

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Taiwan's Lai says he would tell Trump he hopes to continue arms purchases from US

**TAIPEI (TAIWAN), MAY 20:** Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said Wednesday that if given the chance he would tell US President Donald Trump of his hope to continue US arms purchases, which Lai called essential for peace, while offering assurances that the island's future would not be decided by external forces.

Lai is marking two years in office, the halfway point of his term, under growing pressure from China, which sees Taiwan as a breakaway province to be retaken by force if necessary.

Trump's recent narrative on Taiwan also raised concerns about US traditional support for the island even without formal diplomatic ties.

Lai said he could talk to Trump, he would emphasise that peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait was crucial for global security, alleging China was the "destroyer" of the strait's peace.

Lai said he also would tell Trump that Taiwan's increasing defence budget was a response to threats and purchases of US arms would be an essential means to safeguard the strait's stability. Lai said he believes "only strength can bring peace".

"No country has the right to annex Taiwan," Lai said he would tell Trump at the news briefing. "Democracy and freedom should also not be seen as provocation."

Lai looks forward to more



cooperation between Taiwan and the US and other democratic countries in promoting peace in the strait, he added.

**Lai stands firm despite Xi's warning to the US**

Chinese President Xi Jinping last week issued a strong warning to the US, telling Trump during their Beijing summit that the "Taiwan question" is the most important issue in ties between China and the US and the two nations will "have clashes and even conflicts" without proper handling.

Trump in December approved a record-breaking, USD 11 billion arms package to Taiwan. In an interview aired Friday on Fox News as the US president wrapped up his visit to China, Trump said his approval of a new USD 14 billion arms package to Taiwan depended on China, describing the deal as "a very good negotiating chip".

Trump later told reporters he needed to talk to the person who is running Taiwan, without naming Lai, who Beijing deemed a separatist.

In his speech Wednesday, Lai said democracy is not a gift from the sky.

"Taiwan's future cannot be decided by external forces, nor can it be held hostage by fear, division, or short-term interests," he said, without specifying who the external forces are.

He added that Taiwan was willing to engage in healthy and orderly exchanges with China under the principles of equality and dignity, but firmly rejects united front tactics that "package unification as peace".

Beyond geopolitics, Taiwan is a major manufacturer of artificial-intelligence servers, computer chips and precision instruments. The AI boom has propelled Taiwan's leading technology companies to record profits and revenues.

But observers worry the island's heavy reliance on computer chipmakers and other technology companies carries risk if the AI craze becomes a bubble.

Lai said he would roll out a

USD 3.1 billion plan to accelerate the upgrading and transformation of small and medium-sized businesses and traditional industries and to have the tech industries drive traditional sectors.

**Beijing slams Lai**

China's Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson Zhu Fenglian told reporters in Beijing that Lai's Facebook statement on Sunday, which alleged China was the cause of changing the status quo, was filled with "lies and deception, hostility and confrontation", according to Chinese official Xinhua News Agency.

She accused Lai of stubbornly insisting on Taiwan independence and inciting cross-strait opposition and confrontation.

"(Lai) is the destroyer of the status quo of Taiwan's strait," she said, according to the Xinhua report.

China and Taiwan have been governed separately since 1949 when the Communist Party rose to power in Beijing following a civil war. Defeated Nationalist Party forces fled to Taiwan, which later transitioned from martial law to multiparty democracy.

The US and Taiwan had formal diplomatic relations until 1979, when President Jimmy Carter's administration recognised and established relations with Beijing. Still, the US is required by law to ensure Taiwan can defend itself. (AP)

## PM Modi, Italian PM Meloni Visit Iconic Colosseum After Dinner, Share Pictures

**ROME [ITALY], MAY 20:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi met his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni over dinner shortly after arriving in Rome on Tuesday, on the last leg of his five-nation visit.

They both then undertook a visit to the iconic Colosseum, where they engaged in deep conversation over a wide range of subjects.

In a post on X, PM Modi shared glimpses of his visit with Meloni and said, "Upon landing in Rome, had the opportunity to meet Prime Minister Meloni over dinner, followed by a visit to the iconic Colosseum. We exchanged perspectives on a wide range of subjects. Looking forward to our talks today, where we will continue the conversation on how to boost the India-Italy friendship."

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— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) May 20,



2026 Giorgia Meloni welcomed Prime Minister Narendra Modi upon his arrival in Rome for the final leg of his five-nation tour.

Sharing a picture with PM Modi on X, Meloni wrote, "Welcome to Rome, my friend!"

Meloni shared an earlier picture of both leaders at the Colosseum in Italy.

PM Modi received a warm welcome from the Indian diaspora upon his arrival in Rome.

He interacted with members of the Indian community and witnessed cultural performances at his hotel.

PM Modi also signed an autograph for a child who greeted him with a portrait.

Among those who met the Prime Minister was Svamini Shuddhananda Ghiri, who said she was meeting PM Modi for the second time after 2021. She further said that the Sanatana Dharma Samgha had been recognised as an official religion in Italy by the Italian Parliament.

"I am very happy, and this is the second time we have met him. We met him in 2021 and he also continued to sustain and to foster our mission...Sanatana Dharma Samgha is recognised as an

official religion here in Italy by the Italian Parliament," she said.

PM Modi's Italy visit comes amid strong momentum in India-Italy relations, with both sides actively advancing the Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-2029, a broad framework for cooperation across multiple areas. These include trade—which reached USD 16.77 billion in 2025—investment, with cumulative FDI of USD 3.66 billion (April 2000-September 2025), as well as defence and security, clean energy, innovation, science and technology, and people-to-people exchanges. (Agencies)

## Residents of Lithuania's capital told to shelter as drone alarm underlines NATO's eastern jitters

**VILNIUS (LITHUANIA), MAY 20:** Residents of Vilnius were told to take shelter and Lithuania's president and prime minister were taken to safe locations on Wednesday because of an alarm over drone activity near the border with Belarus, underlining jitters on NATO's eastern fringe over incursions related to Russia's war with Ukraine.

An emergency announcement from the military told people in the Vilnius region to "immediately head to a shelter or a safe place".

The alert, which lasted for about an hour, also led to the closure of the airspace over Vilnius Airport. President Gitanas Nauseda and Prime Minister Inga Ruginiene were taken to shelters, and there was also an evacuation order at Lithuania's parliament, the Seimas, the BNS news agency reported.

It was the first major alert that sent residents and political leaders in a European Union and NATO capital rushing to shelters since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Lithuania, a member of NATO and the European Union, borders Russia-allied Belarus to the east and Rus-



sia's Kaliningrad exclave to the west. Wednesday's alert came after the military said it detected drone activity in Belarus, but no drones were sighted over Lithuania.

In recent months, Ukrainian drones aimed at Russia have crossed or come down in NATO territory on numerous occasions. Western officials have blamed what they say is likely Russian electronic jamming of the drones. Russia, meanwhile, has renewed threats that it would retaliate if Ukrainian drones are launched from Baltic countries or if those

countries are complicit in their use against Russia.

On Tuesday evening, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Kestutis Budrys wrote on social media that "Russia is deliberately redirecting Ukrainian drones into Baltic airspace while waging smear campaigns" against Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

"It's a transparent act of desperation — an attempt to sow chaos and distract from a simple reality: (Ukraine) is hitting Russian military machine hard." Budrys' comment came hours after a NATO jet shot down a

Ukrainian drone over southern Estonia. Ukraine apologised for that "unintended incident," without specifying what had happened.

Last week, Latvia's government collapsed following an argument over the handling of multiple incidents involving stray drones suspected to be from Ukraine.

The defence minister was forced to quit after his party withdrew its support for him, and the prime minister then resigned. The governing coalition had been under strain for months over several other issues. (AP)

**RANCHI, MAY 20:** Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu on Wednesday cautioned that the country must remain vigilant and prepared to tackle any possible fallout of the escalating crisis in West Asia, although "it is not worrisome for India at present". Naidu, during his maiden visit to Ranchi, said every sector, including civil aviation, must take responsibility and plan proactively to minimise the impact on citizens and the country.

"The situation is not worrisome at present, but we need to remain alert. Every sector, including civil aviation, has to assess the impact and prepare short-term, medium-term and long-term strategies," Naidu told reporters. On concerns over rising travel costs amid global uncertainty, Naidu



said the Centre had already initiated measures to shield domestic passengers from any burden.

He said the government reduced aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices along with landing and parking charges at airports to stabilise fares and support the aviation sector.

Last week, the Delhi government had reduced the value-added tax on aviation

turbine fuel from 25 per cent to 7 per cent.

"Nearly five lakh passengers travel daily on domestic routes. We are continuously monitoring airfares. If demand rises, we will increase connectivity and deploy more aircraft," he said.

On the ongoing investigation into the Ahmedabad aircraft accident, Naidu said the probe was in its final stages

and was being conducted in a "fair, transparent and accountable manner".

Emphasising the international nature of the investigation due to passengers from multiple countries, he said the final report would be released soon and would stand up to global scrutiny.

The minister unveiled a series of passenger-friendly initiatives at Ranchi airport, including the Udan Yatri Cafe, aimed at offering affordable food to travellers. Calling the initiative a success across several airports, Naidu said the government's focus is to make air travel more accessible and comfortable. Naidu received a warm welcome on his arrival in Ranchi and rode pillion with Union Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth on a motorcycle from the airport. (Agencies)

## PM Modi working to protect India's prestige on global stage: Sharad Pawar

**MUMBAI, MAY 20:** NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar has said even though he may differ with Narendra Modi politically, one must not forget that as prime minister, he is working to uphold India's prestige internationally.

Speaking at an event here on Tuesday evening, the former Union minister stressed that whenever there is a chance to work collectively for the national interest, everyone should join with a shared purpose and help strengthen the country's prestige.

He also said that leaders such as Indira Gandhi, P V Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh always kept the country's future and reputation at the centre of their leadership.

"Political differences should not come in the way when it comes to protecting India's prestige, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is working to uphold the country's honour abroad," Pawar stated.

"Prime Minister Modi is working to protect the country's prestige outside India.



We may have different political views, but when it comes to the nation's honour, political differences should not be brought in," he added.

The Rajya Sabha member was speaking at a gratitude and fellowship gathering of former state and district office-bearers organised by the Pune-based Lakshmanrao Gutte Rural Development Foundation.

Pawar said many of those present at the event had devoted the most energetic years of their lives to the Youth Congress and other organisations and were now working in different political parties.

"Some may be in different

parties today, but all of you continue to remain among common people and have consciously preserved your commitment to society," he noted.

Recalling his early political journey, Pawar said he came to Pune from Baramati in 1958 at the age of 18 because there was no college in his hometown at the time. He said he joined the youth movement, became chief of the Pune City Youth Congress four years later, and subsequently led the Maharashtra Youth Congress before working at the national level.

The veteran leader said one of the most memorable

moments of his youth was meeting Jawaharlal Nehru at Teen Murti House in Delhi.

"We had prepared several questions on farmers and youth issues, but when Pandit Nehru arrived, we forgot everything we wanted to say because his personality was so towering," he recalled.

Pawar also narrated an incident involving former Indira Gandhi during an official visit to the then Soviet Union, when she felt due respect had not been accorded to India's prime minister.

Quoting a conversation with former diplomat and prime minister I K Gujral, Pawar said Indira Gandhi told Soviet authorities that she represented 40 crore Indians and would not accept any slight to their dignity.

"I represent 40 crore people of India. If their prestige is not respected, I will never accept it," Pawar quoted Gandhi as saying.

The NCP (SP) chief welcomed the coming together of former colleagues from different parties and urged them to continue such initiatives.

## 'No-Car Day' In Chandigarh: Punjab Governor Takes Electric Bus; Officials Ride Bicycles To Work

**CHANDIGARH, May 20:** Punjab Governor and Chandigarh Administrator Gulab Chand Kataria on Wednesday travelled by an electric bus while many officials commuted to work using bicycles as the Union territory observed the first 'no car-day'.

Last week, the governor asked UT officials to avoid using four-wheelers every Wednesday in the wake of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to cut down fuel consumption.

He encouraged officials to ride bicycles, walk or use public transport. The



Chandigarh administration made special transport arrangements for ferrying employees on Wednesday after the governor's appeal. Kataria reached an event

in Baltana by electric bus and said, "I had said the UT officials would not use their cars every Wednesday, and today is the first day; it is an experiment," he said.

No official will use a car to commute every Wednesday, he asserted and said he will be travelling in an electric bus to reach his office.

"Everybody should make efforts to save fuel," he said, adding that even the students will now be asked to use bicycles or public transport to get to schools one day a week. Last week, the prime minister significantly reduced his convoy size, days after his appeal for lowering fuel consumption and other expenses, prompting several BJP chief ministers and other leaders to adopt similar measures. (AGENCIES)