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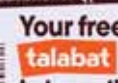


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Maduro toppled as Trump vows US will run Venezuela

- **Captured president, wife taken out of country**
- **US oil firms will tap country's huge reserves**
- **Administration hints at deploying US troops**



US President Donald Trump during a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Palm Beach

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that the United States will “run” Venezuela and tap its huge oil reserves after snatching leftist leader Nicolas Maduro out of the country during a bombing raid on Caracas.

Trump’s announcement came hours after a lightning attack in which special forces grabbed Maduro and his wife, while air strikes pounded multiple sites, stunning the capital city.

Trump did not go into detail what he meant but told a press conference in Florida: “We’re going to be running it with a group.”

“We’re designating people,” he said, mentioning that cabinet officials standing with him would be in charge.

In another surprise, Trump indicated that US troops could be deployed in Venezuela.

The US is “not afraid of boots on the ground,” he said.

Although the operation is being framed as a law-enforcement action, Trump made clear that regime change and Venezuela’s oil riches are the major goals.

“We’re going to have our very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure,” he said.

“We’ll be selling large amounts of oil,” he said.

The 79-year-old Republican posted a picture of Maduro in cus-

Qatar urges restraint, dialogue

Qatar expressed its deep concern over the ongoing developments in Venezuela, calling in this context for restraint, de-escalation, and the adoption of dialogue as the appropriate means to address all outstanding issues.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed Qatar’s position advocating adherence to the Charter of the United Nations

and the established principles of international law, including obligations under the Charter to resolve international disputes through peaceful means.

The ministry reiterated Qatar’s full readiness to contribute to any international effort aimed at achieving an immediate peaceful solution, underlining its commitment to keeping channels of communication open with all concerned parties. (QNA)



A photograph which US President Donald Trump posted on his Truth Social account shows what he describes as Venezuelan President “Nicolas Maduro on board the USS Iwo Jima” amphibious assault ship, currently in the Caribbean Sea. The image appears to be taken from a printed photograph, as white edging can be seen around the image. What appears to be the letters DEA can be seen on a black uniformed person next to Venezuelan president Maduro. Verifying the location was not immediately possible as the photograph is tightly cropped. But the patterning of grey hairs within Maduro’s mustache matched recent imagery of him. (Reuters)

today on a US naval ship wearing a blindfold, handcuffs and what looked like noise-cancelling ear muffs. He and his wife were being taken to New York to face narcotics and terrorism charges.

US rejects Machado

US-backed opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who won the Nobel Peace Prize last year, posted on social media: “the hour of freedom has arrived.” She called for the opposition’s candidate in the 2024 election, Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, to “immediately” assume the presidency.

But Trump scotched any expectation that Machado should emerge as Venezuela’s new leader. She doesn’t have “support or respect” there, he said.

He indicated he could instead work with Maduro’s deputy, Delcy Rodriguez, saying “she’s essentially willing to do what we think is necessary to make Venezuela great again.”

Trump also made clear that the US presence is unlikely to be short.

“We’re there now, but we’re going to stay until such time as the proper transition can take place.”

The United Nations chief said he was “deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected.”

China, a backer of Maduro’s hard-left regime, said it “strongly condemns” the US attack, while France warned that a solution for troubled Venezuela cannot “be imposed from outside”. **To Page 11 Pages 5, 6, 10**

PM meets US Congress delegation



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with a delegation of United States Congress members following their visit to the country. They discussed the close strategic relations between Qatar and the United States, and ways to support and strengthen them. They also discussed developments in the region, particularly in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, in addition to a host of topics of mutual interest. HE the prime minister emphasised the need for combined regional and international efforts to ensure the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, paving the way toward achieving sustainable peace and the much sought-after stability in the region. (QNA) **Page 2**

Trump signals US may expand focus to Cuba

Reuters, AFP
Palm Beach, Florida

US President Donald Trump yesterday indicated that Cuba could become a topic of discussion as part of broader US policy in the region, highlighting the potential for Washington to expand its focus beyond Venezuela amid rising tensions in Latin America.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a sworn foe of Cuba’s communist government, also warned Havana after US forces deposed its ally Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela.

“If I lived in Havana and I was in the government, I’d be concerned at least a little bit,” Rubio told a news conference alongside President Donald Trump. Meanwhile the US military operation that led to Maduro’s capture sparked alarm across the international community, with allies and foes of Washington and Caracas expressing disquiet.

Countries, which had longstanding ties with Maduro’s government, were quick to condemn the operation but their alarm was also shared by Washington’s allies including France and the EU. Russia demanded the US leadership “reconsider its position and release the legally elected president of the sovereign country and his wife”.

● **World reaction Page 5**

Qatar welcomes Yemen dialogue

Qatar has welcomed the efforts of the legitimate Yemeni government to support the Yemeni dialogue process and address the Southern issue. In this regard, Qatar commended the request of the President of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council to convene a conference in Riyadh to discuss just and sustainable solutions to the issue, reflecting his commitment to dialogue as the optimal approach to addressing national challenges.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Qatar’s appreciation to Saudi Arabia for hosting this conference as part of its continued efforts to support initiatives aimed at achieving security and stability in Yemen.

The ministry stressed the importance of the constructive and responsible participation of all Southern components in the upcoming Riyadh conference, in a manner that prioritises the supreme interests of the Yemeni people. It also underscored the necessity of adhering to the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, which represent the consensual framework and comprehensive reference for reaching an inclusive political solution that fulfils the aspirations of all segments of the Yemeni people, while safeguarding Yemen’s unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

STC hails Saudi dialogue after Mukalla falls

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) said in a statement yesterday the Saudi initiative was a “genuine opportunity for serious dialogue” that could safeguard “the aspirations of the southern people”.

The STC’s statement came hours after Yemen’s internationally recognised government said it had retaken control of Mukalla, the key eastern port and capital of Hadramout province, from the southern separatists who seized it last month. Rapid government gains since Friday have reversed many of the STC gains last month. Meanwhile, the Saudi Foreign Ministry also said yesterday it was “keen to strengthen and preserve relations with the UAE”.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs cautioned that unilateral declarations or actions taken outside the framework of consultation, consensus, and serious dialogue among Yemeni parties would risk exacerbating instability and chaos, thereby harming the interests of the brotherly Yemeni people and undermining prospects for a sustainable political settlement. (QNA) **Page 3**

‘Qatar indispensable bridge, linking ME with Europe, West’

Greece foundation head hails Doha’s ‘trust and balance’

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

Qatar’s diplomatic culture – “rooted in trust and balance” – is emerging as an indispensable bridge between Europe and the Middle East as global power dynamics reshape in 2026.

This assessment comes from Panagiotis G Mihalos, founder

and president of the Greece-based Georgios M Mihalos Foundation and the Nisyros Dialogues, who describes Qatar’s approach to dialogue as strategic rather than ceremonial – focused on de-escalation and practical co-operation that transcends rigid geopolitical blocs.

“Qatar does not approach dialogue as an abstract exercise, but as a strategic tool for de-escalation, mediation, and practical co-operation. That ethos deeply resonated with our own philosophy,” Mihalos told *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview.

He praised Qatar’s abil-

ity to speak with Europe, the Arab world, Asia, and global powers “with equal fluency, without being trapped in rigid blocs”. He explained that Qatar offers a culture of listening and mediation for the Eastern Mediterranean, which Mihalos noted as “often caught between competing narratives”.

Mihalos was in Qatar last month for the Doha Forum, where he participated in several discussions. He lauded the forum, saying it has evolved over the years into one of the most coveted global platforms for diplomacy and strategic dialogue.

“What distinguishes it is not

only the calibre of its participants, but the seriousness with which dialogue is treated, not as a ceremonial exercise, but as a tool for real-world problem solving,” he emphasised.

Mihalos said: “Operating under the banner ‘Diplomacy, Dialogue, Diversity’, the forum has succeeded in convening voices that rarely share the same table, let alone the same dialogue. This is precisely why the Nisyros Dialogues felt so intellectually and philosophically aligned when becoming part of the Doha Forum ecosystem.

“At the Doha Forum, we framed migration not simply as a humani-

tarian challenge, but as a multidimensional issue intersecting with labour markets, social cohesion, regional stability, and development. This reinforced our conviction that the Eastern Mediterranean must move beyond reactive policies and toward cooperative, cross-regional frameworks, exactly the space the Nisyros Dialogues aim to occupy.”

According to Mihalos, Qatar’s diplomatic balance, deeply rooted in Arab and Islamic traditions yet fully engaged with Western institutions, allows it to act as a cultural and diplomatic interlocutor. **To Page 11**



Panagiotis G Mihalos, the founder and president of the Georgios M Mihalos Foundation and the Nisyros Dialogues.



Justice ministry unveils training plan for legal professionals

The Legal and Judicial Studies Center at the Ministry of Justice announced the launch of its Specialised Legal Training Plan for 2026, which encompasses the general track for continuous professional development, in addition to specialised legal training programmes tailored to various legal professions across the state.

The programme aims to keep legal professionals abreast of legislative, judicial, and jurisprudential developments, while enhancing their skills in legal drafting and writing. This initiative seeks to develop the legal competencies of national cadres, strengthen institutional performance, and improve the quality of government services, in support of building national capacities capable of contributing to the achievement of Qatar National Vision 2030.

Some 110 legal professionals are expected to benefit from the 2026 legal qualification programmes, including 94 participants enrolled in the twenty-third Legal Professionals Qualification Programme, and 16 trainees enrolled in the sixteenth Mandatory Training Programme for trainee lawyers.

The programme's executive plan includes 118 specialised training courses, distributed across the programme's annual timeline at an average of eight courses per month. Legal trainees have been divided into four training groups, each receiving theoretical and practical instruction designed to equip them with the skills necessary to engage effectively and proactively with societal needs.

On this occasion, the Legal and Judicial Studies Center yesterday organised an introductory meeting for all participants in the two training programmes, including legal professionals and trainee lawyers.

During the meeting, Director of the Legal and Judicial Studies

The initiative seeks to develop the legal competencies of national cadres, strengthen institutional performance, and improve the quality of government services, in support of building national capacities capable of contributing to the achievement of Qatar National Vision 2030

Center at the Ministry of Justice, Dr Abdullah Hamad al-Khalidi, outlined the ministry's vision to prepare and qualify Qatari legal and judicial cadres to the highest standards of competence and professional excellence. He also highlighted the ministry's mission to train legal professionals by developing and updating their scientific and practical skills, and to prepare qualified candidates for appointment to the judiciary, the Public Prosecution, and various legal sectors.

Dr al-Khalidi also delivered a comprehensive briefing to trainees on the programme's training tracks and objectives, which aim to equip participants with the scientific and practical expertise required to perform their legal duties with quality and efficiency. This, in turn, contributes to increased productivity and enables institutions to meet their legal needs. The briefing also emphasised the transfer of new knowledge and skills to enhance individual performance within their respective organisations, including the use of emerging technologies supported by artificial intelligence tools in the legal field.

Participants further attended a detailed presentation outlining the general obligations to be observed during lectures, requirements for participation in workshops, practical applications, and field visits, as well as compliance and adherence requirements in accordance with the rules.

The participants were also briefed on the attendance and leave system throughout the training period, the evaluation mechanism, and the assessment criteria upon which trainees are evaluated in line with approved standards and regulations, in addition to the rewards system granted to top-performing participants upon completion of the programme.

Dr al-Khalidi emphasised the importance of the training programme in enhancing training outcomes and elevating the quality of the training curriculum, in a manner that aligns with national development priorities and with the Ministry of Justice's Strategic Plan 2025-2030, which underscores that development is founded on human capital, particularly those working within government institutions.

The year 2025 witnessed a remarkable leap in legal training across various tracks and legal categories within different government entities. A total of 2,472 legal professionals were trained during the year through a range of programmes and training courses.

According to official data published on the Ministry of Justice's website regarding its achievements in the past year, the number of training courses in 2025 increased by 14.6%, while the number of beneficiaries of specialised and mandatory training programmes rose by approximately 24.78%.

Additionally, 77 legal awareness workshops were organised, marking an increase of 250% compared to the number of workshops conducted in 2024.

Furthermore, new and diverse programmes and initiatives were introduced to broaden the segments of society reached by legal awareness efforts. Legal awareness video content achieved unprecedented levels of viewership and engagement, underscoring the importance of the educational and awareness-raising role of the legal programmes and activities implemented by the Legal and Judicial Studies Center at the Ministry of Justice. (QNA)



23 artists to showcase creative works at Fire Station Museum

The Fire Station Artist in Residence (AIR) is hosting artists participating in the current edition of its Intensive Arts Study Programme.

The artists are continuing their creative work within the artist residency programme, as part of a comprehensive educational and artistic experience, culminating in a final exhibition in October 2026.

The programme selected 23 artists from among the 996 applications submitted in this edition, reflecting a high level of interest and the programme's prominent standing as one of the leading initiatives supporting contemporary arts in Qatar.

The Intensive Arts Study Programme is an annual initiative held at the Fire Station. It is open to artists of all nationalities, offering an intensive curriculum that combines practical work in studios, specialised workshops, seminars, group critique sessions, and lectures delivered by artists, curators, and thinkers from around the world.

Through this blend of artistic practice, theoretical reflection, and critical discussion, the programme aims to develop traditional art education methods, empowering artists to deepen their creative and critical perspectives and engage with contemporary artistic issues.

The programme represents a pivotal point for emerging visual artists, providing them with an immersive, multidisciplinary artistic environment that contributes to refining their technical skills, enriching their intellectual methodologies, and broadening the horizons of their creative practices within a supportive and stimulating professional context.

The programme is part of Qatar Museums' vision to establish the country as a global hub for artistic innovation and cultural dialogue by supporting emerging talent and fostering knowledge and cultural exchange.

Throughout the year, the programme features international instructors and experts who deliver public lectures and open discussions, contributing to the revitalisation of the local art scene and enhancing engagement with the public.

The current edition of the Intensive Art Study Programme is scheduled to culminate in a final exhibition in October 2026, showcasing the artistic experiences and projects developed by the participating artists during their residency at the Fire Station.



The participants in the latest edition of the Fire Station Artist in Residence's Intensive Arts Study Programme.

PM holds talks with US Congress delegation



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with the visiting delegation of US Congress members. The meeting discussed the close strategic relations between Qatar and the US, and ways to support and strengthen them. Also discussed were developments in the region, particularly in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, in addition to a host of topics of mutual interest. During the meeting, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs emphasised the need for combined regional and international efforts to ensure the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, paving the way for achieving sustainable peace and stability in the region. (QNA)

Qatar expresses solidarity with Afghan flood victims

Qatar has expressed its solidarity with Afghanistan in facing the impact of the floods that occurred in several regions in the country, resulting in deaths and injuries. In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs conveyed Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims, the caretaker government, and the people of Afghanistan, and wished the injured a speedy recovery. (QNA)

QMC launches inaugural issue of *Ielam* magazine

Qatar Media Corporation (QMC) announced yesterday the launch of the inaugural issue of its quarterly magazine, *Ielam*, as part of its strategic direction to further develop its media tools and strengthen its editorial presence, thereby contributing to the enrichment of the national media landscape.

Ielam is dedicated to delivering informed, professional media content that keeps pace with the transformations underway in the media sector, while addressing its issues and challenges with objectivity and rigour. The magazine also provides platforms for dialogue among decision-makers, specialists, and media professionals, while enhancing engagement with audiences and readers, in service of the media's mission to serve society and the nation.

In his foreword, HE Chairman of Qatar Media Corporation, Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer al-Thani, said that the magazine is being launched following careful study and sincere collective efforts, to stand as one of QMC's initiatives aimed at enhancing and enriching the media arena, and as a value-added contribution to national media.

In the issue's opening editorial, HE Qatar Media Corporation's CEO, Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulaziz bin Jassim al-Thani, affirmed that the magazine stems



from a conviction that media, at its core, is a civilisational message that goes beyond the mere transmission of news to shaping awareness and enriching public dialogue. He noted that *Ielam* aspires to be a mirror reflecting the pulse and aspirations of the Corp, a record documenting its journey and achievements, and a dialogic platform open to diverse expertise, experiences, and perspectives.

In his article, Editor-in-Chief of *Ielam*, Mohammed bin Sal'an al-Marri, stated that the launch of the magazine establishes a professional reference to be relied upon and a documentary record to be consulted, contributing to the elevation of institutional media discourse and reinforcing the presence of conscious, responsible professional practice.

The inaugural issue of *Ielam* features a diverse selection of thematic files, reports, studies, and professional interviews. These cover the evolution of Qatari media from its foundations to the digital sphere; media-related issues and relevant legislation; and the transformations

brought about by digital platforms and artificial intelligence in content creation. The issue also documents the achievements of the QMC, its regional and international presence, and its experiences in institutional development and capacity-building, as well as the development of multilingual media platforms. In addition, it highlights key milestones in the history of Qatar Radio and Qatar Television and their role in shaping the national media discourse, alongside special features, professional interviews, and infographics documenting the historical and organisational trajectories of media in Qatar.

The magazine will be available in print as well as in digital format through the Qatar Media Corporation's website (<https://qmc.qa/ielamag>), in addition to its official social media platforms, as part of its approach to enhancing access to content and expanding audience engagement.

The launch of *Ielam* comes within the framework of the QMC's efforts to broaden its editorial platforms and provide a professional knowledge-based forum that documents its achievements, reflects its vision, and contributes to strengthening its institutional identity, while highlighting the professional development of Qatar's media sector and its presence in regional and international fora. (QNA)

Qatar Charity supported over half a million people in Bangladesh in 2025

Qatar Charity (QC), with the generous support of benefactors in Qatar, delivered impactful humanitarian and development assistance to 674,484 beneficiaries across Bangladesh in 2025.

Through 2,171 implemented projects, the organisation addressed critical needs in water and sanitation, education, housing, health, food security, orphan care, and humanitarian response — while maintaining a strong focus on supporting the Rohingya refugees.

Under the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programme, QC implemented 1,879 projects, benefiting 94,000 people across Bangladesh. These interventions focused on improving access to safe drinking water through digging deep tube wells and filtering contaminated water.

Through 188 mosque projects, benefiting 37,600 individuals, QC strengthened the religious, cultural and social fabric of communities. These initiatives involved mosque construction, providing safe spaces for prayer, religious learning and community gatherings.

QC implemented 25 education projects, including schools and Qur'an memorising centres, reaching 5,100 beneficiaries. These projects aim to expand access to quality education for children and youth in disadvantaged communities.

Under 34 housing projects, QC provided safe and durable homes to 432 individuals living in unsafe or inadequate housing conditions. These interventions enhanced family security, dignity and long-term stability.

QC built five orphan care centres, benefiting 900 orphaned and vulnerable children. These centres provided comprehensive care, including accommodation and education, for child development.

Through 21 health projects, QC delivered specialised eye care services to 2,150 beneficiaries. These initiatives focused on the diagnosis, treatment and surgical management of cataracts, helping to prevent avoidable blindness and restore vision.

As part of two seasonal projects, Qatar Charity supported 42,630 beneficiaries through targeted food assistance. During Ramadan, food baskets were distributed to poor and vulnerable families,



while the Qurbani project provided sacrificial meat to underprivileged households, orphans, and widows. Through two emergency response (relief) projects, QC supported 22,750 people affected by floods. The response focused on the distribution of emergency food baskets and essential relief items, helping flood-affected families meet their immediate needs.

Under the sponsorship programme, QC currently supports 1,846 orphaned and vulnerable children across Bangladesh. This long-term initiative ensures continuous access to education, nutrition, healthcare, shelter, and essential services, supporting children's well-being and future self-reliance. Through 15 integrated projects covering relief, shelter, school feeding and healthcare, QC supported 467,076 Rohingya refugees living in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char.

The Director-General of the NGO Affairs Bureau, Mohamed Daud Miah, praised QC's role in Bangladesh's development efforts. "Qatar Charity has demonstrated exceptional dedication in supporting Bangladesh's development and humanitarian priorities. We appreciate Qatar Charity's continued partnership and its meaningful role in improving the lives of the vulnerable."

The country director of QC Bangladesh Office, Zakarya Ali al-Motair, stated: "Our projects in 2025 reflect Qatar Charity's unwavering commitment to protecting dignity, improving lives, and strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities across Bangladesh."

Rawabi Hypermarket concludes ‘Win One Million’ mega campaign with 528 winners

Rawabi Hypermarket has successfully concluded its landmark customer reward initiative, the ‘Win One Million’ campaign, with a grand mega draw held on January 1 at Rawabi Hypermarket, Izghawa, marking the end of an exciting seven-month-long campaign that captured widespread customer participation across Qatar.

Launched on May 26, 2025, and which concluded on December 31, 2025, the campaign stands as one of the largest and most rewarding promotional initiatives conducted by Rawabi Hypermarket to date. Over the campaign period, more than 100 nationalities registered and participated, reflecting Rawabi’s strong connection with Qatar’s diverse community.

The mega draw was conducted digitally under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and witnessed by the Group general manager, heads of departments, store manager, and customers.

A total of 528 winners were announced, including 525 shopping voucher winners and three grand prize winners, who each won a GWM TANK 500 SUV. The grand prize winners are Jahfer (coupon number R005020923), Musthafa (R002415261), and Jahidul Islam (R005200541).

Aside from the three GWM TANK 500 SUV winners, Rawabi Hypermarket awarded QR3,000 shopping vouchers each to 35 winners, QR2,000 shopping vouchers each (75 winners), QR1,000 shopping vouchers (140 winners), and QR500 shopping vouchers (280 winners).

Throughout the campaign, customers spending QR50 or more at any Rawabi Hypermarket outlet automatically received a digital e-affle coupon sent to their registered mobile number, making participation seamless and fully digital. Monthly draws were conducted from June-December 2025, rewarding customers with shopping vouchers of various denominations, leading up to the final mega draw.

Kannu Baker, Group general manager of Al Rawabi Group of Companies, said: “The ‘Win One Million’ campaign reflects our deep appreciation for the trust and loyalty our customers place in Rawabi. Over seven months, we witnessed overwhelming participation from people of more than 100 nationalities, which truly represents the spirit of Qatar.

“Conducting the mega draw digitally under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce reinforces our commitment to transparency, credibility and customer confidence. We will continue to introduce innovative and rewarding initiatives that add value to every shopping experience at Rawabi.”

With campaigns like ‘Win One Million’, Rawabi Hypermarket continues to strengthen its position as one of Qatar’s leading retail destinations, known for customer-focused initiatives, competitive pricing and community engagement. From daily essentials to festive promotions and mega rewards, Rawabi remains committed to delivering value beyond shopping. For more information, visit www.rawabihypermarket.com



MSF says may have to halt Gaza operations in March

AFP
Paris

Banned from the Gaza Strip with 36 aid bodies, medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said yesterday it will have to end its operations there in March if Israel does not reverse its decision.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on Friday for Israel to end a ban on humanitarian agencies that provided aid in Gaza, saying he was “deeply concerned” at the development.

Israel confirmed on Thursday it is barring 37 major international humanitarian organisations from entering the Gaza Strip, accusing them of failing to provide the list of their employees’ names, which is now officially required for “security” reasons.

MSF called this demand a “scandalous intrusion” but Israel says is needed to stop fighters from infiltrating into humanitarian structures.

“To work in Palestine, in the occupied Palestinian territories, we have to be registered... That registration expired on December 31, 2025,” said Isabelle Defourny, a physician and president of MSF France, on France Inter.

“Since July 2025, we have been involved in a



re-registration process and to date, we have not received a response. We still have 60 days during which we could work without being re-registered, and so we would have to end our activities in March” if Israel maintains its decision, she said. MSF has around 40 international staff in the Gaza Strip and works with 800 Palestinian staff across eight hospitals. “We are the second-largest distributor of water (in the Gaza Strip). Last year, in 2025, we treated just over 100,000 people who were wounded, burned, or victims of various traumas. We are second in terms of the number of deliveries performed,” the president of MSF France said.

According to her, the Israeli decision is explained by the fact that NGOs “bear witness to the violence committed by the Israeli army” in Gaza.

Arab League, OIC welcome Saudi initiative to hold conference on Yemen

QNA
Cairo

The Arab League welcomed the call by the president of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council, Rashad al-Alimi, to hold a comprehensive conference in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, to discuss just solutions to the issue in the southern part.

The League also expressed its appreciation for Saudi Arabia’s swift response to this request from the legitimate Yemeni government and its announcement of its readiness to host and sponsor the conference with the participation of southern factions.

In a statement issued yesterday, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said: “The situation in southern Yemen has well-known historical dimensions and involves just aspects that must be discussed at the negotiating table within a comprehensive Yemeni framework.” He stressed that “the policy of imposing a fait accompli does not serve the southern cause; rather, it harms it greatly by exposing the country to further fragmentation and disintegration.”

In this regard, Aboul Gheit noted the Arab League’s position, as stated in its successive resolutions on the Yemeni crisis, which stems from a commitment to the unity of Yemen and the integrity of its national territory.

The Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) also yesterday commended Saudi Arabia’s initiative to hold a comprehensive conference in Riyadh, in response to a request from the head of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council, and with the participation of various southern factions, with the aim of discussing solutions to the southern issue, QNA reported from Jeddah.

In a statement, the OIC affirmed that sincere and inclusive dialogue remains the only way to achieve lasting peace and the desired stability in Yemen.

OIC Secretary-General Hissein Ibrahim Taha stressed that addressing national issues, foremost among them the southern issue, can only be achieved through dialogue, understanding, and consensus, taking into account its historical and social dimensions and sparing the country further fragmentation, suffering, and division.

He also affirmed that the unity, security, and stability of Yemen represent a fundamental pillar for the security and stability of the entire region, praising Saudi’s leading role in supporting Yemeni legitimacy and sponsoring the dialogue process.

He called on all parties to participate positively and constructively in a way that serves the higher interests of Yemen and the aspirations of its people, and promotes regional peace and stability.

MWL PRAISES

The Muslim World League (MWL) also commended Saudi Arabia’s announcement of its response to the request of the President of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council to hold a comprehensive conference in Riyadh, QNA reported from Makkah Al-Mukarramah.

MWL Secretary-General, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulkarim al-Issa, praised Saudi Arabia’s response to the request of the President of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council, emphasising that it reflects Saudi’s continued support for the Yemeni people and its commitment to preserving peace and stability in Yemen.

Medical graduates celebrate in Gaza



Students from the faculties of medicine at the Islamic and Al-Azhar universities raise their hands as they take an oath during their graduation ceremony in the courtyard of Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, yesterday. A fragile ceasefire has been in place since October, following a deadly war waged by Israel.

UN peacekeepers claim Israeli attack in southern Lebanon

QNA
Beirut

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) came under attack by forces affiliated with the Israeli entity in southern Lebanon.

In a statement, Unifil said that two of its units were fired upon with live ammunition from machine guns at close range while

carrying out patrols near Kfar Shouba in southern Lebanon, without resulting in any casualties.

The statement added that the gunfire originated from a position belonging to Israeli forces south of the Blue Line, and that Unifil submitted a request to cease fire through its established communication channels.

Unifil had previously informed Israeli forces of its activities in

those areas, in accordance with standard procedures for patrols in sensitive areas near the Blue Line.

The statement called for an end to aggressive behaviour and attacks on forces working to promote peace and stability along or near the Blue Line, noting that such incidents have occurred repeatedly and constitute serious violations of UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

Khamenei says protesters’ economic demands fair, warns ‘rioters’

AFP
Tehran

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday acknowledged the economic demands of protesters in Iran, where demonstrations have spread to more than two dozen cities, even as he warned there would be no quarter for “rioters”.

The protests began last Sunday as an expression of discontent over high prices and economic stagnation, but have since expanded to include political demands.

Iranian media have reported localised violence and vandalism in the west of the country in recent days.

“During clashes in Malekshahi, Latif Karimi, a member of the IRGC, was killed while defending the country’s security,” Mehr news agency said.

Malekshahi is a county of about 20,000 residents with a large Kurdish population, where “riot-



ers attempted to enter a police station”, according to separate news agency Fars, which added that “two assailants were killed”.

Mehr earlier reported a member of the Basij paramilitary force was also killed during another protest in western Iran after being “stabbed and shot” by “armed rioters”.

The protests have affected, to varying degrees, at least 30 different cities, mostly medium-sized, according to an AFP tally based on

official announcements and media reports. At least 12 people have been killed since Wednesday in clashes, including members of the security forces, according to a toll based on official reports.

Speaking to worshippers gathered in Tehran for a religious holiday, Khamenei said the protesters’ economic demands in the sanctions-hit country were “just”.

“The shopkeepers have protested against this situation and that is completely fair,” he added.

But Khamenei nonetheless warned that while “authorities must have dialogue with protesters, it is useless to have dialogue with rioters. Those must be put in their place”.

The first deaths were reported on Thursday as demonstrators clashed with authorities.

The Tasnim news agency, citing a local official, also reported a man was killed on Friday in the holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, when a grenade he was trying to use exploded “in his hands”.

Zambia to host regional meeting on DR Congo

Zambian Defence Minister Ambrose Lwiji Lufuma is expected to chair the meeting in Livingstone, with Lusaka adding that all 12 defence ministers and defence chiefs Forces from ICGLR member countries were expected to attend

AFP Lusaka

Zambia said it will host a meeting on Thursday of Great Lakes region defence ministers to address the increasingly parlous security situation in conflict-racked eastern DR Congo.

In a statement yesterday, Lusaka said it will “host a three-day meeting on the deteriorating security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)... at the request of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)”

Countries in the region are alarmed at ongoing violence which again yesterday pitted fighters from the M23 armed group against DRC troops around the strategic and resource-rich eastern city of Uvira bordering Rwanda. The area has suffered repeated conflict over three decades and the violence has intensified since the resurgence of M23 in 2021.

Zambia shares a large border with the DRC. Zambian Defence Minister Ambrose Lwiji Lufuma is expected to chair the meeting in Livingstone, with Lusaka adding that all 12 defence ministers and defence chiefs Forces from ICGLR member countries were expected to attend.

The ICGLR comprises Angola, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Having early last year taken control of the key eastern cities of Goma and Bukavu, the M23 last month launched a new offensive in South Kivu province, taking control of Uvira, a city of several hundred thousand, as well as a number of areas bordering Burundi. The developments came just days after DR Congo and Rwanda had signed a peace accord in Washington overseen by US President Donald Trump.

Under US pressure, the M23 announced on December 17 it was withdrawing from Uvira, while asking for international mediation to ensure the city was protected from violence and “remilitarisation”.

The M23, which denies links with Kigali, says its goal is the overthrow of DRC President Felix Tshisekedi.

Regional Congolese army spokesman Lieutenant Reagan Mbuyi Kalonji meanwhile revealed yesterday of “clashes in Kigongo and Katongo, specifically in the hills of Kashombe and Lubanda in the territory of Uvira”.

VIOLENT CLASHES

Earlier, violent fighting broke out yesterday between M23 armed group and pro-Kinshasa forces in several towns around the strategic eastern DR Congo city of Uvira, local sources said, AFP reported from Bukavu, DR Congo.

The resource-rich east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which borders Rwanda as well as Burundi, has been beset by 30 years of continual violence.

The situation has worsened since 2021 amid the resurgence of the M23.

Having seized the two main eastern cities of Goma and Bukavu late last year, the group launched a new offensive in December in South Kivu province and gained control on December 10 of Uvira, a strategic city of several hundred thousand people near Burundi, DRC’s ally.

The group also took control of border areas at a time when the DRC and Rwanda were signing a peace accord in Washington brokered by US President Donald Trump.

“Since 3am (0100 GMT), violent clashes between M23 rebels and Wazalendo (pro-Kinshasa militias) and the armed forces of the Republic have been reported in several localities in the territory of Uvira,” in South Kivu province, said Kelvin Bwija, Uvira civil society co-ordinator.

Bwija cited the localities of Kashombe, Lubanda, Musingwe, Katongo, and Kigongo, located about 10 kilometers from the city as seeing fighting.

“So far, the sound of gunfire can be heard in Uvira,” he said.

A resident of Kigongo, also reached by telephone, confirmed to AFP that “clashes resumed this morning, with loud explosions and gunfire” heard.

Lieutenant Reagan Mbuyi Kalonji, regional spokesman for the Congolese army (FARDC), confirmed to AFP “clashes in Kigongo and Katongo, specifically in the hills of Kashombe and Lubanda in the territory of Uvira”.

There have also been reports of intense fighting in the neighbouring province of North Kivu since Friday, where at least six people were killed and 41 wounded in a bombing attributed to the Congolese army in Masisi territory in North Kivu province, according to local sources.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) meanwhile stated on social media that “42 people, including many children and women, wounded by shrapnel and suffering from other injuries, were admitted to Masisi General Hospital following an air strike in a residential area of Masisi”.

Workers clear Nairobi building collapse rubble



Rescue workers work at the site where a 16-storey residential building under construction collapsed near the shopping centre in the South C neighbourhood of Nairobi, Kenya yesterday.

Gambia ‘grieving’ over migrant boat tragedy: president

AFP Banjul

President Adama Barrow has said The Gambia was in mourning after at least seven people drowned when a boat carrying undocumented migrants capsized off the country's coast.

The boat, loaded with more than 200 people, made a distress call overnight Wednesday to Thursday near the North Bank region.

The Gambian Navy launched a hunt for survivors after midnight, involving several vessels and a fishing boat. The stricken vessel was later found on a sandbank.

“So far, 102 persons have been res-

cued, with a number of victims still under medical care,” Barrow said in a televised address.

“Sadly, only seven bodies have been recovered but search and rescue operations are ongoing to locate those still unaccounted for.”

He added: “On behalf of the government and the people of The Gambia, I extend my sincere condolences to the bereaved families and to all those affected by this heartbreaking tragedy.

“I reassure every parent, relative and loved one anxiously waiting for additional news that you are not alone in this dilemma. The nation grieves with you.”

Barrow promised to provide updates on the identities of those who lost their lives, some of whom were not Gambian citizens, and a “comprehensive investi-

gation” into the causes of the tragedy.

Thousands of people, most of them young, have tried to reach Europe from west Africa, mainly via the Spanish Canary Islands, on overcrowded and often dilapidated boats due to restrictions on visas and tighter border security.

Migrant boats have been forced to leave from further south, notably from The Gambia and Guinea, adding to the journey – and dangers – at sea, after Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco increased maritime patrols.

Barrow said in his address that the latest tragedy was a “painful reminder of the dangerous and life-threatening nature of irregular migration”.

“Surely, no dream, journey or promise is worth a single loss of life at sea,” he added.

Illegal gold mining stokes bandit violence in Nigeria

AFP Minna, Nigeria

A scramble for gold reserves dug up in illegal mines is fuelling violence by criminal gangs in parts of Nigeria, officials, expert reports and local residents say, with much of it smuggled to a Middle Eastern destination.

Northwestern and central Nigerian states have long been terrorised by criminal gangs locally called “bandits” who raid villages, abduct residents and loot and burn homes.

While the decades-long violence started as clashes between herders and farmers over limited grazing land and water resources exacerbated by climate change, the conflict has since morphed into organised crime – at a time when the price of the precious metal has been soaring.

Nigeria is well known for its oil, yet also has significant gold deposits of some 754,000 ounces (21.37 tonnes), worth \$1.4bn, accounting for 0.5% of global production, according to the 2023 Gold Mining Industry report.

A recent wave of kidnappings, including hundreds of school children, brought the violence into fresh international focus.

Local artisans extract gold for their livelihoods, attracting others from neighbouring countries, officials, including Kebbi State Governor Nasir Idris, say.

The bandits tax the miners and demand a cut from the extracted ore as a levy to allow them access to the pits, villages and experts say.

“Gold has become an increasingly important revenue stream for armed bandit groups in north-west Nigeria since 2023,” said the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime in an October report.

Nigeria’s political and business elite use mining companies as proxies to buy artisanal miners’ gold through middlemen.

Most of the illegally-mined gold is smuggled out to a Middle East nation, from where it is laundered into the global supply chain in Europe, the US, Asia and South Africa.

“This gold is almost entirely smuggled out of the country and shipped to a Middle East nation,” said a 2024 SwissAid report.

Solid Minerals Minister Dele Alake said Nigerian gold often ends up in the



File photo shows local artisans such as these in Zamfara state extracting gold for their livelihoods - but the trade has become increasingly unsafe.

Middle East “unlawfully”.

Alake has previously said illegal miners sponsor “banditry and terrorism”.

Nigeria's counter-terrorism boss Major General Adamu Garba said recently that illegal mining “intersects with banditry, insurgency, arms trafficking and cross-border smuggling”.

Against the backdrop of recent kidnappings, governors and traditional chiefs from 19 northern states recently dubbed illegal mining a “major contributory factor to the security crises”.

They want a six-month suspension of mining to clean up the sector.

But umbrella union the Nigerian Miners Association warns a blanket mining ban would disrupt locals’ livelihoods, “deepen poverty and increase insecurity”.

Miners who resist paying levies come into the bandits’ firing line. In October bandits killed 16 miners and villagers while in April 19 people were killed in different parts of the region.

Supported by bandits, some miners raid gold-rich villages, pushing out residents to access deposits, said Mamman Alassan, who fled his village in Niger’s Shiroro district three years ago following raids.

“People usually protest and the miners respond by launching deadly raids to take over the area,” Alassan said after resettling in Minna city.

The villages also sit on deposits of other minerals including tantalite, copper and lithium, in strong demand for its use in electric vehicles and clean energy tech.

Intelligence sources say even licensed companies are forced to pay bandits to gain access to mining sites.

Niger State governor Umar Bago re-

cently questioned how miners can “freely access” sites in remote areas without getting attacked.

Officials also blame the influx of foreigners for the worsening insecurity, with Kebbi state governor Idris singling out illegal miners from Mali, Chad and as far afield as Tanzania.

The violence has been exacerbated by the increasing alliance between bandits and militants from the northeast who have in recent years established a strong presence in northwest and central regions, security officials and analysts say.

Although they have no ideological leanings and are mainly motivated by financial gains, the bandits’ alliance with militants has exposed them to better arms, tactics and brutality, they say.

INEFFECTIVE BANS

Around 35% of Nigeria's gold deposits lie beneath impoverished northwestern villages, according to Ismail Suleiman, who owns a mining company that extracts minerals across the northwest.

Some state governments have at various times banned mining to curb banditry but the violence has continued unabated.

In October, Niger state's Bago announced an indefinite ban on mining, with plans to recruit 10,000 government-sponsored militia to protect Niger's rural communities.

In 2019, the federal government imposed a five-year mining ban in Zamfara state but lifted it in January, citing “improved security” despite increased killings and kidnappings there.

Artisanal mining has continued on a much larger scale since the ban was lifted and violence has raged, said the miners’ union.



QatarEnergy LNG

Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	SUP/C/OTS/7491/25 PROVISION OF HYDRAULIC BOLT TORQUING TRAINING ON CALL OFF BASIS	04/01/2026 to 22/01/2026	0	0	29/01/2026

Scope of Work:
The purpose of this tender is to appoint a suitably qualified Contractor to provide a Hydraulic Bolt Torquing training course for QatarEnergy LNG. The training must be designed in accordance with ASME standards and industry best practices to achieve leak-free flange joint tightening. Sessions will be delivered both at the Contractor’s facility within Qatar and at QatarEnergy LNG’s onshore and offshore locations, targeting identified personnel.

Bid Validity: Bid Offer should be valid for 180 calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:
ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

Note: Local Companies (established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) are advised to refer to the tender documentation and In-Country Value (ICV) Digital Portal: - <https://icv.qa/en-US/> for details of ICV compliance that may be applicable.

US allies, foes alarmed by Maduro's capture

AFP/Reuters
Paris/Santiago/Sao Paulo/Palm Beach, Florida

The US military operation that led to the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro yesterday sparked alarm across the international community, with allies and foes of Washington and Caracas expressing disquiet.

US President Donald Trump said Nicolas Maduro and his wife would be taken to New York to face federal charges after military strikes and an operation which he described as looking like a "television show".

The Venezuelan government decried what it termed a "extremely serious military aggression" by Washington and declared a state of emergency.

Countries such as Russia and Iran, which had longstanding ties with Maduro's government, were quick to condemn the operation but their alarm was also shared by Washington's allies including France and the EU.

Russia demanded the US leadership "reconsider its position and release the legally elected president of the sovereign country and his wife".

"This morning, the United States committed an act of armed aggression against Venezuela. This is deeply concerning and condemnable," the Russian foreign ministry said.

"The pretexts used to justify such actions are unfounded. Ideological animosity has prevailed over business pragmatism and the willingness to build relationships based on trust and predictability," the ministry added. "In the current situation, it is important, first and foremost, to prevent further escalation and to focus on finding a way out of the situation through dialogue."

Beijing said that "China is deeply shocked and strongly condemns the US's blatant use of force against a sovereign state and its action against its president".

Iran, which Trump bombed last year, said it "strongly condemns the US military attack on Venezuela and a flagrant violation of the country's national sovereignty and territorial integrity".

Mexico, which Trump has also threatened with military force over drug trafficking, strongly condemned the US military action in Venezuela, saying that it "seriously jeopardises regional stability".

"The Mexican government strongly condemns and rejects the military actions carried out unilaterally in recent hours by the armed forces of the United States of America against targets in the territory of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in clear violation of Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations," Mexico's ministry of foreign affairs said.

Columbian President Gustavo Petro - whose country neighbours Venezuela - called the US action an "assault on the sovereignty" of Latin America which would lead to a humanitarian crisis.

"As the government of Chile, we express our concern and condemnation of the military actions of the United States in Venezuela and call for a peaceful solution to the serious crisis affecting the country," Chile's President Gabriel Boric wrote on X.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva slammed the US attacks as a "serious affront" to Venezuela's sovereignty.

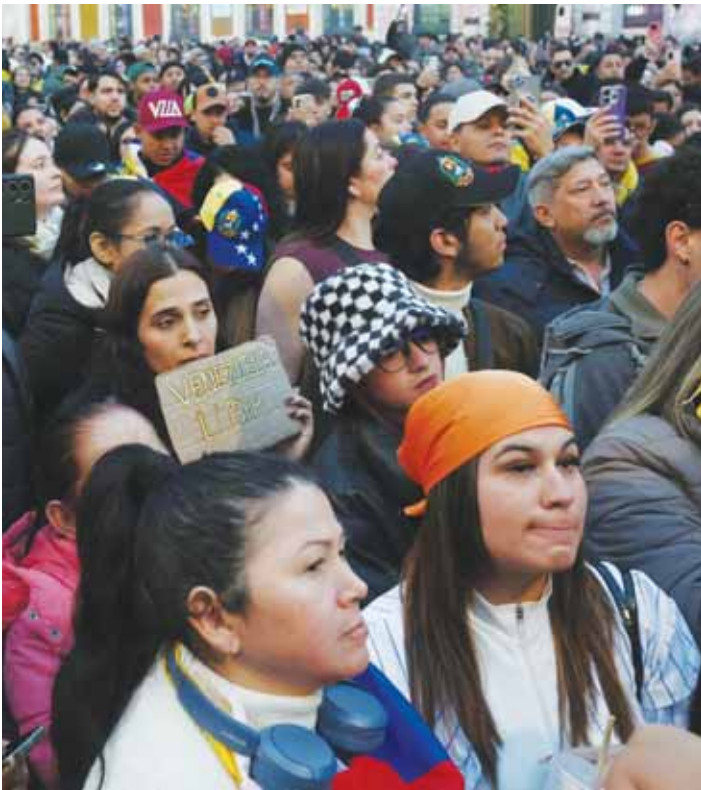
"The bombings on Venezuelan territory and the capture of its



People celebrate at Caracas's Bolivar Square after US forces captured Maduro. - AFP



Right: Government supporters gesture near a photograph of Maduro during a rally in Caracas. - Reuters



Venezuelan citizens living in Spain gather at Puerta del Sol square in Madrid after US forces captured Maduro. - AFP



Cubans hold a Venezuelan national flag with a Cuban one during a gathering in Havana in support of Maduro. - AFP

president cross an unacceptable line," he wrote on X. "These acts represent a grave affront to Venezuela's sovereignty and yet another extremely dangerous precedent for the entire international community."

"Attacking countries in flagrant violation of international law is the first step toward a world of violence, chaos, and instability, where the law of the strongest prevails over multilateralism," Lula added.

Cuba, a strong ally of Venezuela's, denounced "state terrorism against the brave Venezuelan people".

"Paraguay is closely monitoring current developments in Venezuela and calls for prioritising democratic

The UN chief has said that the developments constitute a dangerous precedent

means that guarantee an orderly transition," Paraguay's government said, while Bolivia's foreign ministry said that the country "reiterates its commitment to peace, democracy, and co-ordination with the international community for humanitarian assistance, the protection of the civilian population, and support for a credible and definitive process of institutional reconstruction".

"In light of the events that took place early this morning in Venezuela, my government reiterates our position in favour of democratic trials and in favour of accepting the legitimate wishes of

the Venezuelan people, as expressed emphatically at the polls, where Edmundo González was elected," Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino wrote on X.

"The government of Peru calls for a prompt solution to the political situation in Venezuela, in favour of a transition with full respect for international law and human rights, as well as attention to the legitimate and genuine aspirations of the Venezuelan people to live in democracy with the support of the regional community," Peru's foreign ministry said.

"Uruguay rejects, as it always has, military intervention by one country in the territory of another and reaffirms the importance of respecting international law and the UN Charter, in particular the basic principle that States must refrain from resorting to the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations," Uruguay's foreign ministry said.

"Trinidad and Tobago is NOT a participant in any of these ongoing military operations," Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar stated. "Trinidad and Tobago continues to maintain peaceful relations with the people of Venezuela."

China strongly condemns the US's use of force against a sovereign state

"What we have to understand is that it's the collapse of the regime of a dictator that was rigging elections, that in the last election was badly defeated and, despite that, he clung on to power," Argentina's President Javier Milei said. "That's why I'd say that today's new is excellent news for the free world."

"The time is coming for all the narco-Chavista criminals. Their structure will finally collapse across the entire continent," Ecuador President Daniel Noboa wrote on X.

"Canada calls on all parties to respect international law and we stand by the people of Venezuela and their desire to live in a peaceful and democratic society," said Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand. "Canada is engaging with its international partners and monitoring developments closely."

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said all countries should "uphold international law".

"I want to establish the facts first. I want to speak to President Trump. I want to speak to allies. I can be absolutely clear that we were not involved... and I always say and believe we should all uphold international law," Starmer said in a statement to British broadcasters.

Spain offered to mediate in the crisis to find a way to a peaceful

solution, while calling for "de-escalation and restraint".

France condemned the US operation, saying that it undermined international law and no solution to Venezuela's crisis can be imposed from the outside.

"The military operation that led to the capture of Nicolas Maduro violates the principle of not resorting to force, that underpins international law. France reiterates that no lasting political solution can be imposed from the outside and that only sovereign people themselves can decide their future," French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot wrote on X.

"We call on all involved parties to avoid an escalation of the situation and to seek ways for a political settlement," the German foreign ministry said. "International law has to be respected... Venezuelans deserve a peaceful and democratic future."

"The developments in Venezuela mark a dramatic escalation of an already very tense situation. It is now crucial that the facts about what has happened come to light," Norway Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide told Reuters.

"The Maduro regime lacks democratic legitimacy," he said. "Despite the 2024 election showing that the regime no longer had the support of the majority of the population, Maduro has clung to power. The regime has become increasingly authoritarian and is responsible for extensive human rights violations."

"International law is universal and binding for all states. The American intervention in Venezuela is not in accordance with international law," Eide added. "A peaceful transition to democratic rule is the only viable path in Venezuela. This requires inclusive political processes that respect the rights of the population."

"The US military action in Venezuela is further evidence of the breakdown of the world order created after World War II," Slovakia Prime Minister Robert Fico said.

"We now consider it important to calm the situation and initiate diplomatic negotiations, including with the participation of the Venezuelan opposition," Czech Foreign Minister Petr Macinka said.

"The President of Belarus CATEGORICALLY CONDEMNS the act of American aggression against Venezuela. Alexander Lukashenko spoke about the consequences just recently in an interview with

American journalists," Belta news agency cited Natalia Eismont, spokesperson for Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, as saying.

The EU more generally expressed concern at the developments and urged respect for international law, even as it noted that Maduro "lacks legitimacy".

European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen said: "Following very closely the situation in Venezuela. We stand by the people of Venezuela and support a peaceful and democratic transition. Any solution must respect international law and the UN Charter"

In a rare expression of support for the US operation by a major European

country, far-right Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni - a Trump ally - argued the US military action in Venezuela was "legitimate" and "defensive".

"In line with Italy's long-standing position, the government believes that external military action is not the way to end totalitarian regimes, but at the same time considers defensive intervention against hybrid attacks to its security to be legitimate, as in the case of state entities that fuel and promote drug trafficking," she said.

"Ukraine has consistently defended the right of nations to live freely, free of dictatorship, oppression, and human rights violations," Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybha said. "The Maduro regime has violated all such principles in every respect. We stand for further developments in accordance with the principles of international law, prioritising democracy, human rights, and the interests of Venezuelans."

"South Africa calls on the UN Security Council, the body mandated to maintain international peace and security, to urgently convene to address this situation," a statement by the South African department of international relations said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "deeply alarmed" by the US strikes, with his spokesman quoting him as saying it could "constitute a dangerous precedent".

"These developments constitute a dangerous precedent," his spokesperson said. "The secretary-general continues to emphasise the importance of full respect - by all - of international law, including the UN Charter. He's deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected."

The United States' history of intervening in Latin America

The United States, which attacked Venezuela yesterday and abducted its president, has a long history of military interventions and support for dictatorships in Latin America. On multiple occasions the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicolas Maduro accused Washington of backing coup attempts.

On June 27, 1954, Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, president of Guatemala, was driven from power by mercenaries trained and financed by Washington, after a land reform that threatened the interests of the powerful US company United Fruit Corporation (later Chiquita Brands).

In 2003, the United States officially acknowledged the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s role in this coup, in the name of fighting communism.

From April 15-19, 1961, 1,400 anti-Castro militants trained and financed by the CIA attempted to land at the Bay of Pigs, 250km (155 miles) from Havana, but failed to overthrow Fidel Castro's communist regime. The fighting left killed more than a hundred on each side.

In 1965, citing a "communist threat", the US sent Marines and paratroopers to Dominican Republic's Santo Domingo to crush an uprising in support of Juan Bosch, a leftist

president ousted by generals in 1963. Washington backed several military dictatorships, seen as a bulwark against left-wing armed movements in a world divided by Cold War rivalries.

It actively assisted Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet during the September 11, 1973 coup against leftist president Salvador Allende. US secretary of state Henry Kissinger supported the Argentine junta in 1976, encouraging it to quickly end its "dirty war", according to US documents declassified in 2003.

At least 10,000 Argentine dissidents disappeared.

In the 1970s and 1980s, six dictatorships (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil) joined forces to eliminate left-wing opponents under "Operation Condor", with tacit US support.

In 1979, the Sandinista rebellion overthrew dictator Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. US president Ronald Reagan, concerned about Managua's alignment with Cuba and the USSR, secretly authorised the CIA to provide \$20mn in aid to the Contras (the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries), partly funded by the illegal sale of arms to Iran.

The Nicaraguan civil war, which ended in April 1990, claimed 50,000 lives.

Reagan also sent military advisers to El Salvador to crush the rebellion of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN, far left) in a civil war (1980-1992) that resulted in 72,000 deaths.

On October 25, 1983, US Marines and Rangers intervened on the island of Grenada after prime minister Maurice Bishop was assassinated by a far-left junta and as Cubans were expanding the airport, presumably to accommodate military aircraft.

At the request of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), Reagan launched Operation "Urgent Fury" with the stated goal of protecting a thousand US citizens.

The operation, widely deplored by the UN General Assembly, ended on November 3, with more than a hundred dead.

In 1989, after a contested election, president George W Bush ordered a military intervention in Panama, resulting in the surrender of general Manuel Noriega, a former collaborator of US intelligence, who was wanted by US justice.

Some 27,000 GIs took part in Operation "Just Cause", which officially left 500 dead.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) put the toll significantly higher, in the thousands.

Noriega would spend more than two decades in prison in the United States for drug trafficking, before serving additional sentences in France and then Panama. - AFP



California's ban on openly carrying guns 'unconstitutional', court rules

Reuters
San Francisco

A US appeals court has ruled that California's ban on openly carrying firearms in most parts of the state was unconstitutional.

A panel of the San Francisco-based 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals sided 2-1 with a gun owner in ruling that the state's prohibition against open carry in counties with more than 200,000 people violated the US Constitution's Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms.

About 95% of the population in California, which has had some of the nation's strictest gun-control laws, live in counties of that size.

US Circuit Judge Lawrence VanDyke,

who was appointed by Republican President Donald Trump, said the Democratic-led state's law could not stand under the US Supreme Court's 2022 landmark gun rights ruling.

That decision, *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v Bruen*, was issued by the court's 6-3 conservative super majority and established a new legal test for firearms restrictions.

The test said they must be "consistent with this nation's historical tradition of firearm regulation".

VanDyke, whose opinion on Friday was joined by another Trump appointee, said the latest case "unquestionably involves a historical practice - open carry - that predates ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791".

The judge noted that more than 30

states generally allow open carry.

California itself allowed citizens to carry handguns openly and holstered for self-defence without penalty until 2012, he said.

"The historical record makes unmistakably plain that open carry is part of this nation's history and tradition," VanDyke said.

The ruling partially reversed a 2023 decision by a lower-court judge who had rejected a 2019 challenge to the law by gun owner Mark Baird.

While the appeals court largely sided with Baird, it rejected his related challenge to California's licensing requirements in counties with fewer than 200,000 residents, which may issue open-carry permits.

Senior US Circuit Judge N Randy Smith, who was appointed by Republican former president George W Bush, dissented, saying

that his colleagues "got this case half right" as all of California's restrictions complied with the Supreme Court's ruling.

A spokesperson for California Attorney-General Rob Bonta, a Democrat who defended the state's ban, in a statement said that his office is considering its options.

"We are committed to defending California's common sense gun laws," the spokesperson said.

The 2022 Supreme Court ruling has prompted court cases nationwide challenging modern firearm restrictions, including in California.

A 9th Circuit panel in September 2024 upheld a California law that prohibits people with concealed-carry permits from carrying firearms at several categories of "sensitive places" like clubs, parks, zoos, stadiums and museums.



Mamdamani greets a child before speaking at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, New York City, on Friday. - AFP

Mamdamani defends scrapping executive orders his predecessor issued

New York Mayor Zohran Mamdamani has defended his revocation of executive orders that his predecessor Eric Adams issued after being indicted in 2024 on federal charges of accepting illegal campaign contributions.

The dozen orders Adams issued since his indictment included a directive to allow federal agents, including immigration officers, to use an office on Rikers Island, the city's main jail.

That order was later struck down by a court.

The new mayor also struck down executive orders that Adams had portrayed as addressing antisemitism.

Mamdamani, a Muslim who some have accused of antisemitism over his support of Palestinians in Gaza, told reporters on Friday that he would fund measures to prevent hate crimes, and would make protection of Jewish New Yorkers a focus of his administration.

Mamdamani recalled September 26, 2024, the day when Adams was charged with accepting illegal campaign contributions and luxury travel from foreign nationals seeking to influence him, as "a moment when many New Yorkers lost even more faith in New York City politics and the ability of city government to actually prioritise the needs of the public, as opposed to the needs of the person".

In April, a US judge dismissed the charges against Adams, a Democrat, at the request of the US Justice Department, which had argued that the case was distracting the mayor from helping Republican President Donald Trump step up deportations.

Mamdamani, from the left wing of the Democratic Party, has clashed with Trump over the immigration crackdown.

On Thursday, Mamdamani revoked orders by Adams that had prevented city institutions from divesting from Israel and that defined antisemitism in a way recognised by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an intergovernmental organisation of 35 countries that promotes Holocaust education.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations is among groups that argue that the IHRA definition has been used to try to silence advocates for Palestinian rights.

While Islamic organisations praised Mamdamani's moves, Israel's foreign ministry posted on X on Friday that Mamdamani "shows his true face: He scraps the IHRA definition of antisemitism and lifts restrictions on boycotting Israel. This isn't leadership. It's antisemitic gasoline on an open fire".

Reuters

Venezuela diaspora celebrates, wonders what's next

Reuters/AFP
Santiago/Caracas

Venezuelan migrants around the world erupted in celebration yesterday following the US-led deposition of President Nicolas Maduro, whose government oversaw one of the world's largest migration exoduses in recent history.

Chants celebrating Maduro's capture were heard in the streets of Chile's capital, where Venezuelans gathered to share their joy.

"We are free. We are all happy that the dictatorship has fallen and that we have a free country," said Khaty Yanez, a Venezuelan woman who has spent the last seven years in Chile.

"My joy is too big," her compatriot Jose Gregorio said. "After so many years, after so many struggles, after so much work, today is the day. Today is the day of freedom."

Since 2014, some 7.7mn Venezuelans or 20% of the population have left the country, unable to afford food or seeking better opportunities abroad, according to the UN International Organisation for Migration.

Neighbouring Colombia has received the largest share of the diaspora, with around 2.8mn Venezuelans, followed by 1.7mn in Peru, according to the R4V platform, a group of regional non-governmental organisations (NGOs) assisting migrants and refugees from Venezuela set up by the UN migration agency.

In Peru's capital Lima, dozens of Venezuelans gathered, many wrapped in their country's flag, to mark Maduro's deposition.

Venezuelan migrant Milagros Ortega, whose parents are still in Venezuela, said she hoped to go back.

"Knowing that my dad was alive to see the fall of Nicolas Maduro is very emotional. I would like to see his face," she said.

Peruvian President Jose Jeri said on X that his government would facilitate the immediate return of Venezuelans, regardless of their immigration status.

For years, the US was a haven for Venezuelans but many were branded criminals and forced to seek refuge elsewhere during President Donald Trump's second term.

In Spain, thousands of people gathered at central Madrid's Puerta del Sol and applauded as they watched Trump's press conference live.

In the afternoon, groups of Venezuelans are also expected to



gather to celebrate in Argentina's capital Buenos Aires.

After the initial joy, doubts about Venezuela's future also set in, as Venezuelans abroad wondered what the future would hold for their country and its citizens.

Andres Losada, who has lived in Spain for three years and is among the 400,000 Venezuelans residing in the country according to official data, said he is struggling between worry and joy about the situation in Venezuela.

"Although what people are going through in Caracas is tough, I believe that beyond that there is a light that will lead us to freedom," he added.

Venezuelan security forces patrolled largely empty streets at dawn in the capital, Caracas, yesterday.

Most residents stayed home, devouring the latest information on their phones, while some went to stock up on groceries in case they need to hunker down for a prolonged period.

A lingering smell of explosives hung over Caracas where a few hundred Maduro supporters gathered to clamour for his freedom.

"I felt the explosions lift me out of bed. In that instant I thought: 'My God, the day has come,' and I cried," Maria Eugenia Escobar, a 58-year-old resident of the city of 6mn people, told AFP.

The strikes started around 2am local time, with dozens of detonations some at first mistook for fireworks.



People take part in a demonstration in front of the White House in Washington, DC, against US military action in Venezuela. - AFP

Left: Children dance outside Venezuela's embassy in Lima after the US attacked Venezuela and deposed its president. - Reuters

Colombian troops deployed to border

Colombian President Gustavo Petro said yesterday that he ordered the deployment of military forces to the Venezuelan border, following US strikes that ended with the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Petro described Washington's actions as an "assault on the sovereignty" of Latin America and said they would result in a humanitarian crisis.

While proposing that the situation could be resolved through "dialogue", the leftist president said on X that he had also ordered the "deployment of the security forces" to the Venezuelan border.

Petro made no mention of Maduro's capture, despite the Venezuelan leader being one of his government's closest allies in the region.

Earlier, the Colombian leader had requested an "immediate" meeting of the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the UN to "establish the international legality of the aggression" by the United States.

Windows rattled from the shockwaves and residents rushed out onto terraces and balconies as military aircraft zoomed overhead.

"It was horrible, we felt the planes flying over our house," said a resident of the Coche neighbourhood, near the city's largest military complex, which was targeted in the raid.

Residents saw columns of smoke rising from several parts of the city, which was soon cloaked in a fog-like haze.

Witnesses spoke of bombings in La Guaira, Caracas's airport and port, in Maracay to the west, and

in Higuerote to the east.

A few hundred supporters gathered in Caracas to demand news of their leader's fate.

"Long live Nicolas Maduro," echoed a rally cry from a hastily-erected stage with speakers blaring revolutionary music.

"Long live!" retorted the crowd. Katia Briceno, a 54-year-old university professor, came out to protest what she described as US "barbarism".

"How is it that a foreign government comes into the country and removes the president? It's absurd!" she told AFP.

Colombia holds a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council this year, which led to its call for the body to be convened.

Petro has been a vocal critic of military deployments ordered by Trump in the Caribbean to fight alleged drug trafficking vessels.

Petro added in other posts to social media that he had put measures in place to "preserve stability at the border".

An AFP reporter observed normal conditions at the main crossing between the two countries.

Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez said the security forces had activated "all capacities" to prevent "any attempted terrorist attack" at the border by illegal groups such as the National Liberation Army.

As part of his anti-drug strategy, Trump recently said he would not rule out striking drug-production laboratories in Colombia, which Petro condemned as a threat of invasion at the time. - AFP

Apart from the protesters, there were few Venezuelans out and about, and just an occasional car on the usually bustling streets.

Those who did venture out did so under the watchful eye of black-clad agents patrolling the centre with long guns.

Many stores were shuttered in the hours after the attack, while queues formed at others that were letting people in a few at a time.

Damage from the explosions was mostly limited to military installations, where vehicles stood riddled with bullet impacts, others smouldering and charred.

Elon Musk's Grok under fire over manipulated images

AFP
San Francisco

Elon Musk's Grok has said that it was scrambling to fix flaws in the artificial intelligence (AI) tool after users claimed it turned pictures of children or women into obscene images.

"We've identified lapses in safeguards and are urgently fixing them," Grok said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

Complaints of abuses began hitting X after an "edit image" button was rolled out on Grok in late December.

The button allows users to modify

any image on the platform - with some users deciding to partially or completely remove articles of clothing from wearers in pictures, according to complaints.

Grok maker xAI, run by Musk, replied to an AFP query with a terse, automated response that said: "The mainstream media lies."

The Grok chatbot, however, did respond to an X user who queried it on the matter, after they said that a company in the United States could face criminal prosecution for knowingly facilitating or failing to prevent the creation or sharing of illegal material involving children.

Media outlets in India reported on



Friday that government officials there are demanding X quickly provide them details of measures the company is taking to remove "obscene... content" generated by Grok without the consent of those in such pictures.

11 killed as bus crashes head-on into truck in southern Brazil

A head-on collision between a bus and a truck left at least 11 people dead on Friday in southern Brazil, the country's Federal Highway Police said in a statement.

Another seven people were injured in the accident, which took place on a federal highway in Brazil's southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul around 11.30am local time (1430 GMT), and were

sent to hospitals, the police said.

Part of the truck's sand cargo ended up inside the bus as a result of the crash, making it difficult for rescuers to access the vehicle, the police said. - Reuters

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, KONNAMOOTILASIF NAWABSAHEB

holder of

INDIA Passport No. AI632048
QID No. 27935600019

hereby change my name

from

KONNAMOOTILASIF NAWABSAHEB

to

ASIF MEERAN KONNAMOOTIL

Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR
NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.



Ukraine's allies in Kyiv for talks on plan to end war

AFP
Kyiv

Security advisers from Ukraine's top allies met in Kyiv yesterday for talks on a US-brokered plan to end the war with Russia, days after Kyiv announced a deal was "90%" ready.

Officials from 15 countries including Britain, France and Germany as well as representatives from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) and the European Union joined the meeting, the first of several planned for the new year.

US special envoy Steve Witkoff also joined virtually, a Ukrainian official told AFP, though the United States' large-scale military attack on Venezuela earlier in the day overshadowed proceedings.

A follow-up summit of European leaders was expected to take place in France on Tuesday, according to Ukraine.

"National security advisers from European countries have arrived in Kyiv," Ukraine's chief negotiator Rustem Umerov said in a post on Telegram.

He announced in a later post that the meeting had started.

"The first part of the meeting focused on framework documents, including security guarantees and approaches to the peace plan, as well as the sequence of further joint steps," he said.

Diplomatic efforts to end Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II have gained pace in recent weeks, though both Moscow and Kyiv remain at odds over the key issue of territory in a post-war settlement.

Russia, which occupies around 20% of Ukraine, is pushing for full control of the country's eastern Donbas region as part of a deal.

However, Kyiv has warned ceding ground will embolden Moscow and said it will not sign a peace deal that fails to deter Russia from invading again.

The meeting yesterday capped a week marked by deadly strikes, as well as a Russian claim – denied by Ukraine – that Kyiv had launched drones at a residence of President Vladimir Putin in an unsuccessful attack.

Russia accused Kyiv of firing drones at a hotel and cafe in the Moscow-held part of Ukraine's southern Kherson region early on Thursday, killing what it said were 28 people celebrating the New Year.

Ukraine says it was a military gathering. A woman and three-year-old child died in a Russian missile strike on Ukraine's second largest city of Kharkiv late on Friday, according to the region's governor.

And early yesterday, Russian bombardment of a Kyiv-held part of the southern Kherson region left two people dead, according to the region's governor.

Russia made bigger advances on the battlefield last year than in any other year since it launched its invasion in 2022, according to an AFP analysis of data from the Institute for the Study of War.

As the year kicked off, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced sweeping changes to his top circle, naming a new chief of staff and defence minister on Friday while announcing plans yesterday to replace several regional leaders (*see accompanying report*).

Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine

Zelensky proposes moving defence minister to energy in cabinet overhaul

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky proposed yesterday moving his current Defence Minister Denys Shmygal into the role of energy minister, the latest in a widening reshuffle of cabinet positions.

The Ukrainian leader did not explain why he was making the changes, which come at a critical juncture in the nearly four-year war with Russia.

Shmygal had only started working in the defence role last July. Shmygal hopes to replace him with 34-year-old Digital Transformation Minister Mikhailo Fedorov – a relative political novice who is little-known to the Ukrainian public.

The appointments require approval from parliament, though it has largely coalesced around Zelensky since Russia's invasion and is unlikely to torpedo his decisions. Announcing yesterday's decision in a post on X, Zelensky said he hoped Shmygal would use his "systematic" approach to the defence role in the energy portfolio.

"I am counting on parliamentary support," he said.

"It is crucial that, after each Russian strike, we can quickly restore what has been destroyed, and that the growth of Ukraine's energy sector remains stable and sufficient to meet the country's needs," Zelensky said, posting a picture of him meeting Shmygal in the presidential office on Telegram.

Russia has pounded Ukraine's energy sector with drones and missiles for consecutive winters since the war began nearly four years ago.

In recent months, Moscow has again intensified its strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, forcing long blackouts across the country during critical winter months. Zelensky separately on Friday announced a new chief of staff, after his previous top aide resigned in November over a corruption scandal.

The reshuffle of Ukraine's top officials overseeing security forces and crucial defence and energy sectors comes weeks after a major energy sector corruption scandal that caused Ukraine's biggest wartime political crisis.

Justice and energy ministers also resigned as a result of the scandal. **-AFP**

in February 2022, describing it as a "special military operation" to prevent the expansion of Nato – a war aim that Kyiv has called a lie.

Moscow has since fired on Ukrainian towns and cities in daily drone and missile attacks while waging battles that have reduced entire urban areas to rubble.

Swiss launch probe of club managers after deadly fire

Reuters/AFP
Crans-Montana, Switzerland

Two people who ran a Swiss club that burst into flames during a New Year's Eve party, killing 40, have been placed under criminal investigation on suspicion of offences including homicide by negligence, prosecutors said yesterday.

Two days after the fire, in which 119 people suffered injuries including severe burns, officials were still trying to identify many of those killed and attention turned to how one of Switzerland's worst tragedies could have occurred.

The club's two operators are suspected of offences including homicide by negligence, causing bodily harm by negligence and arson by negligence, prosecutors in Valais, the canton that is home to the club in the upscale ski resort of Crans-Montana, said in a statement, without naming them.

"It was an enormous tragedy. We're all so sorry that this had to happen," Swiss Justice Minister Beat Jans told reporters, adding that temperatures in the club must have reached "500° 600° Celsius, (900°-1,100° Fahrenheit)".

Reuters was not immediately able to contact the club's owners for comment or reach the prosecutors to verify whether they were the people referred to.

Witnesses had reported seeing staff at Le Constellation carrying so-called fountain candles atop beverage bottles, and questions have also arisen about a foam material used to soundproof the ceiling of the basement where revellers danced.

Beatrice Pilloud, chief prosecutor of Valais, said indications were that the fire started because the sparklers got too near to the ceiling.

"From there, a rapid, very rapid and widespread blaze ensued," she said on Friday afternoon.

Investigations will focus on renovations made to the club, the fire extinguishing systems and escape routes, as well as the number of people in the building when the fire started, prosecutors said.

Police arrived quickly at the scene, according to local residents, but the fire burned victims so severely that investigators said they would need days to identify the bodies.

Illustrating the painstaking nature of that work, the Valais prosecutors' office said in a state-



ment yesterday that the police had identified the bodies of four Swiss victims aged between 16 and 21 – two female and two male – and returned them to their families.

It did not elaborate on their identities.

On Friday, officials had only identified one of the dead, a teenage Italian international golfer, Emanuele Galeppini.

According to two people familiar with the investigation, some of the victims may be under 16.

Local residents said the club was popular with young people and the Swiss government said many of the dead were likely youths.

One of the club's two owners, Jacques Moretti, told the *Tribune de Geneve* newspaper that Le Constellation had been checked three times in 10 years and that everything was done according to the rules.



A makeshift memorial outside Le Constellation in the upscale ski resort of Crans-Montana, southwestern Switzerland. **- Reuters**

Left: A photo shows the Swiss flag flying at half-mast following a fire at Le Constellation, in the Alpine ski resort town of Crans-Montana. **-AFP**

Right: The blocked-off zone outside Le Constellation. **-AFP**



The disaster has left Switzerland reeling, with families of the overwhelmingly young partygoers waiting for news of their loved ones.

Among those bracing for the worst was Laetitia Brodard, who said that the last text she received from her son, Arthur, was "Mum, Happy New Year, I love you".

"It's been 40 hours. Forty hours since our children disappeared. So now we need to know," she told journalists on Friday near the memorial.



Police officers are seen outside a power distribution system that caught fire, causing a blackout in parts of the city, in Berlin. **- Reuters**

Power outage hits Berlin, police suspect arson

AFP
Berlin

Tens of thousands of homes in Berlin will be without electricity until Thursday as authorities struggle to repair power cables seriously damaged in a suspected arson attack, officials said.

Some may also be without heating as the outage has affected local systems, at a time when the German capital is blanketed in snow and temperatures are hovering around freezing.

Emergency services were alerted early yesterday that several high-voltage cables on a bridge near a power plant had gone up in flames.

Firefighters quickly extinguished the blaze, but about 45,500 households and 2,200 businesses in districts in southwest Berlin were left without power, according to grid operator Stromnetz Berlin.

The extensive damage means that around 35,000 households will be without electricity until Thursday afternoon, Berlin authorities said in a statement.

Power should be restored to other homes by early today.

"We are dealing with a particularly serious power outage affecting tens of thousands of households and businesses, including care facilities, hospitals, numerous social institutions, and companies," said Franziska Giffey, Berlin senator for economic affairs.

The local district heating system – which transports heat around a pipe network in the area – is affected as it is powered by electricity.

Stromnetz Berlin warned that repair work "will take a very long time", with media reports saying that cold weather was hindering efforts to lay new underground cables.

Police deployed about 160 officers to the site of the incident in the Lichterfelde area

and said they were "investigating on suspicion of arson".

They drove vans equipped with loudspeakers through the affected areas, urging residents to stay with friends or relatives elsewhere if possible, use mobile phones sparingly and ensure they have torches at hand.

Local train stations were impacted, with electronic information signs and ticket machines not working – although the trains were still running.

Giffey said yesterday's outage was worse than one in September, when tens of thousands were also left without power in Berlin after a blaze hit electricity pylons.

Police also suspected arson in that case, and an unnamed anarchist group claimed responsibility online for starting the blaze.

Germany has been on high alert for sabotage activities directed at its infrastructure, including from foreign actors such as Russia.



Trump invites Japan's Takaichi to US

AFP
Tokyo

President Donald Trump invited Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi to the United States during a phone call late on Friday and they agreed to work towards a meeting early this year, officials said.

Trump has already said he will visit China in April, with Tokyo and Beijing in dispute over Takaichi's suggestion in November that Japan could intervene militarily in case of any attack on self-ruled Taiwan.

China claims the democratic island as part of its territory and has threatened to use force to bring it under its control.

Takaichi's comments triggered a sharp dip-



Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi speaks to the media after a telephone call with US President Donald Trump, at her residence in Tokyo.

lomatic backlash from China, which has urged its citizens to avoid travelling to Japan and suspended Japanese seafood imports.

She and Trump spoke for 25 minutes, agreeing to further strengthen

economic and security co-operation, the foreign ministry in Tokyo said in a statement.

Trump invited Takaichi to visit the United States and "the two leaders concurred to co-ordinate in detail to realise the visit

to the United States this spring", it said. The statement did not make clear whether they talked about China, but Trump and Takaichi also "exchanged views mainly on the Indo-Pacific region and confirmed the close co-operation between Japan and the United States", it said.

China launched missiles and deployed dozens of fighter jets, navy ships and coastguard vessels around Taiwan in live-fire drills last week.

The drills drew a chorus of international criticism, including from Japan, Australia and European countries.

Trump advised Takaichi not to provoke China over Taiwan in their previous phone call on November 25, the *Wall Street Journal* reported, but Tokyo denied the report.

National launch of Visit Malaysia 2026



Visitors take pictures with clowns during an event as part of the national launch of Visit Malaysia 2026 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Asia's factories end 2025 on firmer footing as orders pick up

Asia's factory activity rebounds with growth in key economies; Taiwan and South Korea PMIs show expansion after months of decline; new product launches and demand boost semiconductor manufacturers

Reuters
Singapore

Asia's factory powerhouses closed 2025 on a firmer footing, with activity swinging back to growth in several key economies as export orders picked up, helped by new product launches and blistering demand for artificial intelligence.

Purchasing managers' indexes (PMIs) released by S&P Global on Friday showed factory activity in the major tech-exporting economies of South Korea and Taiwan snapping months of declines in December, while most Southeast Asian nations maintained brisk growth.

They followed PMIs released for China on Tuesday, which also showed an unexpected turnaround in factory activity in the world's second-largest economy, helped by a pre-holiday surge in orders.

While it is too early to say whether Asia's largest exporters are adjusting to US tariffs, a pickup in global demand had given some manufacturers cause for optimism heading into the new year.

"Exports from most countries have surged in recent months, and we think the near-term outlook for Asia's export-oriented manufacturing sectors remains favourable," said Shivaan Tandon, Asia Economist with Capital Economics.

He noted most Asian economies should continue to benefit from a shift in US demand away from China and strong global demand



An employee works next to a reel of copper flat wire on the production line at the Wellascent factory in Ganzhou, Jiangxi province, China. Asia's factory powerhouses closed 2025 on a firmer footing, with activity swinging back to growth in several key economies as export orders picked up, helped by new product launches and blistering demand for artificial intelligence.

for AI-related hardware. Taiwan's PMI rose to 50.9 in December from 48.8 in November, breaking above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction for the first time in 10 months.

"Taiwan's manufacturing sector ended 2025 on a high, with firms signalling fresh increases in production and overall new business amid reports of firmer demand conditions," said Annabel Fiddes, Economics Associate Director at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

"There were signs that companies anticipate the recovery to continue into 2026, with manufacturers building their inventories and expressing stronger optimism around future output."

Similarly, South Korea's PMI rose to 50.1 from 49.4, the first

expansionary reading since September.

Both economies are among the world's largest manufacturers of semiconductors, which have benefited enormously from a booming market for artificial intelligence.

South Korea's PMI survey showed the steepest rise in new orders since November 2024.

"According to manufacturers, new product launches and improved external demand drove the improvement in sales, while confidence in the outlook also improved markedly in December to reach its highest level since May 2022," said Usamah Bhatti, economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

"In turn, firms were encouraged to raise both employment

levels and purchasing activity."

Official data released on Thursday showed exports from South Korea, a bellwether for global trade, beat forecasts in December.

Elsewhere in Asia, factories mostly sustained activity growth although Indonesia and Vietnam reported slight moderations in expansion.

India's factory sector activity slowed to its weakest growth in two years, although the pace is still among the region's strongest.

Separately, Singapore on Friday reported a pickup in economic growth for 2025 to 4.8% from 4.4% in 2024 while the quarterly growth beat forecasts.

S&P Global will release the Japanese PMI on Monday.

Cambodia demands Thailand withdraw troops, week into border truce

AFP
Phnom Penh

Cambodia called on neighbouring Thailand yesterday to pull out its forces from areas Phnom Penh claims as its own, one week since a truce halted deadly clashes along their disputed border.

The decades-old dispute between the southeast Asian neighbours erupted into military clashes several times last year, with fighting in December killing dozens of people and displacing around one million on both sides.

The two countries agreed a truce on December 27, ending three weeks of clashes.

Cambodia says that during that period, Thailand seized several areas across four border provinces.

In a statement yesterday, Phnom Penh's foreign ministry demanded the withdrawal of "all Thai military personnel and equipment from the territory of the Kingdom of Cambodia to positions fully consistent with the legally established boundary".

The Thai army has rejected claims it had used force to seize Cambodia territory, insisting its forces were present in areas that had always belonged to Thailand.

The Cambodian foreign ministry also called on Thailand to immediately end "all hostile military activities" along the frontier and "within Cambodian territory".

The two nations' border conflict stems from a dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre (500-mile) border, where both sides claim territory and centuries-old temple ruins.

On Friday, Cambodia's Information Minister Neth Pheaktra accused Thailand of launching the "illegal annexation" of the border village of Chouk Chey.

The Thai army disputed Phnom Penh's narrative, and Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said his country "has never breached another country's sovereignty and has acted in line with international regulations".

Anutin was speaking on Friday while visiting troops deployed to the border province of Surin.

Kim Jong-un visits greenhouse farm, encourages workers

Reuters
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un inspected a greenhouse farm construction site along the country's border with China on Friday, and encouraged youths and troops working on the construction in the new year, state media KCNA said yesterday. In recent weeks, Kim has made a series of visits to various military and economic facilities to confirm their progress ahead of the key

Ninth Party Congress of the Workers' Party, expected to convene early this year to set out major policy goals.

"I wanted to spend the beginning of 2026 with my comrades who are greeting the new year at the northwest tip of our country, so I rushed here as soon as the central event was over," Kim said, lauding the workers' efforts.

The farm's location, Sinuiju, faces China's Dandong across the two countries' shared border and had been hit by flood damage in 2024.

China says Irish PM to visit Beijing, Shanghai

AFP
Beijing

Irish prime minister Micheal Martin will visit China on the invitation of counterpart Li Qiang from Sunday-Thursday, Beijing's foreign ministry said. Martin will go to Beijing and the economic powerhouse of Shanghai, meeting with Li as well as President Xi Jinping, China's foreign ministry said in a statement yesterday. Martin's visit to China would be the first by an Irish taoiseach since 2012. "In recent years, the China-Ireland strategic partnership for mutually beneficial cooperation

has enjoyed robust development," the statement said. "Our two sides have always treated each other with mutual respect and equality... Through the upcoming visit, China stands ready to work with Ireland to enhance political mutual trust, expand mutually beneficial cooperation." The foreign ministry also said it hoped the upcoming visit would promote "sound and steady advancement of China-EU relations". Martin's visit will overlap with South Korean President Lee Jae Myung's trip to China. Lee will also be in the country from today to meet counterpart Xi.

China's BYD sets new sales record



People visit the BYD stand at the Beijing Auto Show (file). The Chinese auto giant sold 2.26mn electric vehicles last year, a company statement at the Hong Kong Stock Exchange showed, setting a new record for any firm globally.

'US action in Venezuela violates international law'

Reuters
Beijing

China's foreign ministry said in a statement on yesterday that it condemned the US action in Venezuela, which it said violated international law. "China is deeply shocked and strongly condemns the use of force by the US against a sovereign country and the use of force against the president of a country," the foreign ministry said.

"China firmly opposes such hegemonic behaviour by the US, which seriously violates international law, violates Venezuela's sovereignty, and threatens peace and security in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We urge the US to abide by international law and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and stop violating the sovereignty and security of other countries."

Ceremonial drills



Military band members of India's Border Security Force (BSF) perform during a passing-out parade of newly inducted constable colleagues at a military garrison in Srinagar, India, yesterday. (Reuters)

Starmer says all ‘should uphold international law’ after US actions in Venezuela

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday all countries should “uphold international law” after President Donald Trump announced US forces had captured Venezuela’s leader Nicolas Maduro in a large-scale assault.

Calling the situation “fast-moving”, Starmer added that “the UK was not involved in any way in this operation” as he urged patience in order to “establish the facts”.

“I want to speak to President Trump, I want to speak to allies,” the British leader said in brief comments aired on UK television hours after the US attack.

“I can be absolutely clear that we were not involved in that. And as you know, I always say and believe we should all uphold international law.”

Starmer added that “hopefully more information will come out” about the situation when Trump holds a press conference later Saturday.

The UK has not recognised



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer. (Reuters)

the results of the disputed 2024 election that handed Maduro a third term in power, and has called for a “peaceful, negotiated transition” of power there.

Following yesterday’s events, Starmer said his government’s focus was on supporting around 500 British nationals thought to be in Venezuela.

“We’re working with the (British) embassy to make sure

that they are well looked after, safeguarded and get appropriate advice,” he added.

The Foreign Office in London yesterday updated its advice to urge against all travel to Venezuela.

It noted Venezuelan authorities had “announced a ‘state of external commotion’ due to air strikes on targets across the country”.

“This could lead to closure of Venezuelan borders and airspace,” the advice added.

The US actions prompted strong political reactions in Britain.

Nigel Farage, leader of the hard-right Reform UK party and a longtime Trump ally, called them “unorthodox and contrary to international law”.

“But if they make China and Russia think twice, it may be a good thing. I hope the Venezuelan people can now turn a new leaf without Maduro,” he added.

But Ed Davey, leader of the centrist Liberal Democrats, urged Starmer to “condemn Trump’s illegal action in Venezuela”.

“Maduro is a brutal and illegitimate dictator, but unlawful attacks like this make us all less safe,” he added, arguing they give Russian President Vladimir Putin and China’s Xi “a green light” to “attack other countries with impunity.” (AFP)

Australian police boost security for Sydney Ashes Test after Bondi Beach attack

Police in Australia’s New South Wales state said yesterday they would bolster staffing at the Sydney Cricket Ground for the fifth Ashes Test starting today, weeks after gunmen killed 15 people at a Jewish event in the city.

The father-and-son gunmen are alleged to have carried out the attack at a Hanukkah event at the famed Bondi Beach on December 14.

Australia’s worst mass shooting in almost three decades, the attack shocked the nation and stoked fears of rising antisemitism in the country.

The massacre has sparked more active policing in Sydney, Australia’s most populous city and the state capital.

Authorities said a “high-visibility” police presence at the SCG, located around 5 km (3.1 miles) from Bondi Beach, would include the riot patrol unit, of-

ficers on horseback and officers carrying rifles.

“The difference will be in the visibility of long arms and a stronger presence,” New South Wales Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon said in a statement.

Police said they expected a capacity crowd for day one of the fixture between England and Australia, the final encounter in the five-match series already claimed by Australia.

The hosts Australia leads the Ashes series 3-1.

“Many people may not be used to seeing police carrying rifles at sporting events, but our objective here is to help the public feel safe,” Lanyon said.

On Wednesday, around 3,000 police, some carrying long arms, were deployed in the city during New Year celebrations, which typically attract over a million revellers.

Several New Year events planned at Bondi were cancelled, while traditional Christmas celebrations there were muted, following the attack.

Joshua returns to Britain after fatal crash in Nigeria

AFP
London

Former world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua has reportedly flown back to Britain after a fatal car crash in Nigeria that killed two of his close friends.

The Sun newspaper said the British boxer landed at London’s Stansted Airport in a private jet on Friday evening.

His return comes after Nigerian police charged the driver of the vehicle, Adeniyi Mobolaji

Kayode, 46, with “dangerous driving causing death”. He is due to appear in court on January 20.

Kayode was driving Joshua and team members Latif Ayodele and Sina Ghami on a busy highway linking Lagos and Ibadan in southwest Nigeria when the Lexus SUV in which they were travelling rammed into a stationary truck on Monday.

Nigerian police and Ogun state officials said Ayodele and Ghami died at the scene, while Joshua and Kayode sustained minor injuries.

Joshua was taken to hospital and was discharged on Wednesday.

Ghami was Joshua’s long-time strength and conditioning coach, while Ayodele was his personal trainer, according to British media.

Reports said Joshua, 36, had returned to Britain ahead of the funerals of Ghami and Ayodele.

The 2012 Olympic champion, who has family roots in Nigeria, was on holiday in the African country following his win over Jake Paul in Miami on December 19.

Frigid day



A vendor selling cucumbers waits for customers at a vegetable market on a cold winter’s day in Amritsar, India, yesterday. (AFP)

Italian singer Pausini to perform at Milano Cortina Games opening ceremony

Reuters
Milan

Italian singer and songwriter Laura Pausini (pictured) will be among the headline performers at the opening ceremony of the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics, organisers said.

Pausini, one of Italy’s most internationally acclaimed artists, is credited with helping to bring the country’s music to a global audience. She has won a Grammy, five Latin Grammy Awards, a Golden Globe and earned an Oscar nomination during a career spanning



more than three decades. The Milano Cortina Games opening ceremony will take place on February 6 at Milan’s San Siro Stadium.

Created and produced by Balich Wonder Studio, the event will feature performances by international artists like American pop

superstar Mariah Carey alongside elements celebrating Italian culture and innovation.

Pausini “embodies the concept of Harmony”, the central theme of the ceremony, and her music represents a meeting point between tradition and modernity, between Italian roots and an international outlook, organisers said in a statement.

The Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics will be staged across northern Italy, with events hosted in Milan, Cortina d’Ampezzo and other venues in Lombardy, Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige.

The Games will run from February 6-22.

Supermoon spotted



The wolf supermoon sets, seen from Richmond Park, south west London early yesterday morning. The first full moon of the year appeared in UK skies that were clear for most of the country. (AFP)

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GULF TIMES

Venezuela strike:
What US claims,
what Caracas says,
and what comes next

The explosions that rattled Caracas before dawn – and the extraordinary claim hours later that the United States had captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro – mark one of the most dramatic escalations in US-Latin America relations in decades. If President Donald Trump’s account is accurate, the operation represents a sharp departure from years of sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and covert pressure, crossing into overt military action aimed directly at regime leadership.

Washington has framed the strike as the culmination of a campaign driven by migration, drugs, and national security. Caracas, by contrast, calls it an act of aggression designed to topple a government and seize control of the world’s largest proven oil reserves. Between these competing narratives lies a complex reality with profound regional and global implications.

At the heart of the US justification is migration. Trump has repeatedly argued that Venezuela’s political and economic collapse has directly fuelled instability at the US southern border. The scale of the Venezuelan exodus is not in dispute: nearly eight million people have fled since 2013, primarily to neighbouring Latin American countries. Where the controversy begins is in Trump’s assertion – offered without public evidence – that the Maduro government deliberately pushed criminals and psychiatric patients toward the United States. Caracas has flatly denied the accusation, and independent verification has been limited. Still, the claim resonates with Trump’s long-standing political framing of migration as a security threat rather than a humanitarian crisis.

Washington has framed the strike as the culmination of a campaign driven by migration, drugs, and national security

and personally accusing Maduro of leading the so-called Cartel de los Soles. By designating Venezuelan groups as Foreign Terrorist Organisations, the administration has sought to create a legal basis for military action under the banner of counterterrorism rather than traditional interstate war.

It is within this framework that Washington says the Caracas strikes occurred. Trump describes a short, intense operation involving US military and law enforcement agencies, resulting in the capture of Maduro and his wife. Reports from the ground – explosions near military facilities, power outages, and low-flying aircraft – suggest a co-ordinated assault, though details remain contested. Venezuela’s government says civilian areas were hit and has declared a state of “external disturbance”, urging supporters to mobilise.

What is clear is that the operation did not emerge in isolation. For months, the United States has steadily tightened pressure: deploying major naval assets to the Caribbean, seizing oil tankers, enforcing an effective maritime blockade, and acknowledging lethal strikes on vessels accused of drug trafficking. By declaring itself in an “armed conflict” with drug cartels, Washington has blurred the line between law enforcement, counterterrorism, and conventional warfare – a blurring that now extends onto Venezuelan soil.

From Caracas’ perspective, the attack confirms long-held suspicions. Maduro has consistently argued that US policy is less about drugs or migration and more about regime change and control over oil resources. He points to recent offers of co-operation on migration and narcotics – made just days before the strikes – as evidence that diplomacy was possible. Whether those offers were genuine or tactical is difficult to assess, but their existence complicates Washington’s claim that force was the only remaining option.

The broader consequences may be far-reaching. Regionally, an open US strike risks destabilising already fragile neighbours and placing governments across Latin America under pressure to take sides. Internationally, it raises questions about precedent: if drug trafficking and migration are grounds for capturing a sitting head of state, the boundaries of sovereignty become sharply contested.

For the United States, the gamble is whether decisive action will deter criminal networks and curb migration, or instead deepen resentment, fuel nationalist backlash, and entrench instability. For Venezuela, the immediate question is power: whether Maduro’s removal – if confirmed – creates an opening for transition or plunges the country into deeper chaos.

What is certain is that the events in Caracas represent a watershed moment. The era of pressure without overt force appears to have ended. What replaces it – stability, confrontation, or prolonged uncertainty – remains unresolved.

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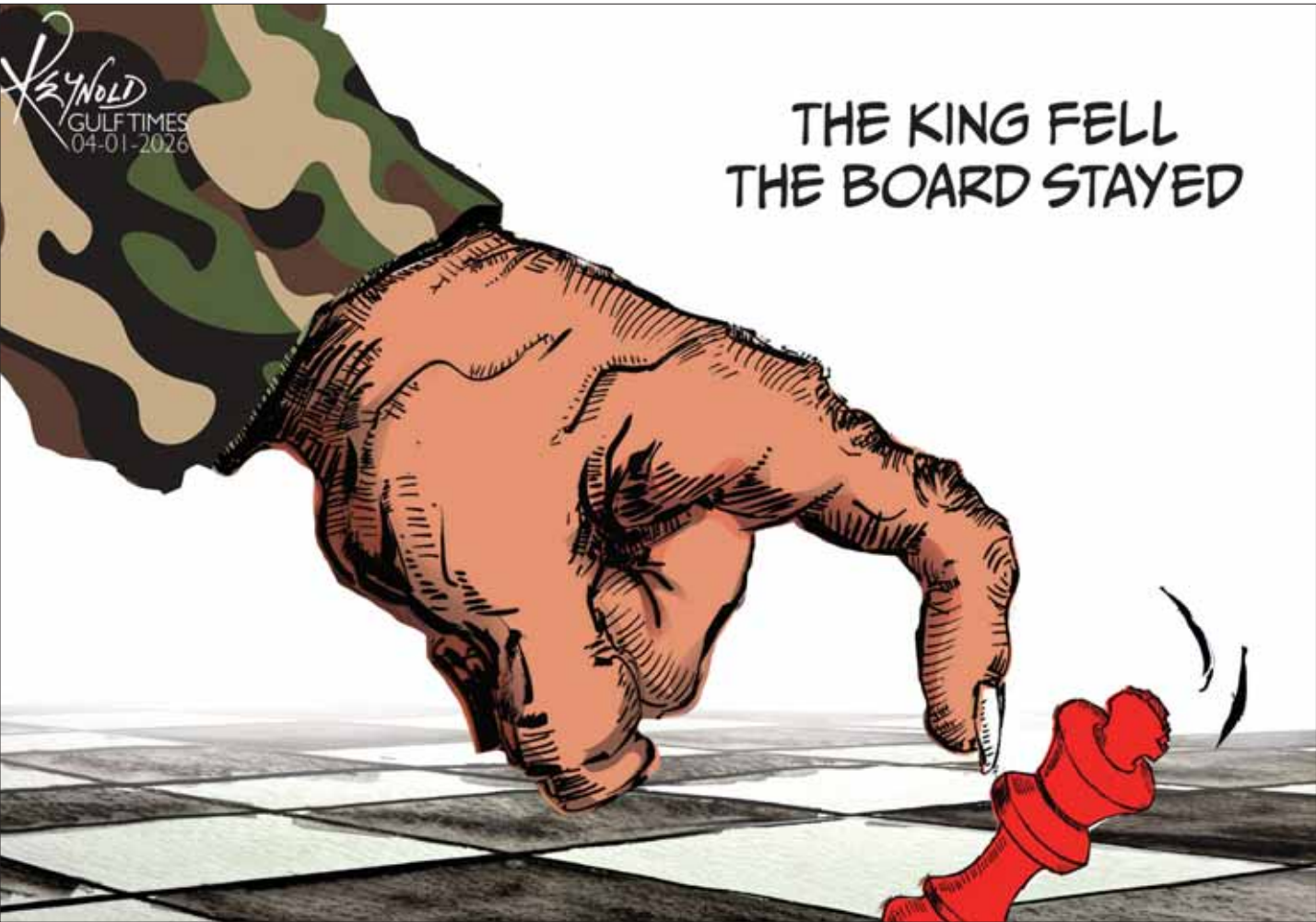
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Maduro’s heavy-handed
rule in Venezuela is
finally ended by Trump

- **Maduro’s rule marked by economic collapse and social crises**
- **US military build-up and sanctions pressured Maduro’s government**
- **Maduro denied rights abuses, blamed US for economic woes**
- **Maduro, a one-time bus driver, took office after Hugo Chavez died in 2013**

Nicolas Maduro ruled Venezuela with a heavy hand for more than 12 years, presiding over deep economic and social crises and resisting pressure from domestic opponents and foreign governments for political change. His rule abruptly ended on Saturday when President Donald Trump announced US forces had captured him and flown him out of the country.

A 63-year-old socialist and the handpicked successor of the late Hugo Chavez, Maduro was long accused by critics both at home and abroad of being a dictator who jailed or persecuted political opponents and repeatedly staged sham elections. Maduro, a salsa aficionado with a flair for theatrics, often called opposition politicians “fascist demons” and took pride in resisting US pressure against him, even having his invocation to Trump of “yes peace, not war” remixed into an electronica song. He was sworn in for a third term in January 2025 following a 2024 election that was widely condemned as fraudulent by international observers and the opposition. Thousands of people who protested against the government’s declaration of victory were jailed.

Venezuela’s opposition, the United States and many other Western countries also considered Maduro’s election win in 2018 to be a sham. His government’s repressive measures were highlighted by the awarding of the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize to opposition leader Maria Corina Machado.

After Trump announced last October that he was authorising CIA operations in the country, Maduro blasted “those demonic powers that aim to sink their claws into Venezuela to steal our oil”. Maduro has long denied US accusations of connections to drug smuggling and corruption.

In August, Washington doubled its reward for Maduro’s arrest to \$50mn over allegations of drug trafficking and links to criminal groups. Trump ratcheted up the pressure in recent months with a huge build-up of the US military in the southern Caribbean, more than two dozen

strikes on vessels allegedly involved in trafficking drugs in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, and a ramping up of sanctions.

A UN Fact-Finding Mission found last month that the country’s Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) committed serious human rights violations and crimes against humanity over more than a decade in targeting political opponents.

Maduro long denied abusing political and human rights, instead describing his government as being at odds with what he views as a decades-long imperialist campaign to topple Chavez’s socialist movement and take Venezuela’s oil.

He and his government called sanctions by the US and others illegitimate measures that amounted to an “economic war” designed to cripple the country. His supporters hailed him as a hero who stood up to Washington in the tradition of Cuba’s Fidel Castro.

Protesters led months of demonstrations in 2017 against Maduro’s government, a period marked by accusations of torture, arbitrary arrests and abuse by security forces. Those protests left 125 people dead. Dozens more died during protests after Maduro’s inauguration to his second term in 2019. After the 2024 election, the UN found that Maduro’s government escalated repressive tactics to crush peaceful protests, with over two dozen dead and 2,400 arrests.

Maduro’s rule was marked by an extended economic collapse in the once relatively affluent nation that prompted an exodus of some 7.7mn migrants. Almost 82% of Venezuelans live in poverty, with 53% in extreme poverty, unable to buy even basic foodstuffs, a UN special rapporteur said in 2024 after visiting the country.

Maduro was born into a working-class family on November 23, 1962, son of a trade union leader. He worked as a bus driver during the time army officer Chavez led a failed coup attempt in 1992. He agitated for Chavez to be released from

prison and backed his fervent leftist agenda in an era when socialism was well out of favour.

After Chavez’s 1998 election, Maduro won a seat in the legislature and spent years championing his mentor’s self-styled revolution against US intervention in Latin America.

Adversaries took swipes at Maduro’s working-class roots and portrayed him as a buffoonish cretin who did little more than slavishly repeat Chavez’s bombast.

But the criticism made little dent in his meteoric rise: he became president of the National Assembly and later foreign minister. In that role he crisscrossed the globe to help build alliances with other developing countries through oil-financed assistance programmes.

Maduro was narrowly elected president after Chavez died from cancer in 2013. But there was a gaping chasm between his own appeal and the legendary charisma of his predecessor. His rule was quickly plagued by bread lines and product shortages that smacked of Soviet-era collapse, largely due to his unwillingness to unwind lavish Chavez-era subsidies that were unsustainable after the oil boom came to an end.

As inflation soared in 2013, Maduro sent troops to occupy shops that sold home appliances and forced them to sell off their wares at fire-sale prices, helping fuel his popularity in the run-up to a nationwide election for mayors. In 2018, militants attempted to assassinate him by sending explosives-laden drones over the top of a rally he was addressing on a Caracas avenue, leading him to reduce his spontaneous public appearances and limit live broadcasts of public events.

Throughout his career, Maduro was often flanked by his wife, Cilia Flores, who held numerous high-ranking positions, including attorney general and chief of parliament, and was often seen as a power broker with as much influence as her spouse.

Trump said on Saturday Flores was also captured and flown out of the country. - Reuters



Nicolás Maduro, president of Venezuela (second right), along with the high ranking officials of the army. (AFP/File Photo)

QCS chairman among top 100 global influential figures in oncology in 2025

The global oncology platform OncoDaily has announced the selection of HE Sheikh Dr Khalid bin Jabor al-Thani, chairman of Qatar Cancer Society (QCS), among the Top 100 Most Influential Figures in Oncology for 2025.

The recognition comes in appreciation of his outstanding contributions to advancing cancer care, supporting public health policies, strengthening healthcare systems, and promoting cancer awareness, patient advocacy, medical education, and scientific research.

It also reflects the advanced position of Qatar in cancer control efforts, highlighting the growing global influence of Qatari healthcare leadership in shaping oncology-related policies and enhancing cancer services in line with international best practices. It also un-

derscores the vital role of the QCS as a leading national institution in patient support, community awareness, and the development of effective local and international partnerships.

Sheikh Dr Khalid expressed his pride in the recognition, emphasising that it represents a collective national accomplishment rather than an individual one. He stated that the international acknowledgement reflects the confidence of the global medical community in Qatar's integrated healthcare approach, which prioritises prevention, early detection, and advanced treatment while placing patients at the centre of care.

He added that the recognition serves as a greater responsibility to further develop programmes and services, expand partnerships, and ensure comprehensive and



sustainable support for cancer patients, survivors, and their families.

In 2025, QCS supported the treatment of more than 1,750 adult and paediatric patients receiving care at the National Centre for Cancer Care and Research and

Sidra Medicine, at a total cost exceeding QR49mn. In the field of psychosocial support, 1,200 individuals benefited directly from community-based programmes, while more than 40,000 indirect beneficiaries were reached through digital platforms. In addition, 50

cancer survivors received specialised one-on-one psychological support. Community awareness remained a core focus, with campaigns reaching over 6.6mn indirect beneficiaries through digital channels, alongside nearly 19,000 participants in workshops, educational programmes, and field activities across Qatar.

As part of ongoing efforts to enhance professional development and support scientific research in the field of cancer, the total number of beneficiaries reached 16,248, reflecting a pivotal role in strengthening competencies, advancing research and development, and contributing to sustainable professional development goals.

As for partnerships and institutional achievements, QCS recorded several milestones in 2025, including membership in Qatar's

National Cancer Control Framework, the Gulf Federation for Cancer Control, and the Union for International Cancer Control.

It also won the Qatar Social Responsibility Award 2025, secured the rights to host the global Relay for Life event, established 17 strategic partnerships, and implemented more than 80 awareness initiatives in collaboration with schools, universities, and various institutions.

Founded in 1997, QCS operates as a charitable organisation and represents a key pillar in Qatar's national cancer control ecosystem. QCS works to build a cancer-aware community and improve the quality of life of those affected by the disease through awareness programmes, financial assistance, and psychosocial support, among other initiatives.

Aspetar looks back at year of achievements on many fronts

QNA
Doha

Aspetar, the Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, saw a remarkable year in 2025, dedicating all its efforts to achieving medical excellence and ensuring a safe sports environment. The hospital continued to serve Qatar's athletes while attracting elite sports stars and patients from around the world. Beyond its achievements in the medical field, Aspetar also shone on the global medical tourism stage, reaffirming its status as a world-leading destination in sports medicine.

Aspetar began 2025 by achieving a historic milestone, receiving the Diamond Accreditation from Accreditation Canada under the Qmentum International program for the second consecutive cycle, with a perfect score. It became the first healthcare institution in the world to accomplish this distinction twice in a row. This prestigious recognition adds to Aspetar's global reputation as a FIFA Medical Centre of Excellence and an IOC Research Centre for Prevention of Injury and Protection of Athlete Health, underscoring the hospital's credibility among leading international sports organisations.

Aspetar also took the spotlight at the 8th Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Medical Conference held in July 2025. The hospital was not only a prominent participant but also a thought leader throughout the event. Aspetar's Orthopaedic Surgery Consultant Dr Khalid al-Khelafi received a distinguished award honouring his pioneering contributions to sports and orthopaedic medicine and his service to Asian football, a recognition of Qatar's national expertise under Aspetar's umbrella.

Aspetar was also recognised by the AFC for its longstanding role as a strategic partner and primary reference in sports medicine, having significantly influenced discussions and shared best practices on injury prevention, rehabilitation, and performance enhancement.

Meanwhile, Acting Director General of Aspetar Khalid Ali al-Mawlawi was named by *Forbes Middle East* among the most influential leaders in management and healthcare highlighting his leader-

Aspetar reinforces its position as global reference in sports medicine, medical tourism and athlete health protection



ship in cementing Aspetar's global standing and balancing medical excellence, international partnerships, and service to Qatar's sports community.

Throughout 2025, Aspetar provided medical coverage for over 100 sporting events, including football, athletics, tennis, motorsport, and more. The hospital served as the official medical provider for major tournaments such as the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025, FIFA U-17 World Cup, Continental Club Cup, Qatar ExxonMobil Open, and Qatar TotalEnergies Open, among others.

A particularly memorable moment came when Aspetar's medical team helped save the life of the Czech Fencing Federation president after he suffered cardiac arrest during the Qatar Grand Prix for Fencing - a testament to Aspetar's field emergency readiness and professionalism.

Medical support

During both the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 and FIFA U-17 World Cup, Aspetar supervised full medical coverage for players, officials, and fans, operating 6-8 clinics in stadiums and deploying 12 sports physicians alongside Hamad Medical Corporation emergency teams. Aspetar also supported referees with physiotherapy services and provided full medical support to the Palestine and Iraq national teams.

Additionally, Aspetar managed the import and clearance of medicines for 23 participating teams,

ensuring seamless medical logistics. During the tournaments, the hospital treated 211 cases, including 70 athletes from 17 countries.

Aspetar's expertise stood behind several national and international successes across various disciplines, such as the World Athletics Championships, the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, and Qatar's historic qualification for the FIFA World Cup.

Doha became the world capital of sports medicine in 2025 when Aspetar hosted the first Aspetar World Conference, attracting over 1,000 participants from 75 countries, including experts from FIFA, the International Olympic Committee, and major global sports and medical institutions.

The conference covered topics from sports injuries and illness prevention to performance sciences and sports pharmacology, continuing Aspetar's scientific legacy of over 1,700 published research papers in leading medical journals. By the end of 2025 alone, Aspetar's research department published 1,660 scientific studies in more than 300 prestigious journals, with 120 new projects launched on muscle and tendon injuries, advanced rehabilitation techniques, and athlete performance innovations.

Aspetar also expanded its physiological and performance services to benefit both professional and amateur athletes, emphasising its role as a leader in research, education, and applied sports science.

Global partnerships



The hospital continued its partnerships with top global organisations, including UEFA's Medical Conference, the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), and the Leaders in Sport Summit in London. Aspetar also co-organised the Paris Saint-Germain Medical Conference, attended by representatives from over 70 European clubs.

Aspetar's scientific and medical excellence made it a preferred destination for elite athletes worldwide. Throughout 2025, the hospital welcomed professional players from the English Premier League, French Ligue 1, and other top European leagues. Among the visitors were Noa Lang (Inter Milan), Malik Tillman (Bayer Leverkusen), Yves Bissouma (Tottenham Hotspur), Aaron Hickey and Pelenda DaSilva (Brentford), Zagadou (VfB Stuttgart), Albert Sambi Lokonga (Arsenal), and Amine Gouiri, Hamed Traore, and Faris Moumbagna (Olympique de Marseille).

Aspetar also received stars from Paris Saint-Germain, including Lucas Hernandez, Goncalo Ramos, Ousmane Dembele, Warren Zaire-Emery, and Desire Doue. Other notable visitors included the Iraqi forward Ali Al Hamadi (Luton Town), Will Smallbone (Millwall), and Bachir Belloumi (Hull City).

From other sports, Aspetar received Formula 1 drivers Isack Hadjar and Fernando Alonso, tennis player Holger Rune, and Olympic champion Karsten Warholm.

In parallel, Aspetar strength-



ened partnerships with clubs such as Paris Saint-Germain and Tottenham Hotspur, and federations from Algeria, Iraq, and Palestine, further expanding its international collaboration network.

As Qatar's reputation as a global sports and health hub grows, Aspetar has emerged as a leading player in medical tourism, attracting patients and athletes from the Middle East, Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia seeking advanced orthopaedic and sports medicine care.

In 2025, Aspetar participated in major international medical tourism events in Belgium, London, and the Forbes Middle East Medical and Wellness Tourism Summit in Dubai, where it contributed to discussions on the evolving role of

destination hospitals.

Throughout the year, Aspetar welcomed over 700 elite athletes from 71 countries, with the majority coming from Europe and neighbouring regions, along with hundreds of global experts attending its scientific conferences.

Beyond competitions and research, Aspetar continued its social responsibility initiatives, promoting health awareness, safe physical activity, and inclusive well-being programs for children, families, and people with disabilities. Through partnerships with organisations such as Dreama, Aspetar reaffirmed its belief that its mission extends beyond elite sports, aiming to enhance the overall health of Qatar's community.

'Qatar indispensable bridge, linking ME with Europe, West'

From Page 1

He explained: "The Doha Forum reflects this balance in practice, bringing together actors who rarely sit at the same table and encouraging engagement grounded in respect rather than alignment. "This ability to operate comfortably in both worlds allows Qatar to translate concerns, values, and priorities across regions. For Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, Qatar can act as a cultural and diplomatic interlocutor, one that reduces misunderstandings and encourages pragmatic co-operation rather than zero-sum thinking."

Trump: US 'to run' Venezuela after toppling Maduro

From Page 1

Venezuelans had been bracing for attacks as US forces, including the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R Ford, spent months massing off the coast.

Caracas residents woke to explosions and the whir of military helicopters around Zam (0600 GMT). Airstrikes hit a major military base and an airbase, among other sites, for nearly an hour, AFP journalists said. The bombing turned out to be only part of the more ambitious plan to topple Maduro and bring him to US soil to face narco-trafficking charges.

Trump said the assault began with a

partial blackout caused by US "expertise". The top US military officer, General Dan Caine, said 150 aircraft took part in the operation, supporting troops helicoptering in to seize Maduro with the help of months of intelligence into the leader's daily habits — down to "what he ate" and what pets he kept. Maduro, 63, and his wife "gave up" without a struggle and there was "no loss of US life", he said.

Maria Eugenia Escobar, a 58-year-old resident of La Guaira, near the heavily bombed main airport, told AFP that the blasts "lifted me out of bed, and I immediately thought, 'God, the day has come'."

Within hours of the operation, Caracas

had fallen eerily quiet, with police stationed outside public buildings and a smell of smoke drifting through the streets.

Shifting justifications

The US and numerous European governments already did not recognise Maduro's legitimacy, saying he stole elections both in 2018 and 2024.

Maduro — in power since 2013 after taking over from leftist mentor Hugo Chavez — long accused Trump of seeking regime change in order to control Venezuela's huge oil reserves.

Trump said the extraordinary snatching of a foreign country's leader was just-

fied because of his claim that Venezuela is responsible for mass death from drugs in the United States. But Trump has given a variety of justifications for the aggressive policy toward Venezuela, at times stressing illegal migration, narcotics trafficking and the country's oil industry.

He had previously avoided openly calling for regime change — likely mindful of his nationalist political base's dislike for foreign entanglements. Several members of Congress quickly questioned the legality of the operation. However, Trump's key ally Mike Johnson, Republican Speaker in the House of Representatives, said it was "decisive and justified".

Call for greater focus in outlying areas of Doha, balanced civic development

Qatar's outskirts are seen to have great potential for the country's tourism sector, given their unique locations and natural scenery, according to a report in local Arabic daily *Arrayah*.

According to the report, these areas outside the major cities require more attention from concerned entities, which could open the way for more investment and business opportunities, especially for the private sector.

Speaking to *Arrayah*, a number of Qatari citizens have voiced their strong hopes for giving more attention to the outlying areas of the country. They stressed that this should be considered among the top priorities of concerned entities due to the "great opportunities these areas could offer for the local economy". Accordingly, they called on the Ministry of Municipality to intensify efforts to develop the streets, main squares, and the public facilities there, while expanding the establishment of central parks that meet community needs and improve the overall quality of life of residents.

They also stressed the importance of engaging residents in the planning processes by surveying their opinions and identifying the

actual needs before implementing the required service projects. They noted that population density and urban expansion should be key considerations to ensure a fair and balanced distribution of municipal services between Doha and the areas outside the capital.

Similarly, they also called for more focus on the related environmental concerns to preserve the natural environment and foster the targeted ecosystems, which are considered among the main tourist attractions. Preserving these areas would encourage the creation of a more sustainable tourism industry there.

Accordingly, they called for more urban and tourism development projects in outlying regions, noting that recent years have seen a heavy focus on Doha. According to them, many areas outside the capital possess promising tourism and historical potential, but have remained underdeveloped.

Despite these concerns, residents praised the overall level of municipal services, highlighting significant progress in recent years that has positively impacted the quality of their daily lives. Khalid Hamad al-Murikhi underscored the need to prioritise outlying and tourist areas, particularly the Al Zubarah Fort area, one of



Qatar's most important historical and tourism sites. He noted that despite attracting large numbers of visitors, the area still lacks sufficient tourism-supporting services.

He suggested introducing more retail outlets, restaurants, cafes, and public parks to encourage longer visitor stays and enhance the overall tourism experience. While he lauded available services, such as restrooms and limited seasonal facilities, al-Murikhi said, "they fall short of meeting the needs of tourists travelling long distances."

Further, al-Murikhi hoped that



the next phase of development should focus on achieving a more balanced distribution of services across the country, especially in areas with tourism potential.

Similarly, Naif Zamel al-Shahrani appreciated the Ministry of Municipality's continuous improvements of public services, especially through digitalisation and the use of artificial intelligence to simplify procedures. However, he stressed the need to intensify efforts in the outlying areas, particularly in tree planting and road beautification, to improve the urban environment and enhance its aesthetics. He pointed

out that the availability of treated water makes large-scale greening projects feasible.

Al-Shahrani also highlighted the importance of community awareness in preserving green spaces and called for an increase in neighbourhood parks, with a focus on large, integrated central parks rather than small, scattered ones.

Saad Issa al-Kaabi, a resident of Al Kaaban area, called for the establishment of well-equipped central parks suitable for walking, sports, and family activities, noting that existing parks are too small with limited facilities.

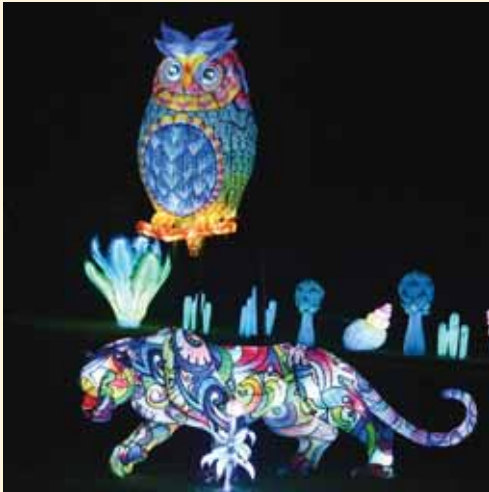
He also emphasised the need for better-organised and regular pest control campaigns to control the spread of mosquitoes and insects.

Similarly, Nabil al-Ajmi expressed hope for increased green spaces and public parks within residential areas in the outlying regions, alongside intensified mosquito control campaigns. He also called for improving internal roads within the neighbourhood and completing an integrated system of municipal, agricultural, and commercial services to improve the living experience of the people there.

Lantern festival remains a winter highlight



The Lantern Festival at Al Bidda Park continues to draw crowds week after week, even as Doha's cultural calendar is expected to pick up as the New Year holidays wind down. The festival's appeal lies not only in its dazzling displays but also in its timing. With cooler temperatures, weekends in Doha have become an opportunity for residents to spend extended hours outdoors. Families stroll through the illuminated pathways, while children marvel at the themed lanterns, and friends gather to enjoy the spectacle against the backdrop of the park's spacious greens. For some visitors, the festival is "more than a one-time visit." Other attendees return to experience the different sections of the sprawling venue, often discovering installations they missed the first time. The festival features more than 400 lanterns in varied shapes and sizes, alongside immersive sections designed to appeal to families and visitors - all in a 55,000sq m area. The event, which will run until March 28, remains a reliable destination for leisure and family outings, as well as one of the longest-running seasonal highlights in Doha.



Marmi names winners of 'Promising Falconer' Championship

The organising committee of the 17th edition of Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2026) announced yesterday the names of the winners of the 'Promising Falconer' Championship, held as part of the event. The festival is held under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and is supported by the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (Daam). It is taking place at Sabkhat Marmi in the Sealine Area and will continue until January 24. The Promising Falconer Championship was dedicated to the 6- to 15-year-olds age group. It consists of a "Da'wa" (falcon speeding) competition over a distance of 200m, according to specific conditions for the falcon, with its size not exceeding 15 inches. Imran Nasser al-Qubaisi won first place, Abdullah Omair al-Nuaimi came second, Majed Mohamed al-Qahtani placed third, Saleh Mohamed Jassim Sultan took fourth place, and Mohamed Salem Mohamed Jarallah al-Nabti came in fifth. In the other categories, Ali Mohamed al-Marri won first place, Ali Mohamed al-Assiri (second place), Amer Abdullah al-Kaabi (third), Saeed Abdullah Ubaid (fourth), and Ali Jarallah



al-Ghayatheen (fifth). Mohammed bin Mubarak al-Ali, chairman of the committees and official spokesperson for the Marmi Festival, said the 17th edition reflects a continuous development and special attention to the junior category through the introduction and development of the Promising Falconer rounds. This step aims to instil a love of falconry and preserve heritage among new generations. He explained that this category now includes younger participants who have gradually moved from



the Junior Falconer category to the Promising Falconer category, as part of a clear vision adopted by the festival over the past years to enhance falconry skills among youth. He added that the organising committee has allocated competitions suitable for their abilities, with reduced Da'wa distances of around 200m to ensure safety and encourage participation, noting that several previous junior participants are now competing alongside professionals in various festival rounds.



In the meantime, qualifiers for the Al Tala'a Championship (where a falcon chases and hunts a houbara bustard bird) for groups five to 10 were held yesterday, resulting in the qualification of falconers Faisal Jaber al-Buraiddi, Abdulhadi Ubaid al-Mehran al-Marri, Abdulhadi Jaber Abdulhadi Jaber Hussein, and Team Barzan. The deputy chairman of the Tala'a Committee at the Marmi Festival pointed out that the second day of the qualifiers witnessed a high level of competition and enthusiasm, reflecting the strong readiness and



preparation of the participating falcons. He explained that qualifiers were held for groups five through ten, with four falcons qualifying from five groups, while no falcon qualified from group seven, underscoring the intensity of the competition. The deputy chairman noted that weather conditions played a major role in the success of the competitions, with clear visibility and ideal weather for Tala'a events, without any atmospheric factors hindering hunting or affecting falcon performance,

particularly against houbara bustards. Accordingly, the qualified participants stressed the importance of good preparation for a championship that reflects the way of life of fathers and grandfathers through direct hunting, showcasing the falconers' skills and spirit of challenge. They praised the efforts of the organising committee of the Marmi International Falcons and Hunting Festival in reviving this heritage. Simultaneously, Marmi 2026 also witnessed the final of the Arab Saluki Racing Championship, in which Team Al Janoub won first place, Juma Saad al-Buainain came second, and Team Rawdat Al Hamam finished third. Qualifiers for the final of the Saluki Racing Championship were also held for the male and female categories. Meanwhile, the festival also received visits from several European tourists who were keen to attend and learn about various aspects of its championships, which showcase Qatari folk heritage. They stressed that combining desert landscapes with traditional Qatari sports offers a rare opportunity to closely experience and enjoy local heritage.