriate guardrails to prevent oppression against journalists.

EU deepens probe into X after Musk outbursts

AFP, Brussels

The EU yesterday demanded X hand over more details about its algorithms and any future changes as part of its wide-ranging probe into the platform, as Elon Musk's outbursts on European politics ramp up pressure for the bloc to act.

Musk, who will be a part of Donald Trump's incoming administration in the United States, has angered Europe with a series of attacks on the continent's leaders as well as support for Germany's far-right AfD party before next month's vote.



People attend a protest in Damascus, Syria, yesterday to support Gaza and condemn Israeli aggression on Syrian territories. Chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court Karim Khan met Syria's new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa yesterday, state media reported, as last month's ouster of Bashar al-Assad sparks hopes for justice.

PHOTO: REUTERS

INTERNATIONAL

US top court upholds law banning TikTok

REUTERS, Washington

The US Supreme Court yesterday refused to rescue TikTok from a law that required the popular short-video app to be sold by its Chinese parent company ByteDance or banned on Sunday in the United States on national security grounds - a major blow to a platform used by nearly half of all Americans.

The justices unanimously ruled that the law, passed by an overwhelming bipartisan majority in Congress last year and signed by Democratic President Joe Biden, did not violate the US Constitution's First Amendment protection against government abridgment of free speech.

The justices affirmed a lower court's decision that had upheld the measure after it was challenged by TikTok, ByteDance and some of the app's users.

"There is no doubt that, for more than 170 million Americans, TikTok offers a distinctive and expansive outlet for expression, means of engagement, and source of community. But Congress has determined that divestiture is necessary to address its well-supported national security concerns regarding TikTok's data collection practices and relationship with a foreign adversary," the court said in the unsigned opinion.

Indian troops kill 12 Maoist rebels

AFP, Raipur

Indian security forces shot dead at least 12 Maoist rebels in central India, police said, as New Delhi steps up efforts to quell the long running insurgency.

More than 10,000 people have died in the decades-long insurgency waged by the rebels, who say they are fighting for the rights of marginalised Indigenous people.

The firefight broke out Thursday in the forested areas of Bijapur district in the state of Chhattisgarh, known as the heartland of the insurgency.

"We have received information of the killing of 12 Maoists in encounters with the security forces," senior police official Sundarraj P told AFP.

A crackdown by security forces has killed more than 200 rebels in the past year, an overwhelming majority in Chhattisgarh, according to government data.

Amit Shah, India's interior minister, said last year the government expected to crush the rebellion by 2026.

The conflict has seen a number of deadly attacks on government forces over the years.

Earlier this month, a roadside bomb killed at least nine Indian troops.

Russia-Iran pact adds momentum to ties

Putin tells his Iranian counterpart amid stinging Western sanctions

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adding it should further boost trade and economic ties.

Moscow has cultivated closer ties with Iran and other countries hostile towards the US, such as North Korea, since the start of the Ukraine war, and already has strategic pacts with Pyongyang and close ally Belarus, as well as a strategic partnership agreement with China amid stinging Western sanctions.

The 20-year Russia-Iran agreement is

not expected to include a mutual defence clause of the kind sealed with Minsk and Pyongyang, but is still likely to concern the West which sees both countries as malign influences on the world stage.

Moscow and Tehran say their increasingly close ties are not directed against other countries, reports Reuters.

Russia has made extensive use of Iranian drones during the war in Ukraine and the US accused Tehran in September of delivering close-range ballistic missiles to Russia for use against Ukraine. Tehran denies supplying drones or missiles.

The Kremlin has declined to confirm it has received Iranian missiles.

Russia has supplied Iran with S-300 air defence missile systems in the past and there have been reports in Iranian media of potential interest in buying more advanced systems such as the S-400 and of acquiring advanced Russian fighter jets.

Bangladesh needs

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In the report, HRW said Bangladesh's interim government has set up a commission to investigate enforced disappearances and pledged reforms and accountability for rights abuses and against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian rule.

During the crackdowns on student-led protests over three weeks in July and August, over 1,000 people were killed and many thousands injured due to excessive and indiscriminate use of ammunition by security forces, the report said.

However, activists have raised concerns that security forces have continued to carry out abuses, including arbitrary arrests of opposition supporters and journalists and denying them due process and proper access to legal counsel.

HRW said while the interim government acceded to the United Nations Convention on Enforced Disappearances, security forces have failed to release those unlawfully detained or provide answers to their families about what happened to them.

The HRW report pointed to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who fled Myanmar and are living in refugee camps are at risk of violence at hands of armed groups and gangs, adding that unregistered refugees risk hunger and do not seek health care out of fear that they will be returned to Myanmar.

Armed groups and government forces unlawfully killed civilians, drove many from their homes, and blocked access to humanitarian aid.

In many of the more than 70 national elections in 2024, authoritarian leaders gained ground with their discriminatory rhetoric and policies.

TIB worried over exclusion

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Iftekharuzzaman added that the NCTB, along with those opposing the self-identification of indigenous communities as "indigenous" and those who devised the bizarre theory that the term "indigenous" cannot be used in Bangladesh, is continuing the legacy of authoritarian governments.

TIB has called for accountability from the NCTB and urged the organisation to be restructured to eliminate authoritarian influences.

TIB also urged the government to clarify its position on recognising indigenous communities' self-identity as "indigenous" and ensuring their equal rights.

'NOT AN ISOLATED INCIDENT' Meanwhile, the CHT Commission yesterday condemned the attack on indigenous students and their supporters on January 15 in Dhaka.

In a joint statement signed by the commission's co-chairs, Sultana Kamal, Elsa Stamatopoulou, and Myrna Cunningham Kain, it said that when a group under the banner "Aggrieved Student Masses" organised a march on January 16 to protest the attack, the police responded with excessive force, including baton charges, water cannons, and sound grenades to disperse them.

"We condemn both incidents and urgently demand justice,

accountability for the perpetrators, proper medical treatment for the injured, and effective measures to prevent such occurrences in the future," the statement said.

The commission believes the attack on indigenous students is not an isolated incident but part of a systemic culture of impunity that exists in the CHT and for indigenous peoples across Bangladesh, which has enabled the rise of extreme fundamentalist groups throughout the country.

The commission warns the interim government that if it fails to take immediate steps to curb the rise of these extremist forces, the consequences will extend beyond harm to indigenous peoples.

"This malicious force will also destabilise the government itself and undermine its promised vision of a diverse and inclusive Bangladesh," the statement read.

The commission urged the government to take swift and decisive action to curb the influence of extremist forces and settler groups, safeguard the rights and security of indigenous peoples both within and beyond the CHT, and honour its commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive Bangladesh.

TORCH PROCESSION Members of Democratic Rights Committee, Left Democratic Alliance, and indigenous communities yesterday

staged a demonstration at Dhaka University protesting Wednesday's assault on students and the subsequent use of excessive force on the protesters by police the following day.

Angkan Chakma, president of the Hill Students' Council, Abdullah Kafi, a leader of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, researcher Mahtab Uddin, author and researcher Maha Mirza, and Masud Imran Manna, a teacher at Jahangirnagar University, and eminent economist Anu Muhammad addressed the programme.

"During and after the July uprising, our youths painted colourful graffiti that depicted their dream of a discrimination-free, new Bangladesh. They dreamed of a Bangladesh where there would be no place for autocracy and discrimination and that Bangladesh would be full of people who would embrace diversity. However, we do not see any similarity between that dream and the reality nowadays," said Professor Anu Muhammad.

Author and researcher Maha Mirza said, "In this country, indigenous people have been brutally assaulted when they were speaking for their rights. Dhaka's streets have been stained by blood. We did not want this Bangladesh, so we must restart our struggle."

Afterwards, demonstrators brought out a torch procession from DU campus.

Economy to grow 4.1% in FY25: WB

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multilateral agencies, Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in FY25 would be the lowest since FY20, when the Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the globe.

Earlier this month, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) said GDP growth was 1.81 percent in the July-September quarter of FY25.

The first-quarter growth was the lowest since the second quarter of FY21, when the pandemic continued to cripple the economy.

In the first quarter of FY24, GDP grew 6.04 percent.

The WB said inflation in Bangladesh has remained persistently high, and monetary policy has been tightened further.

The 12-month average inflation in Bangladesh rose to 10.34 percent in 2024, up from 9.48 percent a year earlier.

In 2022, the annual average inflation

was 7.7 percent, according to the BBS.

In December, the IMF kept its projection of inflation in Bangladesh elevated for the current fiscal year, ending on June 30, 2025.

The WB said political turmoil in mid-2024 damped economic activity and worsened investor confidence.

It said growth in FY24 is estimated to have slowed to 5 percent, a downward revision of 0.6 percentage points from previous projections.

"Supply constraints, including energy shortages and import restrictions, weakened industrial activity and led to increased price pressures."

"High inflation reduced the purchasing power of households, slowing services growth."

The WB also cautioned about the risk of social unrest in countries, including Bangladesh, where youth unemployment has risen since the

pre-pandemic decade.

It said elevated social unrest could weigh on productivity and investor confidence in South Asia.

"In addition, the incidence of political violence has increased in some countries in the region," it added.

More frequent or more severe weather events could reduce food production, drive up food price inflation, and raise living costs, the WB report added.

The Washington-based multilateral agency said slower-than-projected growth in major trading partners and the resulting weaker demand could dampen activity, particularly in countries with strong economic ties to Europe and the USA, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

"For example, countries in Europe account for about half of total goods exports in Bangladesh."