

MoL emphasises role of private sector in driving development

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has underlined the pivotal role of the private sector in attracting graduates and driving economic and social development by providing job opportunities that contribute to harnessing the potential of youth and developing their skills.

This came during the MoL's participation, represented by the Rehabilitation and Skills Development Department, in the closing ceremony of the winter edition of the five-day "My Career, My Future" programme.

Organised by the Qatar Career Development Centre in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the private sector, the programme aimed to train, guide, and raise awareness among high school students regarding career paths and to empower the next generation of professionals by providing opportunities for experience in real work environments across various sectors.

The closing ceremony included the honouring of partners, participants, and competition winners.



Snapshots from the ceremony.

The assistant undersecretary for National Workforce Affairs in the Private Sector at the MoL, Khamis al-Nuaimi, emphasised the importance of training and empowering students to identify their career paths.

This, he said, helps them discover their inclinations and abilities, understand the evolving demands of the labour market, and make informed decisions based on knowledge and planning.

He explained that the private sector effectively helps bridge the gap between

educational outcomes and labour market demands through training, qualification, and early employment programmes.

This enhances graduates' readiness to compete and innovate, the official added, while also creating a stimulating work environment based on productivity and efficiency.

This, in turn, positively impacts economic diversification, increases competitiveness, and achieves sustainable development.

Al-Nuaimi expressed his gratitude

to the participating organisations from various sectors for their contributions to training students and helping them identify their future career paths.

The private sector institutions that provided on-the-job training for the specialised secondary school students included Sidra Medicine, Qatar Facilities Company, Huawei Technologies Company Ltd, Ahli Bank, Qatar Islamic Bank, General Takaful Company, Qatar General Insurance and Reinsurance Company, Commercial Bank, and Mowasalat (Karwa). - **QNA**

The Ministry of Culture has announced the opening of nominations for the Doha International Book Fair Award, until March 1.

The award aims to shed light on the role played by the Doha International Book Fair (DIBF) in fostering the publishing industry at local and international levels.

It also aims to encourage publishing houses to place greater emphasis on knowledge-based content, cultural diversity, and high standards of artistic and technical production, while also motivating authors to pursue further creativity across various fields of knowledge.

In addition, the award is designed to support young authors and to foster a spirit of competition and exchange.

The terms and criteria for nomination across the various categories require publishing houses and authors to comply with intellectual property laws and to submit their publications in digital format through the award's official website.

Submissions must demonstrate excellence in artistic production and reflect diversity in cultural, literary, and scientific content, in accordance with the approved regulations for each category.

The first category, the **Qatar Publishing Excellence Award**, is open to applicants who hold a valid Qatari publishing

Ministry opens nominations for DIBF Award

licence and are members of the Qatari Publishers and Distributors Forum.

A recent letter confirming membership and compliance with intellectual property laws is required.

The publisher must have released no fewer than 20 new and diverse titles during the 2025-26 nomination year.

The prize value is QR30,000.

The second category, the **International Publishing Excellence Award**, requires applicants to hold a valid publishing licence in their country and to be members of their national publishers' association or the Arab Publishers Association.

A recent letter from the relevant publishers' union confirming membership and compliance with intellectual property laws must be provided.

The publisher must have released at least 30 new and diverse titles during the 2025-26 nomination year.

The prize value is QR30,000.

The third category, the **Distinguished Qatari Publisher for Children's Books Award**, is dedicated to Qatari publishers specialising in children's and young adult literature.

Applicants must hold a Qatari publishing licence and be members of the Qa-

tari Publishers and Distributors Forum, supported by a recent letter confirming membership and compliance with intellectual property laws.

The publisher must have released at least five new Arabic-language titles in children's and young adult literature during the 2025-26 nomination year.

The prize value is QR30,000.

The fourth category, the **Distinguished International Publisher for Children's Books Award**, is open to international publishers specialising in children's and young adult literature.

Applicants must hold a valid publishing licence in their country and be members of their national publishers' association or the Arab Publishers Association, with a recent letter confirming membership and compliance with intellectual property laws.

The publisher must have released at least 10 new Arabic-language titles in children's and young adult literature during the 2025-26 nomination year.

The prize value is QR30,000.

The fifth category, the **Distinguished Publisher for Translation Award**, recognises excellence in translation.

Applicants must hold a Qatari publish-

ing licence and be members of the Qatari Publishers and Distributors Forum.

The translated works must be produced by the Qatari publishing house and reflect its output of translations from Arabic into other languages across all categories and subject areas over a three-year period.

The prize value is QR30,000.

All submitted works in the five categories above must demonstrate excellence in artistic production and diversity of cultural, literary, and scientific content, and uploads to the award website must be in PDF format, accompanied by a list of participating Arabic-language, non-translated titles including International Standard Book Numbers (ISBNs).

The sixth category, the **Creative Writer Award**, is open to authors who submit the publisher's consent for participation, along with the author's curriculum vitae and a synopsis of the submitted book.

Each author may participate with one individually authored book only, written in Arabic and not previously translated.

The total word count must be no fewer than 20,000 words for Qatari authors and 25,000 words for international authors.

The book must be uploaded in PDF format to the award website, accompanied

by copies of personal identification and passport documents, with full compliance with intellectual property laws.

The author must be alive at the time of nomination.

The prize value is QR20,000.

The seventh category, the **Creative Young Qatari Writer Award**, is limited to young Qatari authors.

Applicants must submit a curriculum vitae, a synopsis of the book, and the publisher's consent for participation.

Each author may submit one individually authored, Arabic-language, non-translated book with a minimum of 20,000 words.

The book must be uploaded in PDF format to the award website, along with copies of personal identification or passport documents, and compliance with intellectual property rights is required.

The author must be alive at the time of nomination.

The prize value is QR20,000.

The eighth and final category, the **Best Pavilion Award at the 35th Doha International Book Fair**, honours the pavilion distinguished by its unique design and its ability to offer a comprehensive and immersive cultural experience.

The prize value for this category is QR40,000. - **QNA**

Wellington College International Breaks Ground in Lusail, Marking a Major Milestone for Education in Qatar

Al Faleh Educational Holding, in partnership with Wellington College International, has officially broken ground on Wellington College International Qatar in Lusail City, marking a significant milestone in the advancement of world-class education in the country. The ceremony signals the start of construction on a flagship K-12 campus that will bring one of the United Kingdom's most respected educational institutions to Qatar's most ambitious new city.



The groundbreaking represents more than the launch of a new school. It reflects a strategic investment in human capital and knowledge infrastructure, aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the nation's long-term priorities in education, innovation, and global collaboration.

The ceremony, held on January 12 at the Lusail project site, was led by Dr. Sheikha Aisha Al Thani, Chairperson of Al Faleh Educational Holding, and Sir Anthony Seldon, Founding Director of Wellington College Education, who jointly conducted the symbolic turning of the soil. Their participation marked the transition of Wellington College International Qatar from vision to reality, anchoring the institution both physically and symbolically within Lusail City.



Dr. Sheikha Aisha Al Thani said the project reflects a long-term commitment to delivering world-class education in Qatar through trusted global partnerships. She noted that the school will play an important role in preparing future generations for leadership and meaningful contribution, while serving students, families, and the wider community for decades to come.

Sir Anthony Seldon described the



partnership as a landmark addition to Wellington College's global family of schools, noting that the establishment of its first campus in Qatar will contribute not only to Doha, but to the wider region. He reaffirmed the College's aspiration to be among the most admired and innovative education groups in the world.

Duncan Hill OBE, Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy in Doha, welcomed the collaboration, describing

it as a strong example of UK-Qatar cooperation in education, culture, and knowledge exchange.

Wellington College International Qatar will offer a comprehensive K-12 programme, combining academic excellence with extensive sporting, creative, and wellbeing facilities. Designed to international standards and adapted to the local context, the campus will cater to both Qatari and international

families seeking a globally recognised education grounded in values, leadership, and holistic development.

Founded in 1853 under Royal Charter, Wellington College brings more than 170 years of educational heritage to Qatar. Renowned for academic distinction and a holistic philosophy that emphasises leadership, creativity, service, and wellbeing, the College has expanded internationally across Asia in recent years. The Lusail campus marks a significant milestone in this global journey.

The ceremony was attended by senior representatives from key partner organisations, including Mr. Duncan Hill OBE, Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy in Doha; Sheikh Jassim Al Thani, Chief Executive Officer of Al Waab City Real Estate Development; Mr. Animesh Pandey, representing Qatar Diar; Sheikh Anwar Al Thani, Chief Executive Officer of Al Faleh Educational Holding; Dr. Julie Cross, Principal of AFG College with the University of Aberdeen; Ms. Christine Filshill, representing Addworks, architectural consultants for the campus; and Ms. Fiona Carter, International Director of Wellington College International.

Sir Anthony Seldon's visit to Qatar also included a public lecture hosted at AFG College with the University of Aberdeen at its NBK1 campus, titled "How AI Is Transforming Schools and Higher Education: How to Lead the Change."

The lecture highlighted how artificial intelligence is reshaping teaching, learning, and educational leadership, with Sir Anthony Seldon emphasizing the need for ethical, human-centred approaches and the continued guiding role of educators. Dr. Julie Cross, Principal of AFG College with the University of Aberdeen, described the session as a valuable exploration of AI's potential and responsibilities in education. The event drew educators, students, and stakeholders, underscoring the importance of linking educational infrastructure with ongoing intellectual leadership and dialogue.

As construction begins, Wellington College International Qatar is set to become a defining addition to the country's educational landscape, contributing to the development of future leaders, innovators, and global citizens.



Dukhan Bank launches ‘Home Finance’ campaign with profit rate of 3.49%

Dukhan Bank has announced the launch of its ‘Home Finance’ campaign, offering customers the best profit rate as part of its continued commitment to making home ownership more accessible through Shariah-compliant solutions. The campaign is available for a limited time until February 4, 2026, and features a market-leading profit rate of 3.49% per annum. It also offers a grace period of up to 12 months, an easy application process, quick approval, and comprehensive insurance coverage, subject to a minimum financing amount of QR1mn and a minimum tenure of 10 years, providing customers with flexibility and confidence as they plan their home ownership journey.

The Home Finance campaign reflects Dukhan Bank’s customer-centric approach and its focus on delivering value-driven banking solutions that align with evolving customer needs. By offering a competitive profit rate while maintaining transparent terms and efficient processing, the



Enjoy the best profit rate of 3.49% p.a. with Dukhan Bank Home Finance

bank continues to strengthen its position as a trusted partner for individuals and families seeking long-term housing solutions in Qatar. Customers can learn more by visiting www.dukhanbank.com or contacting the Dukhan Bank contact centre at 800 8555.

Qatar Charity delivers urgent cholera response in Yemen

Qatar Charity has completed an urgent three-month humanitarian intervention in Yemen, supplying essential medicines, IV fluids, and medical consumables amid a fast-spreading cholera outbreak. The project supported 13 health facilities across Hudaydah, Hajjah, Taiz, and Aden, reaching around 48,000 people, including displaced families and host communities.

The intervention came after an urgent appeal from local health offices following the registration of more than 253,000 suspected cholera cases and 672 deaths in 2024, alongside rising measles, diphtheria, and dengue infections. Field data from the first half of 2025 recorded thousands of new cases across the targeted governorates.

Dr Fouad al-Haddad, director

general of the Republican Hospital in Taiz, said the support provided crucial relief for the facility, the city’s primary referral centre for acute watery diarrhoea cases. He praised Qatar Charity and Qatar’s donors for their timely assistance.

Similarly, Dr Sami al-Sharabi, director of the Yemeni Swedish Hospital for Mother and Child in Taiz, confirmed that life-saving medicines delivered through the project enabled the team to treat vulnerable children at a critical time. He called for continued assistance in light of the pressing needs.

Among the beneficiaries was the mother of a child, Abdullah, who expressed deep gratitude, noting that the medicines arrived just as she was unable to afford treatment, saving her son’s life and offering hope to thousands of families.



Ministry support instrumental for enhancing local fish production

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The fuel and crushed ice subsidies provided by the Ministry of Municipality (Fish Affairs Department) and other related initiatives have helped considerably in making local fishing businesses up to the involved challenges, improving the ultimate local production of fish.

Accordingly, some fishermen whose support reflects the state’s efforts to enhance local fish production, improve the working environment for fishermen, and protect marine resources. The subsidised fuel and crushed ice initiative has covered over 600 local fishing vessels.

Besides, the ministry has maintained collaboration with Qatar Development Bank (QDB) to provide soft loans for purchasing boats and equipment to help local fishermen upgrade their industry and go ahead with their business, as some used to suffer from low income that barely covered their operation costs.

The fishermen also noted that the Fish Affairs Department has been working to monitor fishermen’s needs while taking practical steps to increase support and develop infrastructure in a way that ensures the sustainability of the fishing sector and achieves self-sufficiency in the local fish market.

They also referred to a recent meeting between HE the Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah and several fishermen, during which the challenges facing the sector and ways to develop it were discussed, contributing to increased local production and a higher



level of self-sufficiency.

They said the meeting reflects the ministry’s keenness to implement integrated plans and programmes to improve the fishermen’s working environment and to provide infrastructure and supporting services for their activities.

Ahmed al-Mahraa pointed out that the previously provided support amounted to about QR3,000 annually per small fishing boat, and after reviewing the situation, it was increased to around QR10,000, while support for large vessels was raised from QR9,000 to QR18,000-20,000. He noted that this initiative reflects the state’s interest in the fishing sector and would certainly improve working conditions for fishermen and related workers.

In turn, Ahmed al-Hamli stressed that the government has provided significant support to fishermen in terms of fuel and ice, noting the establishment of a new fishing harbour in Al Wakra to support fishermen and facilitate their work.

He further stressed the importance of observing environmental rules



while going for professional fishing activities at sea to avoid making environmental violations, pointing to the role of the Ministry of Environment in preserving fishing grounds, such as monitoring ropes attached to fish traps, protecting the marine environment, and preventing the destruction of natural habitats for different species of fish.

Al-Hamli noted that importing fish from abroad could negatively impact local fishermen, emphasising that competition is acceptable but should be limited to the domestic market. He suggested that imported fish could be distributed through commercial complexes instead of being sold in the cen-

tral market at prices that may reduce fishermen’s profits.

Similarly, Jassim al-Linjawi stressed the importance of halting the import of fish species that are available from local catches, as such imports lower market prices and cause losses for fishermen. He added that some fishermen spend up to QR8,000 per month on fuel to travel long distances at sea in search of a catch. He suggested allowing the export of surplus fish abroad to boost fishermen’s profits instead of selling them locally at low prices, as exports could enable them to benefit from daily production without negatively affecting the local market.

Milaha takes part in Dimdex as exhibitor



Qatar Navigation (Milaha) has announced its participation as an exhibitor at the Doha International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference (Dimdex), taking place at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC) from January 19-22.

Dimdex is a premier regional and international platform that brings together decision-makers, industry leaders, and key stakeholders from across the maritime defence and security landscape, providing a global platform for knowledge exchange, the showcasing of advanced technologies, and strategic dialogue shaping the future of the maritime and defence sectors.

The participation underscores Milaha’s continued commitment to supporting Qatar’s maritime, defence, and logistics sectors. Milaha’s participation highlights its integrated capabilities in delivering advanced maritime and logistics solutions tailored to meet the evolving requirements of a wide range of entities, including defence and government institutions.

During the exhibition, Milaha will present its integrated portfolio of maritime and logistics services and engage with industry stakeholders and visitors to explore potential areas of collaboration in support of national and regional maritime objectives. Milaha will be located at Stand H3-203, where visitors are invited to learn more about the company’s services and operational capabilities.

Milaha’s presence at Dimdex reflects its strategic role in supporting Qatar’s vision for a resilient, secure, and sustainable maritime and logistics infrastructure, while continuing to strengthen partnerships with local, regional, and international stakeholders.

UNOPS delivery model boosts Qatar partnerships in fragile states

From Page 1

“The most significant part of our procurement is local, which means we help the development of the local communities, creating jobs locally, and strengthening local businesses. This is a key element. And even on the design of the projects, we engage with

the citizens, even in the most difficult context.”

Da Silva also highlighted underinvestment in energy grids, stressing that partners like Qatar can help link renewable supply with people. “We need energy grids in place; there is an underinvestment in energy grids globally. We may have all the renewable

energy in the world, but if we don’t link these with the people, it won’t succeed,” he stated.

Da Silva added that by combining demand-driven delivery, accountability, and local procurement, UNOPS offers Qatar a model for aid that is both practical and community-anchored, strengthening Doha’s role in fragile contexts.

Qatar steps up as precision medicine giant

From Page 1

“The combination offers a unique framework to develop a world-leading precision health and medicine platform for the benefit of the local as well as global population.”

“It is now time to capitalise on these resources to innovate on clinical implementation and impact to boost industry and entrepreneurial activity and to continue enhancing the infrastructure with more data generation and discovery of new important pieces of medical knowledge at scale,” continued Dr Dermitzakis.

The official noted that precision medicine is actively shaping healthcare in Qatar today. “Through national biobanks, cohort studies, pharmacogenomics and early genomic interventions, we are already seeing its impact in real clinical settings. But to fully realise its potential, we must start with education and awareness,” he underlined.

Dr Dermitzakis pointed out that there is a common misconception that precision health is futuristic or only accessible to a privileged few.

He explained: “In reality, it is happening now, and it is saving lives. We must make this clear to the general public, helping them understand that personal-

ised care is not about luxury, it is about effectiveness, prevention, and equity. Precision medicine is about making better decisions earlier, so its implementation leads to a healthier population and overall lower cost for the health system.”

According to Dr Dermitzakis it is all the more important to engage policymakers and healthcare leaders in the whole process.

“By making the science and outcomes of precision medicine tangible and relatable, we can support informed decisions that accelerate its integration into national healthcare strategies. This is how we move from innovation to implementation by ensuring that everyone, from patients to policymakers, understands the value and urgency of precision health,” the official emphasised.

“The key issue is that while genomic data is well structured and similar across individuals, clinical records from hospitals tend to be sparse and unstructured, making difficult to achieve unbiased data analysis and use of innovative tools such as AI. The integration of unified and deep clinical analysis performed at the Qatar Biobank allows to circumvent this problem, and we will continue to capitalise on this unique resource that has been created and offers world leading oppor-


tunities for discovery and clinical trials,” described Dr Dermitzakis.

As for the official, genomic analyses are now central to clinical decision-making, allowing physicians to move from generalised treatment protocols to highly targeted interventions.

He highlighted: “Predictive diagnostics is one of the most promising frontiers in precision medicine. It allows us to identify individuals at elevated risk for complex conditions often long before symptoms appear by analysing genetic, molecular, and environmental data.

“In QPHI, one of our key areas of exploration and improvement is the integration of AI and machine learning into predictive diagnostics. We are currently investigating how these technologies could enhance our ability to detect subtle patterns across genomic data, clinical records, imaging, and behavioural assessments. This approach holds particular promise for complex conditions like cancer and autism spectrum disorder, where early intervention can significantly improve outcomes.”

“Our vision is to make predictive diagnostics a routine part of healthcare in Qatar empowering clinicians and patients with foresight,” the official pointed out.



QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (USD)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	SUP/C/OOS/7434/25 PROVISION OF MDEA RECLAMATION SERVICES ON CALL-OFF BASIS	14/01/2026 to 21/01/2026	0	0	29/01/2026

Scope of Work:
QatarEnergy LNG requires Methyl Diethanolamine (MDEA) solvent reclamation services to remove the Heat Stable Salts (HSS) and Amino Acids/Bicines from the MDEA solution of Sulfur Recovery Unit using a Mobile Ion Exchange Unit for South Site Trains 7 & 3 located at Ras Laffan Industrial City, State of Qatar. The MDEA solvent reclamation services are expected to reduce the HSS and Amino Acids/Bicines from MDEA solvent of its facilities to meet the stated target values and should be provided by an organization that meets a specific criteria stated in the requirements.

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.

Loss and survival in Gaza



Ten-year-old Malak Khader, who lost her right leg, and who is the sole survivor of her family after all her relatives were killed in the Israeli army bombing of the Fatima Bint Assad School, in Jabalia in May 2025, helps her grandmother, Naifa Khader, 72-years-old, whom she now lives with, in a camp for displaced people in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip, yesterday. **Right:** A displaced Palestinian man who lives amongst the rubble and debris of homes and businesses destroyed by the Israeli military in over two years of military strikes on the Gaza Strip enclave, uses crutches to stand outside his shelter, in Jabalia refugee camp, in the northern Gaza Strip, yesterday.



Egypt's Sisi says values offer by Trump to mediate Nile dam dispute

Reuters
Cairo

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said he valued an offer by US President Donald Trump to mediate a dispute over Nile River waters between Egypt and Ethiopia.

In a post on X, Sisi said yesterday that he addressed Trump's letter by affirming Egypt's position and concerns about the country's water security in re-

gard to Ethiopia's disputed Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

On Friday, Trump said that he was ready to restart US mediation between Egypt and Ethiopia to resolve the dispute over the Ethiopian dam, which both Egypt and Sudan consider a serious threat to vital water supplies.

Egypt has long opposed the project because of worries about its future supplies of water from the Nile, on which it is heavily dependent. Sudan, an-

other downstream country, has expressed concern about the regulation and safety of its own water supplies and dams.

Sudan's army leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan also welcomed Trump's mediation offer yesterday.

Ethiopia, the continent's second-most populous nation with more than 120mn people, sees the \$5bn dam on a tributary of the Nile as central to its economic ambitions. It has repeatedly rejected Egypt's claims.

Iran's leader demands crackdown on 'seditionists' after protests

AFP
Paris

Iran's supreme leader said yesterday that authorities "must break the back of the seditionists", blaming US for "casualties" after a deadly crackdown on protests against the country's leadership.

Iran was rocked by weeks of demonstrations sparked by anger over economic hardship that exploded into the biggest protests against the Islamic republic in more than three years.

But demonstrations have subsided after the crackdown that rights groups say left thousands of people dead under an internet blackout that lasted more than a week.

Authorities have said demonstrations they condemn as "riots" had been controlled and calm returned, with state-aligned media reporting thousands of arrests and officials vowing swift punishment for those detained.

"By God's grace, the Iranian nation must break the back of the seditionists just as it broke the back of the sedition," supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told supporters during an address broadcast by state television.

"We do not intend to lead the country to war, but we will not spare domestic criminals," he added, saying "international criminals" were "worse" and would also not be spared punishment.

Mass protests challenging authorities that

erupted in 2022 were also branded sedition, an accusation rights groups said the authorities used to violently suppress dissent.

Iranian authorities have blamed the latest wave of demonstrations on the US and Israel, saying they fuelled a "operation" that hijacked peaceful protests over the economy.

Trump, who backed and joined Israel's 12-day war against Iran in June, had repeatedly threatened new military action against Tehran if protesters were killed.

Khamenei yesterday lashed out at Trump, accusing him of being "guilty for the casualties, damages and accusations he has levelled against the Iranian nation". While Washington has appeared to have stepped back, the US president has said he has not ruled out military options and made clear he was keeping a close eye on whether any protesters were executed.

President Donald Trump wrote on Friday on his Truth Social platform that Iran had called off the executions of hundreds of protesters and said to the state: "Thank you!"

Rights groups have estimated up to 20,000 people have been arrested. Security officials cited by the Tasnim news agency on Friday said around 3,000 people were arrested.

Alarm has mounted over the reported death toll during the crackdown, as verifying cases remains difficult under severe Internet restrictions.

Eyewitnesses who left Iran after the protests told AFP of coming under fire and hearing numerous gunshots during protests.

Trump invites more leaders to join Gaza 'Board of Peace'

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump's so-called "Board of Peace" for postwar Gaza began to take shape yesterday, with the leaders of Egypt, Türkiye, Argentina and Canada asked to join.

The announcements from those leaders came after the US president named his Secretary of State Marco Rubio, former British prime minister Tony Blair, and senior negotiators Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff to the panel.

Trump had already declared himself the chair of the body, as he promotes a controversial vision of economic development in the Palestinian territory, which lies in rubble after two-plus years of relentless Israeli bombardment.

The moves came after a Palestinian committee of technocrats meant to govern Gaza held its first meeting in Cairo which was attended by Kushner, Trump's son-in-law who has partnered with Witkoff for months on the issue.

In Canada, a senior aide to Prime Minister Mark Carney said he intended to accept Trump's invitation, while in Türkiye, a spokesman for President Recep

Tayyip Erdogan said he had been asked to become a "founding member" of the board.

Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty said Cairo was "studying" a request for President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to join.

Sharing an image of the invitation letter, Argentine President Javier Milei wrote on X that it would be "an honour" to participate in the initiative.

In a statement sent to AFP, Blair said: "I thank President Trump for his leadership in establishing the Board of Peace and am honoured to be appointed to its Executive Board."

Blair is a controversial figure in the Middle East because of his role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Trump himself said last year that he wanted to make sure Blair was an "acceptable choice to everybody".

Blair spent years focused on the Israeli-Palestinian issue as representative of the "Middle East Quartet" — the UN, European Union, US and Russia — after leaving Downing Street in 2007.

The White House said the Board of Peace will take on issues such as "governance capacity-building, regional relations, reconstruction, investment attraction, large-scale funding and capital mobilisation."

The other members of the board so far are World Bank President Ajay Banga, an Indian-born American businessman; billionaire US financier Marc Rowan; and Robert Gabriel, a loyal Trump aide who serves on the US National Security Council.

Trump has created a second "Gaza executive board" that appears designed to have a more advisory role. It was not immediately clear which world leaders were asked to be on each board.

The White House, which said Friday that additional members would be named to both entities, did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

Washington has said the Gaza plan had gone on to a second phase — from implementing the ceasefire to disarming Hamas, whose October 2023 storming of Israel prompted the massive Israeli offensive.

On Friday, Trump named US Major General Jasper Jeffers to head the International Stabilisation Force, which will be tasked with providing security in Gaza and training a new police force to succeed Hamas.

Gaza native and former Palestinian Authority deputy minister Ali Shaath was earlier tapped to head the governing committee.

MWL welcomes Gaza peace plan's second phase launch

The Muslim World League (MWL) welcomed the announcement marking the launch of the second phase of the comprehensive peace plan, the declaration of a "Peace Council", and the formation of a Palestinian national committee to administer the Gaza Strip, QNA reported from Makkah.

In this context, it commended the efforts of US President Donald Trump to halt the war on Gaza, his commitment to the withdrawal of the occupation government's army, and the prevention of any annexation of parts of the West Bank. In a statement, the League's Secretary-General, Dr Mohammed bin Abdulkarim al-Issa, emphasised the urgent need for full adherence to the obligations of this phase and for firm, serious action against any violations.

Army extends control over north Syria

AFP
Deir Hafer

Syria's army took control of swathes of northern Syria and threatened to bomb parts of Raqa province yesterday after Kurdish forces pulled back from territory they had held for over a decade.

The government appeared to be seeking to extend its grip on parts of the country under Kurdish control a day after President Ahmed al-Sharaa issued a decree declaring Kurdish a "national language" and granting the minority official recognition.

The Kurds have said the move fell short of their aspirations.

The army drove Kurdish forces from two Aleppo neighbourhoods last week and took control of an area east of the city yesterday, after implementation stalled on a March deal that was supposed to see Kurdish forces integrated into the state.

Authorities later announced they had seized two oil fields near the city of Tabqa in Raqa province.

An AFP correspondent in Deir Hafer,



A drone view shows people welcoming Syrian army following the withdrawal of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in Maskanah, Syria, yesterday.

some 50 kilometres east of Aleppo city, saw several fighters from the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) leaving the town and residents returning under heavy army presence.

Syria's army said four soldiers had been killed, while Kurdish forces reported several fighters dead, as both sides traded blame for violating the withdrawal deal.

Kurdish authorities ordered a cur-

few in the Raqa region after the army designated a swathe of territory southwest of the Euphrates River a "closed military zone" and warned it would target what it said were several military sites.

SDF chief Mazloum Abdi on Friday had committed to redeploying his forces from outside Aleppo to east of the Euphrates.

But the SDF said yesterday that

Damascus "violated the recent agreements and betrayed our forces during the implementation of the withdrawal provisions".

It said Kurdish forces were clashing with troops in an area south of Tabqa, "which was outside the scope of the agreement".

The army meanwhile urged the SDF leadership to "immediately fulfil its announced commitments and fully withdraw to the east of the Euphrates River".

The SDF controls swathes of Syria's oil-rich north and northeast, much of which it captured during the country's civil war and the fight against the Islamic State group over the past decade.

US envoy Tom Barrack was in Erbil yesterday to meet Syrian Kurdish leader Mazloum Abdi, a source in the presidency of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region told AFP.

The US for years has supported the Kurds but also backs Syria's new authorities. The US Central Command yesterday urged "Syrian government forces to cease any offensive actions in the areas between Aleppo and Al-Tabqa", in a post on X.

FOR SALE USED VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT		
S. NO	MANUFACTURER / BRAND	MODEL
1	MISTUBISHI -BOON TRUCK - CANTER- 3 TON	2013
2	MITSUBISHI ROSA - 26 SEATER	2016
3	TOYOTA-COASTER - 30 SEATER	2014
4	NISSAN-PICKUP - DIESEL - 1 TON QTY 2	2019
5	MITSUBISHI-PICKUP CANTER - 3 TON	2013
6	NISSAN-VAN-URVAN - 14 SEATER	2013
7	NISSAN-PICKUP- 1 TON	2019
8	TATA -BUS - 66 SEATER	2012
9	MITSUBISHI - CANTER PICKUP	2011
10	MITSUBISHI -VAN - 12 SEATER	2013
11	JCB-EXCAVATOR	2014
12	MANITOU - FORKLIFT - 10 - TON	2008
13	MANITOU - MANLIFT - FRANCE	2007
14	MANITOU - TELEHANDLER	2007
15	GORICA - TIPPER BOX	2012
16	AL ALAM - TIPPER BOX	2008
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Uganda’s Museveni wins seventh term as observers slam intimidation

AFP
Kampala

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni won a seventh term in office yesterday after an election marred by violence and an Internet shutdown, with African observers saying arrests and abductions had “instilled fear”.

Museveni, 81, won 71.65% of the vote in Thursday’s election, the Electoral Commission said, amid reports of at least 10 deaths and intimidation of the opposition and civil society.

His victory allows the former guerrilla fighter to extend his 40-year rule of the east African country.

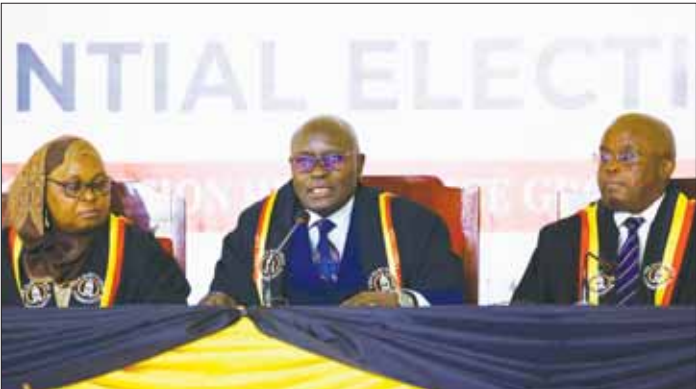
He defeated Bobi Wine, 43, a former singer who styles himself the “ghetto president” after the Kampala slum areas where he grew up, but has faced relentless pressure including multiple arrests before his first run for the presidency in 2021.

Wine, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, won 24.72%. He stated his “complete rejection of the fake results” and said he was in hiding after a raid by security forces on his home.

“I know that these criminals are looking for me everywhere and I am trying my best to keep safe,” he posted on X.

Police denied there had been any raid and said Wine was still at home, though they said there was a deployment around his residence.

“We have not necessarily denied people accessing him but we cannot tolerate instances where



Ugandan Electoral Commission Chairperson Justice Simon Byabakama announces the final presidential results following the general elections at the Tally Centre in Lubowa, Wakiso district near Kampala, yesterday.

people use his residence to gather and... incite violence,” police spokesman Kituuma Rusoke told reporters.

There were major security deployments around the capital Kampala, AFP journalists saw, as Uganda sought to prevent the sort of protests that have hit neighbouring Kenya and Tanzania in recent months.

Many Ugandans still praise Museveni as the man who ended the country’s post-independence chaos and oversaw rapid economic growth, even if much was lost to a relentless string of massive corruption scandals.

“I’m really very happy to see he’s won,” said Isaac Kamba, a 37-year-old teacher at a pro-government rally in a Kampala cricket ground.

“The victory comes because of his hard work, dedication and commitment to the people of Uganda,” he said, though the

mood at the rally was less than jubilant, with a presenter at one point ordering the crowd to be more animated if they wanted the free food.

A spokesman for Wine’s party, the National Unity Platform, told AFP the results were “a sham”. Wine has alleged “massive ballot stuffing” and attacks on his officials under cover of an Internet blackout that has been in place since Tuesday.

African election observers said yesterday they saw no evidence of ballot-stuffing but denounced “reports of intimidation, arrest and abductions” targeting the opposition and civil society.

This “instilled fear and eroded public trust in the electoral process”, former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan told reporters in Kampala.

He was representing election observers from the African Union, as well as regional bodies Comesa



A supporter of Uganda’s President and leader of the ruling National Resistance Movement party, Yoweri Museveni, celebrates in Kampala, Uganda, yesterday.



Former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan, the head of African Union, Comesa and IGAD observer mission, flanked by other observers addresses a press conference following the general elections, in Kampala, yesterday.

and IGAD for east and southern Africa. Jonathan said the shutdown of the Internet “disrupted effective observation” and “increased suspicion” but that the overall conduct of the polls on election day was “peaceful”.

A senior security official in the president’s office, Fred Bamwine, defended the security measures, telling AFP: “We don’t take anything granted. It’s our responsibility to make sure... the state of Uganda stays standing.”

REPORTS OF VIOLENCE

Museveni’s ruling party, the National Resistance Movement,

also had a commanding lead in parliamentary seats, according to provisional results. Ballots were still being counted.

Analysts have long viewed the election as a formality.

Museveni, who seized power in 1986, has total control over the state and security apparatus, and has ruthlessly crushed any challenger during his rule.

The other major opposition figure, Kizza Besigye, who ran four times against Museveni, was abducted in Kenya in 2024 and brought back to a military court in Uganda for a treason trial that is ongoing.

There were reports of election-related violence against the opposition.

Muwanga Kivumbi, member of parliament for Wine’s party in the Butambala area of central Uganda, told AFP’s Nairobi office by phone that security forces had killed 10 of his campaign agents after storming his home on Thursday.

Police gave a different account, saying an “unspecified number” of people had been “put out of action” when opposition members planned to overrun and burn down a local tally centre and police station.

Shooting in SA township leaves seven dead

AFP
Cape Town

Gunmen killed seven people in a township outside the South African city of Cape Town early yesterday in an incident believed to be extortion-related, police said.

The attack is the latest in a string of mass shootings that have shaken the crime-weary country of 63mn people.

“Police are investigating a shooting incident in Marikana that claimed the lives of seven people - one woman and six men aged between 30 and 50,” police said in a statement.

On average, around 63 people were killed each day between July and September last year, according to police data

Three people were also wounded in the attack, which occurred shortly after midnight and was “believed to be linked to extortion in the area”, it said. “The suspects fled the scene and no arrests have been made,” police said, adding that a manhunt had been launched and investigations were ongoing.

South Africa, the continent’s most industrialised nation, is grappling with entrenched crime and corruption driven by organised networks. On average, around 63 people were killed each day between July and September last year, according to police data.

Two separate mass shootings in December, in which gunmen stormed a hostel and a bar, left two dozen people dead, including several children.

Yesterday’s attack occurred in the city’s Cape Flats area, which has a reputation for gang violence and where over 2,000 murders were recorded in the first nine months of 2025.

Uganda’s ex-revolutionary entering 5th decade in power

AFP
Kampala

Yoweri Museveni has been president longer than most Ugandans have been alive, and shows no sign of giving up his place among the world’s longest-serving leaders after he won a seventh election yesterday.

Shortly after Museveni took power in 1986, ending years of bloodshed and chaos under tyrannical rulers, the young president mused that leaders overstaying their welcome lay at the heart of Africa’s problems.

But four decades later, the introspection is gone and Museveni - once hailed in the West as a model African leader committed to good governance - has joined the ranks of those he once criti-

cised. His genial demeanour and penchant for folksy parables belie a past as a wily guerrilla fighter and ruthless political survivor.

During his 40-year reign, Museveni has fused state and party, and crushed political opposition, to such an extent that any real outside challenge to him or his National Resistance Movement (NRM) has become impossible.

At 81 - though some opponents say he is older - Museveni says he is fighting fit.

Having once promised to retire and tend to his cherished long-horned Ankole cows, he has instead outlasted every ruler on the continent bar Teodoro Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea and Paul Biya of Cameroon.

Museveni was born on September 15, 1944, into a cattle-keeping family of the Hima community in Ntungamo District

of southwestern Uganda. He studied at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in the 1960s, then a kind of finishing school for anti-colonialists, where his thesis was on the revolutionary violence promoted by French philosopher Frantz Fanon. British journalist William Pike, who interviewed Museveni in 1984, described him as having the “faraway look... of a dreamer, a revolutionary” who was “intensely serious but showed flashes of humour”.

CHALLENGER WITHIN

After returning to Uganda, he was forced back to Tanzania as an exile during the regime of Idi Amin.

Museveni helped form the Front for National Salvation, which played a part in Amin’s overthrow in 1979. Museveni took up arms after a rigged election in 1980 and led a guerrilla insurgency known as

the Ugandan Bush War that finally captured Kampala in 1986.

A new constitution led to his victory in elections the following year, which he repeated in 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021 and now 2026. He had the constitution changed twice to remove term and age limits. Rights groups have criticised the increasingly violent repression of any challengers.

Despite his radical past, Museveni proved a pragmatic leader, bending to Western demands that he impose stringent neo-liberal reforms to stabilise the economy.

He made himself a useful military partner to the West at moments when they questioned his crushing of democratic rights, not least when he contributed significant troops to fight against insurgents in Somalia in the 2000s.

Protected forests under threat in DRC’s lucrative mining belt

AFP
Likasi, DR Congo

Valery Kyembo was leading an inspection of his community’s protected forest reserve deep in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s mining belt when two armed Congolese soldiers blocked their way.

Behind the troops, a barrier restricted access to a developing mine site. One soldier brandished his weapon in a clear warning - Kyembo should turn back instead of reaching the reserve.

As US and other companies jostle with China over the DRC’s critical minerals, communities like Lukutwe in the southern province of Haut-Katanga fear increasing restrictions and incursions into nature reserves as they seek to protect their land.

Kyembo’s Lukutwe community forest reserve obtained official land titles to help avoid unauthorised exploitation, as huge metal reserves draw more investors.

But community leaders fear displacement from traditional lands despite the communities’ protected status. Haut-Katanga produces a host of minerals, but none more in demand than the silver-tinged cobalt, essential for electric batteries and in defence technology.

The DRC produces around 70%



Forest rangers patrol in a forest in Likasi.

of the world’s cobalt. In Lukutwe, 70 kilometres from the mining capital Lubumbashi, community leaders said they established a forest concession to legalise customary land titles after watching mining firm SEK, a subsidiary of Australia’s Tiger Resources, displace other villages a decade ago. “We wanted to have our own titled land,” Kyembo said, echoing people from surrounding villages. Demand for minerals under Katanga’s earth is heating up.

US President Donald Trump, who has sought to broker an end to decades of conflict in eastern DRC, has made “mineral diplomacy” key to his approach, looking for access for American companies in exchange.

For villages like Lukutwe, which often hold land rights dating back generations but lack formal pa-

perwork, the concessions are a way to secure land titles and protect the region’s vast savannah forest systems. Since 2016, forest concessions, known as CFCL by their French acronym, have been part of the DRC’s strategy to let communities manage their forests.

They “effectively constitute a safeguard against pressure over their land... relocations and expropriations by mining companies,” said Heritier Khoji, a specialist in the region’s forests and an agronomy professor at the University of Lubumbashi. In Haut-Katanga, there are now 20 reserves, covering 239,000 hectares (60,000 acres). Twelve more are in the process of approval. The DRC’s south is covered in what are known as Miombo forests, the largest dry tropical forest ecosystem in the world. But, as in other parts of Africa, forests are

shrinking due to agriculture, deforestation and mining.

From 2001-2024, the Lualaba and Haut-Katanga provinces lost 1.38mn hectares of tree cover, much of it along the copper-cobalt belt, according to Global Forest Watch. The DRC’s mining registry shows the copper-cobalt belt has one of the country’s highest concentrations of exploration and mine licences.

Overseen by Indigenous and local communities, the forest reserves allow environmental management through sustainable projects, reforestation and controlled charcoal production, and set aside specific areas for conservation and rural development.

In theory, mining companies that overlap with or impact the reserves can pay royalties to communities for their operations.

Each reserve has a volunteer brigade to monitor access points and boundaries, said Kibole Kahutu, vice-president of the CFCL Katanga.

MINING PRESSURE

Environmentalists and rights groups meanwhile worry over threats to waterways, farming and health.

A leak of waste from a facility run by Congo Dongfang Mining (CDM), a subsidiary of China’s Huayou Cobalt, flooded suburbs of Lubumbashi in Novem-

ber, prompting the Congolese government to suspend the miner’s operations. Many of the Haut-Katanga reserves are surrounded by or overlap with mining companies.

For example, the Kambala forest initiative, which is yet to be fully approved, overlaps with the exploration permit of MMG Kinsevere SARL, a subsidiary of Australia-based MMG Limited, whose main shareholder is the Chinese company China Minmetals.

Khoji, the agronomy professor, said community forest concessions are not perfect. Sometimes, even communities mine in environmentally destructive ways.

Companies can operate in a concession after obtaining community consent. But local communities complain miners still obtain licences on secured lands even without consent or benefit-sharing agreements.

For communities, “obtaining the concession is a safeguard against land pressures, but the difficult application of laws, decrees, orders... is an obstacle,” Khoji said.

Politics also plays a role, with poor communities lacking clout.

In villages like Lukutwe, forestry concessions often do not generate immediate returns, and the lack of funds discourages some residents, said Veronique Sebente, representative of a committee managing collective land ownership.

Measles cases in South Carolina spike to 558

Reuters
Washington

South Carolina reported nearly 250 new measles cases this week, official figures showed on Friday, bringing the total of confirmed infections to 558 since October as the threat of a wider outbreak increased.

State epidemiologist Linda Bell said on Wednesday that the risk to unprotected individuals, including those traveling to the outbreak area in the northwestern part of the state, was increasing.

At least 531 people are in quarantine after being exposed to the virus, and another 85 people who are symptomatic are in isolation to keep from spreading the disease.

“It is only a matter of time before a very severe or even fatal case occurs,” said Dr Amesh Adalja, infectious disease expert at the Johns Hopkins Centre for Health Security, noting that about one in every 1,000

measles cases results in death.

He said the larger the outbreak grows, the more difficult it will be to bring under control, and the more offshoots it will start in other parts of South Carolina and in other states, as is already happening.

North Carolina, Ohio and Washington State have all reported cases linked with travel to South Carolina.

The United States is seeing a resurgence of measles.

The Trump administration and Health Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr, an anti-vaccine activist, have made sweeping changes to the US childhood vaccination schedule – moves that many experts say will increase vaccine hesitancy.

In 2025, the United States reported 2,242 confirmed measles cases, the most in three decades, putting the nation’s prized status of having eliminated local transmission of the disease at risk.

South Carolina’s outbreak, which began in October, is centred on Greenville and



This picture taken last year shows a measles alert sign outside the entrance to the Cohen Children's Medical Centre, in New Hyde Park, New York. - Reuters

Spartanburg Counties along the state's northern border with North Carolina.

Of those infected, 483 were unvaccinated, six were partially vaccinated with one of the recommended two-dose measles-mumps-rubella vaccines, 13 were fully vaccinated and 56 had unknown vaccination status.

Most cases were reported in children in the 5-17 age group, followed by those below five years of age.

North Carolina officials reported on Thursday two new measles cases related to the South Carolina outbreak, in Buncombe County, bringing that county's total to five.

North Carolina has set up a measles dashboard, which lists a total of seven cases since December, and urged residents to make sure their children are up to date on all childhood immunisations, including the measles vaccine.

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory virus that can hang in the air for as long as two hours.

It causes rash, cough and high fevers and can lead to severe complications including pneumonia, encephalitis and suppression of the immune system.

South Carolina's outbreak follows a large outbreak in West Texas that started in January 2025 and infected more than 800 people in the state.

Utah and Arizona are also battling outbreaks involving 201 cases in Utah and 223 in Arizona.

Non-medical exemptions to school vaccine mandates have risen since the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic to an average of more than 3% of schoolchildren in 2023-24, compared with 0.6% in 2010-11.

To prevent measles, 95% of the population needs to be vaccinated.

In some schools in South Carolina's Spartanburg County, vaccination coverage is as low as 20%, Bell said this week.

Stacy Ellis Matheson, public health director in North Carolina's Buncombe County, said in a briefing this week that 87% of children in her county attend schools in which fewer than 95% of students are vaccinated.

“We’ve got a fire raging in South Carolina, and these pockets of lower vaccination rates are kind of like tinder,” she said, adding there was the definite possibility of a wildfire.

Whistles and walkie-talkies: Minneapolis keeps guard over schools amid ICE crackdown

By Brad Brooks
Reuters

Peter Brown's gray mustache and beard were matted with ice as he stood watch on a frigid Friday afternoon outside Green Central Elementary, not far from where a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent fatally shot Renee Good last week.

Wearing a neon green vest and equipped with a whistle and walkie-talkie, Brown, an 81-year-old retired lawyer who lives nearby, kept his head on a swivel.

His eyes were taking in each passing car and pedestrian near the campus as he stood ready to sound the alarm should federal immigration personnel approach the school, which teaches in English and Spanish and is around the corner from the spot where Good died.

“I never did like bullies, and that’s what the federal government has become,” Brown said, explaining why an octogenarian stood outside for four hours in -2° Fahrenheit with wind chill (-19° Celsius). “What’s happening in my city is nothing more than authoritarian intimidation, and me and my neighbours are not going to put up with it.”

The Trump administration has deployed about 3,000 federal agents across the Minneapolis-St Paul metropolitan area, making it the latest region targeted by the president’s mass deportation programme.

People who normally might be organising parent-teacher association meetings are arranging security patrols at their kids’ schools to watch for immigration agents.

Some parents not on patrol are escorting foreign-born teachers or staff members, driving them to and from their homes and schools to make them feel safer.

Others are delivering groceries and prescription medicines to immigrant families who are too afraid to leave their homes or send their kids to class.

US Senator Amy Klobuchar, a Democrat representing Minnesota, said on Friday that she had met with school principals from her state “and heard horror stories of kids and parents ‘under siege’ by ICE.”

“Little kids scared. Dangerous encounters. This is no longer about a fraud investigation,” she wrote on social media, as she urged residents to remain peaceful.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which oversees the ICE and the Border Patrol, said this week more than 2,500 people have been arrested during the effort that officials have dubbed Operation Metro Surge.

The DHS has repeatedly said its agents are not targeting schools, but focusing on convicted criminals.

However, parents and school leaders say otherwise.

A spokesperson for St Paul Public Schools said in a statement that two of its contracted student transportation vans were pulled over by ICE agents this week.

Several schools and daycare centres have e-mailed parents to notify them of teachers and staff who have been detained, according to school leaders and parents.

The DHS did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

Schools have notified the public that some parents have been detained at bus stops after dropping off kids.

Border Patrol agents clashed with

US judge restricts federal agents over Minnesota protests

AFP/Reuters
Washington/Minneapolis

A US judge has restricted federal agents from interfering with peaceful protesters in Minnesota, after President Donald Trump said there was no immediate need to invoke the Insurrection Act over the demonstrations.

US District Judge Katherine Menendez ordered immigration

agents to dial back their aggressive tactics, barring the detention or arrest of peaceful protesters and drivers and the use of pepper spray against demonstrators.

The court case was brought on behalf of six protesters and observers who claimed that their constitutional rights had been infringed by the actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.

The 83-page order gives the Department of Homeland Security

(DHS)’s current operation in the northern US city 72 hours to come into compliance, and follows two incidents where federal agents opened fire, killing one person and wounding another in the span of a week.

The ruling comes nearly two weeks after the Trump administration announced that it was sending 2,000 immigration agents to the Minneapolis area, bolstering an earlier deployment in what the

DHS called its largest such operation in history.

The surge in heavily armed officers from the ICE agency and Border Patrol has since grown to nearly 3,000, dwarfing the ranks of local police officers in the Twin Cities metropolitan area of Minneapolis and St Paul.

In a separate legal move that could inflame the standoff between the White House and Minnesota elected officials, CBS News

reported that the Justice Department (DOJ) was investigating Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey for impeding federal officers.

Both have called for peaceful protests against immigration sweeps in their state.

“This is an obvious attempt to intimidate me for standing up for Minneapolis, local law enforcement, and residents against the chaos and danger this Administration has brought to our city,” Frey wrote on X on Friday.

Walz said the Trump administration has moved to investigate other Democrats who have spoken out against the president’s policies and mentioned the 37-year-old woman who was fatally shot by an ICE officer in Minneapolis on January 7.

“The only person not being investigated for the shooting of Renee Good is the federal agent who shot her,” Walz wrote on X.

The DOJ did not respond to a request for comment.

However, Attorney-General Pam Bondi wrote on X on Friday: “A reminder to all those in Minnesota: No one is above the law.”

Trump threatened the drastic measure of invoking the Insurrection Act, which would allow him to deploy the military to police the protests, as the row escalated this week.



A Minnesota sheriff escorts a woman towards an unmarked vehicle after agents raided her building in St. Paul, Minnesota. - AFP

Left: Community members blow their whistles to alert people of the presence of a vehicle with federal officers inside parked nearby, in St Paul. - Reuters



A man shows federal agents sitting in their parked truck a sign reading 'Remember' in the Frogtown neighbourhood in St Paul. - AFP



A protesting community member reacts as federal agents fire munitions and pepper balls in north Minneapolis, Minnesota. - Reuters

Mexico seeks answers after citizen dies in US custody

Mexican authorities are seeking details about the death of one of its citizens this week in an immigration detention facility in the US state of Georgia.

The number of people detained by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has increased significantly in recent years, and 2025 was the deadliest year for ICE detainees in two decades, with at least 30 people dying in detention centres.

At least four people have died in ICE detention so far this year, according to agency data.

On Thursday, Mexico’s consulate in Atlanta said it was “closely monitoring” the death of a Mexican citizen on Wednesday at an ICE facility south of the southern state’s capital.

Officials requested “that the circumstances of the incident be clarified”, the consulate said, adding that it was “collaborating on the necessary procedures to ensure that the investigation

is conducted promptly and transparently”.

The consulate did not release the person’s name but said it planned to return the person’s remains to Mexico as soon as possible.

US officials have not publicly commented on the incident.

More than 68,000 adults were in ICE detention as of the end of December, compared with about 36,000 in December 2023, agency data shows. - AFP

protesters on the grounds of Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis as classes ended, just a few hours after Good was shot and killed.

The DHS said the clash followed agents’ pursuit of someone who had rammed one of their vehicles several miles away and fled to the school grounds.

Several school districts – including those in Minneapolis and St Paul, the state’s two largest – have cancelled classes some days and are allowing students to learn online instead of attending classes in person for the next several weeks in response to the immigration operations.

“Many families in my area are afraid to send their kids to school because ICE is staking out our bus stops,” state Representative Carrie

Kotzya-Witthuhn, a Democrat and co-chair of the Minnesota House of Representatives’ Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee, told the *Minnesota Star Tribune* newspaper.

Nate Byrne, a spokesperson for Kids Count on Us, a coalition of 500 community-based childcare centres in Minnesota, said it is receiving daily reports about ICE officers on or near childcare centre grounds, and that such centres in immigrant-heavy neighbourhoods have seen a 50% reduction in attendance.

Kids Count on Us has received reports of childcare workers taken into ICE custody, Byrne said, though he did not have specific figures.

“Parents who are not fearful of

being detained by ICE – typically because they are white – are forming teams to patrol outside their childcare centres during drop-off and pick-up and when staff need to come and go,” Byrne said. “Parents who are fearful of being detained by ICE due to the colour of their skin are being extremely cautious.”

St Paul parent Kelly, who spoke on the condition that her last name not be used, citing fears of retribution from the federal government, said she was helping deliver food to immigrant families that attend her children’s school but were afraid to leave their homes.

Parents are also raising money to help pay rent for the families across the metro area, as the parents are missing work, according to Kelly and other parents.

Kelly, who was attending a Friday night protest against the ICE with her husband and two children, ages six and nine, said she was bewildered by what has become of her city amid the immigration raids.

In years past, she volunteered for parent-teacher association events.

Now, she carries a whistle everywhere she goes and said she is ready to confront federal agents if they approach her kids’ school.

“There’s no parenting handbook for this,” Kelly said. “My parents never had to sit me down and explain that my classmates who are suddenly missing from school aren’t there because their parents are afraid of being snatched by the government.”



Venezuela interim leader sacks industry minister, a Maduro ally

AFP
Caracas

Venezuela's interim president has dismissed businessman Alex Saab, a close ally of deposed leader Nicolas Maduro, from his post as minister of industry.

In a Telegram message, Delcy Rodriguez announced that the ministry would be combined with a commerce ministry and thanked Saab – a Colombian-born Venezuelan – “for his service to the Homeland; he will be taking on new responsibilities”.

The change comes amid pressure from Washington following the January 3 US military raid that ousted Maduro.

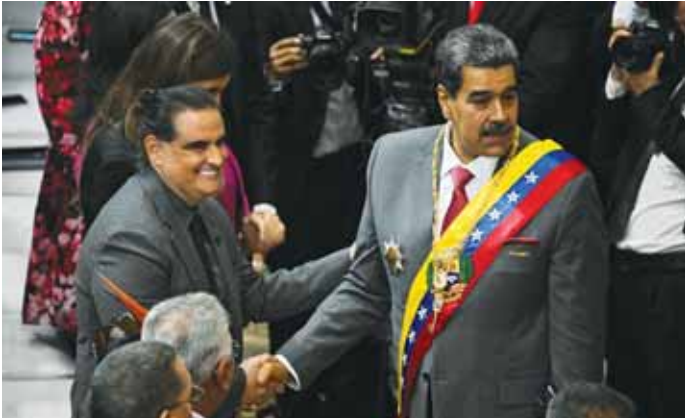
Saab, released in 2023 as part of a prisoner exchange with the United States, was appointed to office in 2024 by Maduro.

He had been arrested in Cape Verde in 2020 due to an Interpol notice over accusations that he had served as a money launderer for the socialist leader.

He was subsequently extradited to the US, where he and his business partner Alvaro Pulido were charged with running a network that exploited food aid destined for Venezuela.

Saab's dismissal is among the latest key changes to Venezuela's government by Rodriguez since the US capture of Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado meanwhile said that her country is starting a



This picture taken on January 16 last year shows then-president Nicolas Maduro with Alex Saab at the National Assembly headquarters for the state of the nation address to parliament. – **AFP**

“true transition” to democracy and will become free with support from the United States and President Donald Trump.

Trump however has sidelined Nobel laureate Machado and backed former vice-president Rodriguez as interim leader of the oil-rich country following the seizure of Maduro.

“We are definitely now into the first steps of a true transition to democracy,” Machado said during an event in Washington, adding that this will have an “immense impact in the lives of all Venezuelans” as well as around the region and the world.

“Venezuela is going to be free, and that's going to be achieved with the support of the people of the United States and the president, Donald Trump,” Machado said.

Her party has presented evidence that Maduro stole the 2024 election – claims supported by Washington and much of the international community.

However, Trump has said that Machado does not have enough support among Venezuelans, and opted to stick with Rodriguez so long as she toes the line on US access to Venezuela's vast oil reserves.

Machado said on Friday that Rodriguez is “following orders” rather than acting of her own will.

The opposition leader's remarks came a day after US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) chief John Ratcliffe met Rodriguez in Caracas.

Ratcliffe travelled to Venezuela to “deliver the message that the United States looks forward to an improved working relationship”; a



Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodriguez has thanked Saab ‘for his service to the Homeland’ and said that he ‘would be taking on new responsibilities’.

US administration official said on condition of anonymity.

In an indication of that improved relationship, a US deportation flight carrying 231 Venezuelans landed in Caracas on Friday, the first since Maduro's overthrow.

Trump has made cracking down on undocumented immigrants a major part of his second term, carrying out sweeping immigration raids and deporting migrants.

Machado, 58, on Thursday presented her Nobel Peace Prize medal to Trump in a bid to win over the US president.

“He deserves it,” she said. “And it was a very emotional moment, I decided to present the Nobel Peace Prize medal on behalf of the people of Venezuela.”

Trump had campaigned hard to win last year's prize, falsely claiming that he stopped eight

was since taking office, but it went to Machado instead.

Trump and Rodriguez had their first telephone call on Wednesday and the White House said he “likes what he's seeing” from her.

Rodriguez said however that her government will stand up to Washington.

“We know they are very powerful... we are not afraid to confront them diplomatically, through political dialogue,” she said on Thursday.

Rodriguez was delivering Maduro's state of the nation address to parliament while the long-time authoritarian leader is in a New York jail facing drug trafficking charges.

By contrast Machado, who campaigned for years to end leftist Maduro's rule, was greeted by jubilant supporters in Washington.

Roadway added to list of things named after Trump

By Nandita Bose
Reuters

US President Donald Trump marked the ceremonial renaming of a roadway near his private club in Palm Beach, Florida, the latest addition to a growing list of buildings, programmes, and initiatives branded with his name since he returned to office in January.

State lawmakers approved giving an honorary new name to part of Southern Boulevard, a road linking Palm Beach International Airport to Mar-a-Lago, Trump's private club and residence.

The road is frequently used by the president's motorcade when travelling between the airport and the property.

Trump said that he was “tremendously honoured” by the recognition.

“I'll remember this amazing gesture for the rest of my life,” he said, speaking at the event held at Mar-a-Lago.

The name change does not alter official addresses, emergency response systems, or government maps, county commissioners



The new sign for ‘President Donald J Trump Boulevard’ is seen across the street from Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida. – **AFP**

told local news outlets.

Since taking office again a year ago, the president's name has been attached to high-

profile Washington buildings, a proposed new class of Navy warships, a visa initiative for affluent foreign nationals, a government-run prescription drug website, and federal savings accounts for children.

Washington has many buildings and monuments named for presidents, but these honours typically came long after they left office and are usually national tributes, often authorised by Congress.

On Thursday, Trump accepted the Nobel Peace Prize medal from Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado during a White House meeting.

The White House said he intends to keep the medal, though the Norwegian Nobel Committee said the prize cannot be transferred, shared or revoked.

Some historians view it as a superficial attempt by the president to cement his legacy, one that may ultimately prove short-lived.

Opposition has surfaced over the renaming of Washington's leading performing arts venue as the Donald J Trump and John F Kennedy Memorial Centre for the Performing Arts, prompting several performers to withdraw in protest.

Colombia to launch \$1.7bn project to create anti-drone shield

Reuters
Bogota

Colombia has launched a \$1.68bn project to develop a so-called anti-drone shield to protect the country from attacks by unmanned drones operated by illegal armed groups, the defence minister said.

Colombia has been involved in an ongoing internal armed conflict for six decades

that has left more than 450,000 dead.

Conflict in the Andean nation has involved the military and police forces, leftist guerrillas, criminal gangs formed by former right-wing paramilitaries and drug cartels.

“Colombia is embarking on one of the boldest and most innovative strategies for our national security and defence,” Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez said in a video statement.

Colombia's government has approved a budget of \$271.1mn for the first phase

of the project, Sanchez added.

A meeting with countries and companies interested in the project was held on Friday in Bogotá, though no details were disclosed.

Between 2024 and 2025, Colombia recorded 264 attacks from unmanned drones loaded with explosives.

They were registered predominantly across the country's dense jungles and mountainous regions dedicated to the cultivation of coca leaves, the base ingredient in the production of cocaine.

The attacks were attributed to the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas and dissidents from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) guerrilla group.

The drone attacks between 2024 and 2025 left 15 soldiers dead and an additional 153 others wounded, according to official statistics.

In November, Colombia signed a €3.1bn (\$3.6bn) agreement with the Swedish company Saab to purchase 17 Gripen fighter jets over the next five years.

Paracetamol/Tylenol in pregnancy is safe, says research prompted by Trump claims

Taking paracetamol, known as Tylenol in the US, during pregnancy is safe, a group of European researchers have said, after compiling data in response to US President Donald Trump's claims of a link to autism last year.

In a review published in the British journal *The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology & Women's Health* yesterday, the team said they had focused on amassing the best-quality evidence to address the claims.

“Paracetamol is safe to use in pregnancy,” said lead author Asma Khalil, professor of obstetrics and maternal foetal medicine at City St George's, University of London. “The key message is reassurance: When used as recommended, the best available evidence does not support a causal link with autism, ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) or intellectual disability.”

She said that she had been asked about the popular pain medication – also known as acetaminophen – by her patients after Trump in September told



An illustration photo shows boxes of Tylenol in Schwenksville, Pennsylvania, US. – **Reuters**

pregnant women not to take the drug.

At the time, national and international medical groups decried the president's comments, saying they were not evidence-based.

Paracetamol/Tylenol is the only

pain reliever considered safe for pregnant women, and doctors already advise them to use the smallest amount for the shortest time to control pain and fever during pregnancy.

Untreated, these conditions can



Trump, with US Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F Kennedy Jr, delivers remarks linking autism to childhood vaccines and to the use of popular pain medication Tylenol for pregnant women and children, at the White House in Washington, DC, on September 22, last year. – **Reuters**

be risky for both pregnant women and their babies.

The researchers conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of existing data, finding 43 studies that were then assessed for quality and bias using a standard tool.

The team particularly focused on studies that looked at children who were born to the same mother who took paracetamol/Tylenol during one pregnancy but not the other.

These take into account shared

Virginia Democrats pave way for new map that could net them four House seats

Virginia's Democratic-controlled Senate has approved a constitutional amendment that, if approved by voters, would permit lawmakers to redraw the state's congressional lines, potentially netting Democrats up to four US House of Representatives seats.

The state's move is the latest volley in a nationwide battle over redistricting between Republicans and Democrats ahead of November's midterm elections, when control of Congress will be at stake.

Democrats need to flip only three Republican-held districts to win a majority in the 435-seat House, making every seat critical.

Democrats in the Virginia House of Delegates, the legislature's lower chamber, approved the amendment earlier this week.

The legislature is expected to schedule a special election this spring, and lawmakers have said they will release a proposed new map before then so voters can make an informed decision.

Democrats currently hold six of the state's 11 seats, but a new map could give them as much as a 10-1 advantage.

A constitutional amendment is necessary because Virginia's voters approved an earlier amendment in 2020 that established an independent redistricting commission.

Under Friday's amendment, lawmakers would have the power to redraw US House lines in response to any other state doing so – as several Republican states have already at Trump's urging – until 2030, when authority would revert to the commission.

Republican lawmakers accused Democrats of abandoning their principles to punish Trump and pursue power.

“That's really the only thing that's behind this, is that you hate the man in the White House, and you want to blunt his power,” Republican Senator Christopher Head said on the Senate floor.

Democrats said the measure was an emergency move to counter Trump's unprecedented push for Republican states to pursue redistricting in the middle of the decade.

“It's a temporary exception to meet an extraordinary threat,” Democratic Senator Scott Surovell said.

Redistricting typically occurs at the start of each decade to incorporate new US Census data.

However, Trump ignited a rash of redistricting fights this summer, when he successfully urged Texas Republicans to draw a new congressional map taking aim at five Democratic incumbents. – **Reuters**

Former UK leader Blair back in limelight with role in Gaza

By Jo Biddle with
Alexandra Del Peral
AFP

Former British prime minister Tony Blair, whose legacy was heavily tarnished by the 2003 war in Iraq, has long been a contentious figure in the Middle East.

The 72-year-old political veteran was named on Friday by US President Donald Trump as a member of a fledgling “Board of Peace” to help oversee Gaza.

He said yesterday that he was “honoured” to have been tapped by Trump to join the board, adding that he looked forward to working with “other colleagues in line with the president’s vision to promote peace and prosperity”.

He also welcomed as “a massive step forward” a Palestinian committee headed by former Palestinian Authority deputy minister Ali Shaath, which began work in Cairo on Friday to govern post-war Gaza.

“It gives hope to people in Gaza that they can have a future different from the past and to the Israelis that they may have a neighbour which does not threaten its security,” Blair said in a statement.

Blair has been credited in some media reports with helping craft the US leader’s 20-point Gaza plan alongside Trump’s son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner.

Blair has plenty of experience in the region, spending eight years as the envoy for the Middle East Quartet of the European Union, United Nations, United States and Russia.

However, social media users were quick to point to his role in backing false evidence of Iraqi chemical weapons to justify the 2003 invasion.

Trump has already declared himself the chair of the board and on Friday announced that its full membership will include Blair as well as Kushner, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Steve Witkoff, Trump’s business partner turned globe-trotting negotiator.

They were all “leaders with experience across diplomacy, development, infrastructure, and economic strategy”, the White House said in a statement.



Former British premier and Middle East Quartet envoy Tony Blair gestures during his visit to the West Bank village of Zakaria near the Jewish settlement of Efrat, south of Bethlehem, on March 19, 2009. – AFP

However, critics have argued Blair achieved little as Middle East envoy and that he is ill-suited to play peacemaker, as he is reviled by many Arabs and discredited in Britain for joining the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Blair has maintained an informal regional role through his Institute for Global Change and various consultancy roles.

When the idea of Blair taking a senior role in the running of Gaza was first mooted, Israel appeared to welcome the move.

And he is said to have a good rapport with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

“He has always had a corner of his heart devoted to the unfinished project of calming down this conflict,” former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak told the *Washington Post* in September.

The Palestinians seemed less enthusiastic when the idea was first floated.

“That is the most horrible idea,” Mustafa Barghuti, head of the Palestinian National Initiative, told CNN at the time.

Blair has remained unapologetic about joining the 2003 invasion, which triggered accusations he

was “a poodle” of then-US president George W Bush.

However, he has expressed regret about intelligence failures and lack of post-war planning.

A youthful Blair first became a lawmaker for centre-left Labour in 1983.

Within 11 years he was spearheading reform as the party’s leader.

He became prime minister in 1997 – the first of three general election wins, an unprecedented feat for Labour – and, at 43, Britain’s youngest leader since 1812.

During his 10-year tenure, Blair, a practising Christian, oversaw a period of prosperity, enacted key constitutional changes and expanded gender minority rights.

He also secured a historic peace deal in Northern Ireland.

However, his political fortunes shifted in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

One million people protested in London against invading Iraq, and his domestic reputation eroded further after the evidence for the war proved flawed.

He was ousted from office in 2007 after an internal power battle.

‘Powerful forces’ are undermining global ties, UN chief warns

AFP
London

UN chief Antonio Guterres has deplored a host of “powerful forces lining up to undermine global co-operation” in a London speech marking the 80th anniversary of the first UN General Assembly.

Guterres, whose term as secretary-general ends on December 31 this year, delivered the warning yesterday at the Methodist Central Hall in London, where representatives from 51 countries met on January 10, 1946, for the General Assembly’s first session.

They met in London because the UN headquarters in New York had not yet been built.

Guterres paid tribute to Britain for its decisive role in the creation of the United Nations and for continuing to champion it.

However, he said 2025 had been a “profoundly challenging year for international cooperation and the values of the UN”.

“We see powerful forces lining up to undermine global cooperation,” he said, adding: “Despite these rough seas, we sail ahead.”

Guterres cited a new treaty on marine biological diversity as an example of continued progress.

The treaty establishes the first legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of marine diversity in the two-thirds of oceans beyond national limits.



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks at the UNA-UK conference to mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the UN, at Methodist Central Hall, the site of the inaugural UN General Assembly, in London. – AFP

“These quiet victories of international co-operation – the wars prevented, the famine averted, the vital treaties secured – do not always make the headlines,” he said. “Yet they are real. And they matter.”

India fines IndiGo \$2.45mn over flight cancellations

India’s aviation regulator has fined IndiGo a record 222mn Indian rupees (\$2.45mn) for poor pilot roster planning that led to mass flight cancellations in December.

The regulator also issued warnings to senior personnel, including to chief operating officer Isidre Porqueras and to Jason Herter, senior vice-president of operations control centre, with directions to IndiGo to relieve Herter “of current operational responsibilities”. A government source said the fine was the largest to date.

IndiGo has been ordered to provide a bank guarantee of \$5.51mn in favour of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, to ensure “compliance with the directives and long-term systemic correction”, the regulator said.

India’s largest airline cancelled about 4,500 flights in the initial weeks of December, leaving tens of thousands of passengers stranded all over the country and leading to chaos at airports. – Reuters

Indonesia searching for missing government aircraft with 11 onboard

Reuters/AFP
Jakarta

Indonesian rescuers were searching yesterday for an ATR 42-500 fisheries surveillance aircraft that went missing with 11 people on board, officials said.

The Indonesia Air Transport plane lost contact with air traffic control at about 1.30pm (0530 GMT) around Maros region in South Sulawesi province, Andi Sultan, an official at the local rescue agency, told Reuters.

The aircraft had been heading to Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi, after departing from Yogyakarta province before contact was lost, Sultan said.

There were eight crew and three passengers on board, he added.

Around 400 personnel, including military and police units, were deployed to search for the plane and those on board, though the effort was being hampered by bad weather, Sultan said.

He declined to comment on the possible cause of the crash.

Muhammad Arif Anwar, the head of the local search and rescue agency, told AFP that teams were deployed to a mountainous area of Maros, near the last known location of the plane.

The search on land and by air involved the air force, police and volunteers, he added.

The plane had been char-

tered by Indonesia’s ministry of marine affairs and fisheries, ministry official Pung Nugroho Saksono told state news agency Antara.

Marine Affairs and Fisheries Minister Sakti Wahyu Trenggono said that the three passengers were ministry staff conducting air surveillance on fisheries.

The ATR 42-500 is a regional turboprop aircraft capable of carrying 42-50 passengers.

According to unconfirmed Flightradar24 data, an aircraft matching the description was flying eastward over the Java Sea at about 11,000’ before rapidly losing altitude and dropping off tracking systems.

In France, Franco-Italian planemaker ATR said that it had been informed of an accident in Indonesia and that its specialists were supporting local authorities as they began their investigation.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago in Southeast Asia, relies heavily on air transport to connect its thousands of islands.

The country has a poor aviation safety record, with several fatal crashes in recent years.

In September last year, a helicopter carrying six passengers and two crew members crashed shortly after taking off from South Kalimantan province, killing everybody on board.

Less than two weeks later, four people were killed when another helicopter crashed in the remote Papua district of Ilaga.

In memory



This overhead view shows people taking part yesterday in memorial services to mark the 31st anniversary of the ‘Great Hanshin Earthquake’, which devastated the city of Kobe, at Higashi Yuenchi Park in Kobe, Hyogo prefecture. The port city of Kobe was hit by a 7.2-magnitude quake on January 17, 1995, killing 6,434 people and levelling much of the city. – AFP

Japan PM considers suspending sales tax on food in election pledge: report

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is considering a pledge to suspend the sales tax on food as part of her campaign for a general election next month, the *Mainichi* newspaper reported, citing unnamed sources.

The government and Takaichi’s Liberal Democratic Party will carefully assess the market impact before deciding, as scrapping the 8% levy on food sales would cut government revenue by an estimated ¥5tn (\$30bn) a year, the newspaper said in the report late on Friday.

A call to the Prime Minister’s Office seeking comment went unanswered yesterday.

Takaichi plans to dissolve parliament and call a snap election as she seeks public backing for spending plans that have rattled financial markets.

She is considering holding the election on February 8, two LDP lawmakers have told Reuters.

The LDP formed a coalition government in October with the right-leaning Japan Innovation Party, known as Ishin, paving the way for Takaichi to become the country’s first female prime minister.

The parties said that they had agreed to consider legislation that would exempt food and beverages from the consumption tax for two years, without providing further details. – Reuters

Scam hub disappearances put relationship at risk, China tells Cambodia

AFP
Phnom Penh

China’s embassy in Cambodia said yesterday that a recent spate of disappearances of Chinese nationals into cyberfraud compounds poses a “serious obstacle” to the allies’ ties.

Ambassador Wang Wenbin urged Phnom Penh to strengthen a crackdown on

the illicit industry in a meeting with Cambodia’s top ministers, a statement on the embassy’s WeChat account said.

“China is highly concerned about a number of recent cases involving Chinese citizens going missing or disappearing in Cambodia,” it quoted Wang as saying.

Most of the harmful cases involving Chinese nationals were related to online fraud, the envoy said, adding that they were “inconsistent with the traditional

friendship between China and Cambodia”.

The Cambodian government has said it is cracking down on the illicit industry, which employs at least 100,000 people in the Southeast Asian country, according to United Nations figures.

Initially largely targeting Chinese speakers, transnational crime groups have expanded operations into multiple languages to steal tens of billions annually

from victims around the world.

Those conducting the scams are sometimes willing con artists, and sometimes trafficked foreign nationals who have been trapped and forced to work under threat of violence.

In recent months, China has stepped up its pursuit of key figures in the scam industry across Southeast Asia to try them on its own soil.

Phnom Penh deported Chinese-born

tycoon Chen Zhi, accused of running internet scam centres in Cambodia, to China this month.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimates online scams caused up to \$37bn in losses in East and Southeast Asia in 2023.

Amnesty International has accused the Cambodian government of “deliberately ignoring” rights abuses by cybercrime gangs.

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GULF TIMES

US and Taiwan reach trade deal, with semiconductor chips and China in focus

The US and Taiwan clinched a trade deal on Thursday that cuts tariffs on many of the semiconductor powerhouse's exports, directs new investments in the US technology industry and risks infuriating China. The deal deepens the Trump administration's ties with Taipei at a critical time as China ratchets up pressure on the island, which it views as its own, and Washington has worked to avoid an all-out trade war with Beijing.

Under the long-negotiated deal, Taiwanese chipmakers like TSMC that expand US production will be charged a lower tariff on semiconductors or related manufacturing equipment and products they import into the US and can import some duty-free. Broad tariffs that apply to most other Taiwanese exports to the US will fall from 20% to 15%.

Generic pharmaceuticals, aircraft components and "unavailable natural resources" will face a 0% tariff, the Commerce Department said. The US also committed that Taiwan will be treated no worse than anyone else should chips tariffs be increased later, according to Taiwan.

In exchange, Taiwanese companies will invest \$250bn to increase production of semiconductors, energy and artificial intelligence in the US. That includes \$100bn already committed by TSMC in 2025, with more to come, according to US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick.

Taiwan will also guarantee an additional \$250bn in credit to facilitate further investment, the Trump administration said. Lutnick said in an interview on CNBC that the objective was to bring 40% of Taiwan's entire chip supply chain and production to the US. He said that if they did not

build in the US, the tariff was likely to be 100%.

Under the long-negotiated deal, Taiwanese chipmakers like TSMC that expand US production will be charged a lower tariff on semiconductors or related manufacturing equipment

The boost in chip production will likely provide more business for TSMC's major suppliers, including major chip manufacturing toolmakers such as ASML, Lam Research and Applied Materials. It should also provide a boost to smaller suppliers of chemicals and materials, such as Sumitomo Corp and DuPont spinoff Qnity Electronics. Many of those firms have long had a presence in Arizona due to Intel's major operations there, but they have expanded facilities with TSMC's arrival in the state, where it is enlarging an existing manufacturing plant.

Shares of chip company Nvidia, which depends on TSMC for manufacturing, rose more than 2%, keeping most of its gains from earlier in the day. Intel shares were modestly lower. Depository receipts and shares of ASML, Lam, Applied Materials and Qnity rose about 4% to 6%.

Washington has grown increasingly impatient with its reliance on computer chips from abroad, especially an island in China's sights. Semiconductors were invented in the US, many are designed there and it remains a top importer of them for everything from consumer gadgets to AI chatbots and advanced weaponry. But many of the most cutting-edge chips are manufactured abroad, especially in Taiwan. Intel and South Korea's Samsung Electronics are also expanding US production capacity. TSMC announced its Arizona factory in 2020, during US President Donald Trump's first term, and expanded it under his Democratic successor Joe Biden.

As it expands further, TSMC risks overspending on a high-flying industry, running into labour and skill shortages, navigating tricky politics around foreign worker immigration and shifting business away from Taiwan at a time of immense geopolitical vulnerability for the island.

China views Taiwan as its own territory, a position Taipei rejects. Washington has formal diplomatic ties with Beijing, but maintains unofficial relations with Taiwan and is the island's most important arms supplier. "Look, they need to keep our president happy, right," said Lutnick told CNBC, referring to Taiwan. "Because our president is the key to protecting their country."

Under the agreement, chipmakers that expand in the US will be able to import up to 2.5 times their new capacity of semiconductors and wafers with no extra tariffs during an approved construction period. Preferential treatment will apply to chips that exceed that quota. Dan Hutcheson, vice-chair of technology analysis firm TechInsights, said the deal was likely to drive higher demand in the chipmaking supply chain as Taiwanese firms build US operations. — Reuters

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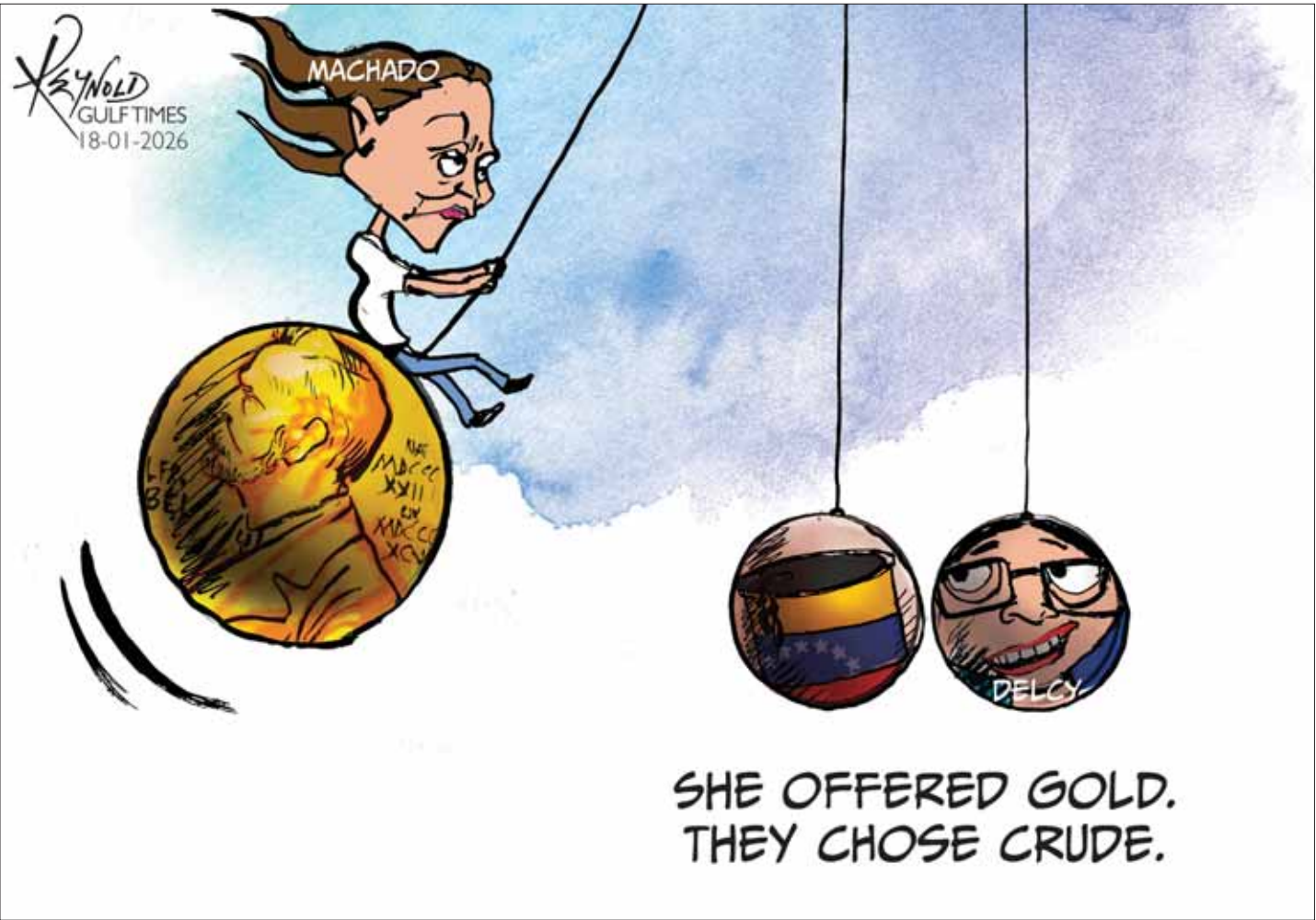
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Trump versus the Federal Reserve – the facts that you need to know

By Andy Sullivan

Reuters

Jerome Powell, head of the US Federal Reserve, said the Justice Department has opened a criminal investigation against him for allegedly misleading Congress about a building renovation project at the central bank's headquarters.

The action marks a dramatic escalation in President Donald Trump's pressure campaign against the top policymaking body for the US economy, which Trump thinks is not lowering interest rates fast enough.

The White House says Trump did not order the investigation, but Trump, who has threatened to fire Powell, has called on him to resign, and has said he should face legal consequences for the renovation's cost overruns.

Outside observers say Trump's actions could erode the independence of the world's most important central bank and reduce confidence in the US economy.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Since returning to office a year ago, Trump has sought to bend the US government to his will by firing tens of thousands of civil servants, eliminating internal watchdog positions, and dismissing Democratic appointees from agencies like the Federal Trade Commission that were set up to be run in an independent fashion.

The Fed is just one of his targets, but perhaps the most significant. The Federal Reserve is tasked with keeping inflation in check, unemployment low and the financial system operating smoothly. It does this by setting the baseline for the cost of credit. While the Fed only controls the federal funds rate - the interest rate that banks charge each other for

overnight loans - that serves as a foundation for the cost of other types of lending like home mortgages and credit cards.

If the Fed sets the interest rate too high, that can discourage borrowing, which can then weigh on consumption and investment and slow the economy. If the Fed sets interest rates too low, the economy can overheat, leading to higher inflation. The Fed sharply hiked the federal funds rate in 2022 and 2023 to combat inflation following the Covid-19 pandemic and has been gradually lowering it since 2024. It cut rates three times at the end of last year.

WHAT'S MEANT BY FED INDEPENDENCE?

Congress designed the Fed to be insulated from political pressure. The seven members of its Board of Governors serve 14-year terms, which ensures that no president can nominate a majority. Moreover, board members make interest-rate decisions with five of the 12 regional bank presidents casting votes as well on an annual rotation, which decentralises power from Washington. The Fed also controls its own budget and does not rely on Congress for funding.

Trump has repeatedly called on the Fed to slash interest rates to as low as 1% - a level rarely seen outside of a crisis - and he has criticised Powell when the central bank has not followed his wishes.

Trump also tried to fire another Fed governor, Lisa Cook, for allegedly filing misleading mortgage documents. Cook has denied wrongdoing and sued to keep her job. The Supreme Court is due to hear her case on January 21, and its decision is expected to have major implications for the central bank's independence.

IS THIS NORMAL?

No. While past presidents have on occasion pressured the

Fed to lower interest rates, none has ever publicly threatened to fire Fed officials or targeted them with criminal charges.

The Justice Department also is playing an unusual role here. The agency has filed criminal charges or announced investigations into several of Trump's political rivals over the past year, including former FBI Director James Comey, New York Attorney General Letitia James and Democratic Senator Adam Schiff. That's a sharp departure from previous administrations, as prior attorneys general have operated with a degree of independence from the White House in order to maintain public confidence in law enforcement.

WHAT IS THE RENOVATION PROJECT?

A planned renovation of two historic buildings in the Fed's Washington headquarters has run over its initial budget of \$1.9bn to about \$2.5bn. That has been attributed to higher-than-expected labour and materials costs, design changes, and unforeseen issues like asbestos and lead contamination.

Trump has accused Powell of mismanagement and suggested potential fraud, though he has not provided evidence. The White House has also criticised the project as ostentatious, with claims of lavish features like VIP elevators and premium marble. Powell has said that is not accurate and has defended the need to remove hazardous materials.

WHAT IS POWELL BEING INVESTIGATED FOR?

Powell said in a video statement that he has been served with subpoenas by the Justice Department for his testimony to the Senate Banking Committee last June about the renovation. That could indicate the Justice Department is preparing to indict him for

lying to Congress - a charge the department also brought against Comey. That case was thrown out of court. Powell has denied wrongdoing, and the Justice Department has not yet commented on the investigation. Several Republican members of the Senate Banking Committee have said they are not troubled by the renovation project, or Powell's testimony about it.

COULD THIS BACKFIRE ON TRUMP?

Potentially. Powell's term as Fed chair will end in May, but he could opt to remain on the board until 2028, delaying Trump's opportunity to further reshape the board with more sympathetic figures. Trump's move is also upsetting some Republicans in Congress, who until now have largely been deferential to the president.

Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina said he will not support any of Trump's future Fed nominees, and Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska has called for an investigation of the Justice Department. Tillis' opposition is significant as he sits on the Banking Committee that oversees the Fed, and Republicans hold just a slender 13-11 majority.

His opposition could deadlock the committee and prevent any nominees from advancing to a confirmation vote in the full Senate. That could prevent Trump from installing a permanent ally after temporary appointee Stephen Miran's term expires on January 31. The Senate's top Republican, John Thune, acknowledged Monday that the Powell investigation could make it harder to confirm Fed nominees.

Of course, Trump's pressure campaign could also succeed. Powell and Cook could be forced off the Fed board one way or another. The Supreme Court could rule that Trump has the right to fire Cook, and Powell could get criminally charged and found guilty. That would open up two spots for Trump to fill.

The Fed next meets to set interest rates on January 27-28, with little expectation of another rate cut. Indeed, several of this year's crop of voting regional bank presidents are opposed to any further rate cuts and so far seem unbowed by Trump's pressure.

WHAT DO INVESTORS THINK SO FAR?

Outside observers argue that a politicised Fed would have less freedom to steer the economy as it sees fit, raising the risk of higher inflation and undermining the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency. That could cause investors to demand higher interest rates for US government debt and raise borrowing costs, analysts say. Analysts warn that the Powell investigation is a clear sign that the Fed's independence is at risk, but investors do not seem alarmed... yet. After a lower start last week, major US stock indices closed modestly higher.



US President Donald Trump and Jerome Powell at the White House in a file photo. — Reuters

Thousands join anti-Trump ‘Hands off Greenland’ protests in Denmark

AFP
Copenhagen

Thousands of people took to the streets of Denmark’s capital yesterday to protest at US President Donald Trump’s push to take over Greenland, an autonomous Danish territory.

The protest followed Trump’s warning on Friday that he “may put a tariff” on countries that oppose his plans to take over mineral-rich Greenland, which is an autonomous territory of Denmark.

They also coincided with a visit to Copenhagen by a bipartisan delegation from the US Congress that has made clear the opposition of many Americans to the Trump administration’s sabre-rattling. Waving the flags of Denmark and Greenland, the protesters formed a sea of red and white outside Copenhagen city hall, chanting “Kalaallit Nunaat!” - the vast Arctic island’s name in Greenlandic.

Thousands of people had said on social media they would take part in marches and rallies organised by Greenlandic associations in Copenhagen, and in Aarhus, Aalborg, Odense and the Greenlandic capital Nuuk.

“The aim is to send a clear and unified message of respect for Greenland’s democracy and fundamental human rights,” Uagut,



Protesters wave Greenlandic flags as they take part in a rally under the slogans ‘Hands off Greenland’ and ‘Greenland for Greenlanders’, in front of City Hall in Copenhagen yesterday. (AFP)

an association of Greenlanders in Denmark, said on its website.

A sister demonstration was scheduled to happen in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, at 4:00pm (1500 GMT), to protest the US’ “illegal plans to take control of Greenland”, organisers said. Demonstrators would march to

the US consulate carrying Greenlandic flags.

The Copenhagen rally, which began at 12:00pm (1100 GMT), was due to make a stop outside the US embassy in the Danish capital.

‘Demand respect’
“Recent events have put

Greenland and Greenlanders in both Greenland and Denmark under pressure,” Uagut chairwoman Julie Rademacher said in a statement to AFP, calling for “unity”.

“When tensions rise and people go into a state of alarm, we risk creating more problems than so-

lutions for ourselves and for each other. We appeal to Greenlanders in both Greenland and Denmark to stand together,” she said.

The demonstration in Greenland was “to show that we are taking action, that we stand together and that we support our politicians, diplomats and partners,” Kristian Johansen, one of the organisers, said in a statement. “We demand respect for our country’s right to self-determination and for us as a people,” added Avijaja Rosing-Olsen, another organiser.

“We demand respect for international law and international legal principles. This is not only our struggle, it is a struggle that concerns the entire world.”

According to the latest poll published in January 2025, 85 percent of Greenlanders oppose the territory joining the United States. Only six percent were in favour.

‘No security threat’

Speaking in Copenhagen, where the Congressional delegation met top Danish and Greenlandic politicians and business leaders, US Democratic Senator Chris Coons insisted there was no security threat to Greenland to justify the Trump administration’s stance.

He was responding after Trump adviser Stephen Miller claimed on Fox News that Denmark was too small to defend its

sovereign Arctic territory. “There are no pressing security threats to Greenland, but we share real concern about Arctic security going forward, as the climate changes, as the sea ice retreats, as shipping routes change,” Coons told the press.

“There are legitimate reasons for us to explore ways to invest better in Arctic security broadly, both in the American Arctic and in our Nato partners and allies,” said Coons, who is leading the US delegation.

Trump has repeatedly criticised Denmark - a Nato ally - for, in his view, not doing enough to ensure Greenland’s security.

The US president has pursued that argument, despite strategically located Greenland - as part of Denmark - being covered by Nato’s security umbrella.

European Nato members are deploying troops in Greenland for a military exercise designed to show the world, including the United States, that they will “defend (their) sovereignty”, French armed forces minister Alice Rufo said this week.

Britain, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have announced they are sending small numbers of military personnel to prepare for future exercises in the Arctic.

The United States has been invited to participate in the exercise, Denmark said on Friday.

Trump threatens Europe with tariffs over Greenland

AFP
Palm Beach/Nuuk, United States

US President Donald Trump yesterday escalated his quest to acquire Greenland, threatening multiple European nations with tariffs of up to 25 percent until his purchase of the Danish territory is achieved.

Trump’s threats came as thousands of people protested in the capital of Greenland against his wish to acquire the mineral-rich island at the gateway to the Arctic.

Thousands more protested in Copenhagen and other Danish cities.

The US president aimed his ire at Denmark, a fellow Nato member, as well as several European countries that have deployed troops in recent days to the vast autonomous territory with a population of 57,000. If realised, Trump’s threats against Washington’s Nato partners would create unprecedented tension within the alliance. From February 1, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Finland would be subject to a 10-percent tariff on all goods sent to the United States, Trump said in a post on his Truth Social network.

“On June 1st, 2026, the tariff will be increased to 25%. This tariff will be due and payable until such time as a deal is reached for the complete and total purchase of Greenland,” he wrote.

“These countries, who are playing this very dangerous game, have put a level of risk in play that is not tenable or sustainable,” Trump said. “Therefore, it is imperative that, in order to protect Global Peace and Security, strong measures be taken so that this potentially perilous situation end quickly, and without question.”

Trump added that he was “immediately open to negotiation with Denmark and/or any of these Countries.”

Denmark called Trump’s announcement a “surprise,” British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said it was “completely wrong,” and French President Emmanuel Macron added: “Tariff threats are unacceptable and have no place in this context.”

“We won’t let ourselves be intimidated,”



People wave Greenlandic flags as they take part in a demonstration that gathered almost a third of the city population to protest against the US President’s plans to take Greenland, in Nuuk, yesterday. (AFP)

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told AFP, adding that the governments involved were working on a joint response.

In Nuuk, thousands of people, including the territory’s prime minister, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, waved Greenlandic flags, chanted slogans and sang traditional Inuit songs under light rain. Many wore caps with the words “Make America Go Away” - a riff on Trump’s “Make America Great Again” slogan.

“We don’t want Trump invading Greenland, that is the message,” 44-year-old nurse Paarniq Larsen Strum said at the Nuuk rally, calling the situation “nerve-wracking”.

“We demand respect for our country’s right to self-determination and for us as a people,” added protest organiser Avijaja Rosing-Olsen.

In Copenhagen, charity worker Kirsten Hjoernholm, 52, said it was important to show unity with Greenlanders.

“You cannot be bullied by an ally. It’s about international law,” she said. Around her, demonstrators waved the flags of Denmark and Greenland while chanting “Kalaallit Nunaat!” - the vast Arctic island’s name in Greenlandic.

Some also held placards saying “USA already has too much ICE,” referring to Trump’s deployment of federal immigration officers in US cities, while others chanted “Greenland is not for sale.”

Trump has repeatedly claimed that the Unit-

ed States needs Greenland for US “national security.” He also claims that Denmark is incapable of ensuring the territory’s security, notably from China and Russia. France said the military exercise in Greenland was designed to show the world that it will defend the territory.

Denmark said the US had been invited to join the drill. It was not immediately clear what authority the US president would invoke to impose the threatened tariffs of up to 25 percent.

Since returning to the presidency, Trump has unleashed sweeping tariffs on goods from virtually all trading partners, to address what Washington says are unfair trade practices and as a tool to press governments on US concerns.

Washington and the European Union struck a deal last summer to lower US tariffs on key European goods, with the deal currently being implemented.

Also on Saturday, US lawmakers were wrapping up a visit to Copenhagen for talks with Greenlandic and Danish politicians.

The group, led by Democratic Senator Chris Coons, told reporters that Trump’s stance was misguided and not backed by the majority of Americans. It is also roundly rejected by Greenlanders, 85 percent of whom - according to the latest poll published in January 2025 - oppose the territory joining the United States. Only six percent were in favour.

Swiss fire fatalities not given routine autopsies: lawyers

AFP
Geneva

The victims of the Swiss New Year fire disaster have not undergone routine autopsies to determine how they died, lawyers representing their families said Friday.

The January 1 fire at Le Constellation, a bar in the ski resort town of Crans-Montana, in Switzerland’s southwestern Wallis canton, killed 40 people, mostly teenagers, injuring 116 others.

“It is incomprehensible that autopsies were not ordered immediately,” lawyer Romain Jordan, who represents several victims’ families, told AFP.

“These are violent deaths, so the cause must be precisely established - fire, smoke, trampling, something else?” he said.

“It is also important to determine how much alcohol the victims had consumed,” he added.

Jean-Luc Addor, a lawyer representing the family of a teenager killed in the tragedy, told AFP: “This is not normal, because in cases of violent deaths, it should be standard procedure. It should have been done.”

In Switzerland, autopsies are ordered by the public prosecutor’s office.

As some funerals have already taken place, there is a risk that bodies that have not undergone a post-mortem examination would have to be exhumed.

Contacted by AFP, the Wallis public prosecutor’s office declined to comment on the issue of autopsies and exhumations.

On January 4, Addor asked the Wallis cantonal public prosecutor’s office to order a post-mortem examination on the teenager’s remains.

With the burial scheduled for January 14, Addor again contacted the prosecutor’s office on January 12, by which time the body had been released to the family.

The prosecutor’s office finally ordered a post-mortem, forcing the family to return the body and postpone the funeral. The teenager was eventually buried on Friday.

Italian concerns

Italy’s ambassador to Bern said none of the six Italian fatalities had undergone a post-mortem in Switzerland, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* newspaper reported on Friday.

In Italy, lawyer Alessandro Vaccaro, who represents the family of one of the victims, told

AFP on Friday that “the Rome public prosecutor’s office has requested that the bodies be made available so that autopsies can be performed”.

Prosecutors in Wallis believe the fire started when champagne bottles with sparklers attached were raised too close to sound insulation foam on the ceiling in the bar’s basement section.

But the investigation still needs to clarify several issues, such as whether the foam met safety standards, the functioning of emergency exits and whether there were fire extinguishers.

“This is not normal, because in cases of violent deaths, it should be standard procedure. It should have been done”

According to an Italian police report based on a January 4 visit to Crans-Montana by two of their forensic pathologists, of the 40 bodies, three were found outside.

Thirty-seven were found in the basement, with 34 of them “piled up at the bottom of the staircase” leading from the basement to the ground floor level of the bar.”

The wooden handrail had been pulled to the ground “by the weight of the bodies”.

The report, seen by AFP, said the Swiss authorities “did not order autopsies or other forensic examinations” of the bodies of the Italian victims, and “the death certificates issued do not indicate the cause of death”.

Bail decision

The bar’s French owners, husband and wife Jacques and Jessica Moretti, are under criminal investigation, facing charges of manslaughter by negligence, bodily harm by negligence and arson by negligence.

Jacques Moretti is being held in custody for an initial period of three months.

Wallis public prosecutors have set a bail amount of 200,000 Swiss francs (\$250,000), a source close to the case told AFP on Friday.

A tribunal court will take a decision on the amount, on a date yet to be fixed.

The Morettis’ lawyers hope a decision will be made “as soon as possible”, they told Switzerland’s domestic news agency Keystone-ATS on Friday.

Jessica Moretti remains free but is subject to certain restrictions.

German killed in Swiss avalanche, 4 other skiers hurt

A German man has been killed in an avalanche in the Swiss Alps and four other people were hurt as they were cross-country skiing, Swiss police said yesterday.

The incident happened on Friday, on the Piz Badus peak near the village of Tujetsch in the centre-south of the country. Police said a group of seven cross-country skiers were swept up in the avalanche, with five of them buried underneath. One member of the party raised the alarm in a phone call to local police, who deployed helicopters with rescue workers and dogs to the site. The German man was found lifeless under the snow and ice, the police said, adding that the four others hurt - whose nationalities were not given - suffered light injuries. —AFP

European Film Awards ceremony



Winner of the European Animated Feature Film Award, French director and illustrator Ugo Bienvenu, celebrates with the trophy during the European Film Awards ceremony in Berlin yesterday. (AFP)



QRCS pays tributes to volunteers of FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025

QNA
Doha

HE the President of the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), Yousef bin Ali al-Khater, has praised the efforts of volunteers who participated in the organisational measures of the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 matches, as well as their dedicated efforts and sincerity toward achieving successes and accomplishments.

This came during a QRCS-organised ceremony in honour of a contingent of volunteers and partners, in recognition of their pivotal role in ensuring a successful Arab tournament, following the colossal efforts they undertook in both organisational and field aspects, which contributed to the seamless progress of matches and side events.

Attending the ceremony was Maj Ghanem Mohammed al-Hudaifi, Assistant Commander of the Operations Unit of the Safety & Security Operations Committee (SSOC), who exchanged honours and shields with HE al-Khater in appreciation of the productive collaboration between the two sides. Al-Khater, for his part, expressed hope that this honoured image of volunteerism at QRCS would continue to expand regionally and globally, culminating in a tremendous model and school for preparing volunteers to operate in community and humanitarian fields.

He applauded the efforts undertaken by partners from the Ministry of Interior and the security committee for their massive con-



fidence, alongside the concerned officials in the General Secretariat and the Executive Apparatus.

Al-Khater further extended his gratitude to the Volunteering Department, noting that the path to achievement was hard and streamlined by ongoing collaboration and intensive communication, emphasising that success genuinely matched the effort. The ceremony showcased a primer that high-

lighted the role of volunteers in maintaining security and safety on the pitch, exactly according to the training provided under the supervision of the security committee.

This included various functions, such as organising spectators, following security instructions, initial intervention in contingency cases, as well as contributing to the preservation of sanitation and order. During the ceremony, the



child Osama Khaled Abu Armilah performed a volunteering anthem, followed by the launch of the "Fursan Volunteering" project, which was announced by Assistant Secretary-General for Volunteering and Local Development, Hussein Aman al-Ali, alongside Head of the Volunteering Department at QRCS, Sharifa Nasser al-Ruwahi.

Al-Ali highlighted that this project is a consequential step to broaden the volunteerism horizons and attract children and students as vital volunteers, noting that Osama was the first volunteer within this initiative. Al-Khater, accompanied by al-Ali, honoured partners and supporters from the Special Security Services Organisation Unit, alongside the leaders of the volunteer teams, the logistics team, and a variety of distinguished volunteers who performed exceptional tasks, as well as the administrative team that oversaw the performance and work of the volunteers.

The participation of QRCS in the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 underscores the significance of volunteerism in supporting sporting events and key national platforms,



promoting a culture of giving and community engagement, while also providing young people with the opportunity to internalise experience and hone skills in the organisation and management of sporting events.

The volunteers were co-opted through multiple stages, beginning with the reception of volunteering applications, their screening, and oral examinations, followed by the training and qualification phase, which is still ongoing, culminating in the final list of leaders, supervisors, and field teams, which included 3,700 volunteers, ahead of this key Arab sporting event.

An accredited training team from the Special Security Services Organisation Unit supervised the delivery of specialised training programmes, covering essential knowledge and skills related to crowd management, security and safety guidance, enhancing alertness, security awareness, rapid decision-making, problem-solving, and teamwork, among other topics.

Volunteers receive both theoretical and practical training to ensure effective handling of all aspects of organisation, security, and safety on the pitch and in the spectator areas.

Each marathon is a lesson in life, resilience, says British Paralympian

By Shaima Sherif
Staff Reporter

British Paralympian Richard Whitehead MBE recently took to the stage at the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo, where he shared an inspiring account of his experiences at the event. Speaking to *Gulf Times*, Whitehead emphasised the importance of inclusivity in sports, highlighting how such platforms create a sense of belonging and community spirit among participants.

Whitehead also spoke about the transformative power of sport, illustrating how it empowers individuals to conquer personal challenges and work together to overcome obstacles. "I've said this a lot while I've been here, but it's truly an honour to be in Doha. The hospitality, the people, the energy — it's all been incredible. But more importantly, it's a platform to share my philosophy around sport. It's not just about my success. It's about passing that on to young people and the community," he said.

Whitehead, who runs with prosthetic legs following a double through-knee amputation, spoke warmly about the youth races that opened the weekend. "Thursday's young people's race was fantastic. All the energy, all the smiles — it really set the tone for some amazing running over the weekend. Then, yesterday, sharing my performance with 20,000 other people is something I'll always remember," he said.

For him, marathons are more than competitions — they are life lessons. "We often look at obstacles and say, 'Running isn't for me,' or 'This will take too much hard work.' But if we take one positive step forward, whether we're 10 or 70, man or woman, we can all improve. Marathon running is like life: it's full of challenges, but with support and guidance, you can overcome them and grow stronger," he emphasised.

Whitehead reflected on the first marathon that changed his perspective. "In my first marathon in New York in 2004, I didn't realise how impactful it would be. It was tough, yes, but taking on that challenge helped me grow. Sport showed me that no matter our circumstances, anything is possible," he said.

He also spoke candidly about inclusivity and representation. "The biggest challenges I've faced aren't always physical. Often, they come from the barriers other people place in front of you. Educating society about celebrating difference, ensuring opportunities for everyone, and giving every person their own 'gold medal moment' — that's what's important," he pointed out.

According to Whitehead, the diversity in Doha struck a chord with him. "On Friday, families were running 10Ks with pushchairs, young people with autism were taking part, and there were experienced marathoners alongside first-timers. That's what I



British Paralympian Richard Whitehead MBE.

love about running — diversity. Through sport, we connect, relate, and inspire each other, even without speaking the same language or sharing the same background," he said.

He said: "I want to leave a legacy here in Doha, to mentor and support young people, and to show hard-to-reach communities that it's possible. Every first step is the hardest, but each one leads to growth, discipline, and hope. Sport can open doors, teach resilience, and empower people to be better — not just for themselves, but for their communities."

"Believing is achieving. By showing up, sharing your journey, and taking those steps, you inspire others. Seeing the joy on young faces, the smiles of families — it has a ripple effect. That's the real power of sport," said Whitehead, adding that the Doha Marathon wasn't just a race, but a stage to educate, inspire, and leave a lasting impact — showing everyone, regardless of ability, that with determination and support, anything truly is possible.



Students set to return for Shell Eco-marathon at Lusail Circuit

THE countdown has begun as students from across Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa prepare to arrive for the second edition of Shell Eco-marathon in Qatar.

The event, hosted under the patronage of HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums, in collaboration with Qatar Auto Museum, will take place from January 21-25 at Lusail International Circuit (LIC) and continues to mark a significant milestone in the region's commitment to innovation and sustainability.

Rob Maxwell, managing director of Shell Companies Qatar, said: "We are thrilled to welcome Shell Eco-marathon back to Qatar for its 2026 edition. This event brings together some of the brightest young minds from around the world to showcase their ingenuity and passion for energy efficiency."

"Lusail International Circuit will once again provide the perfect stage for these talented students to push the boundaries of innovation and demonstrate what is possible in sustainable mobility." Shell Eco-marathon is a global academic programme that challenges student teams to design and build energy-efficient vehicles capable of travelling the farthest distance using the least amount of energy. The programme aims to inspire future scientists and engineers to develop solutions for a more sustainable energy future. Student teams will compete in two vehicle categories: Urban Concept and Prototype. Urban Concept vehicles resemble passenger vehicles with familiar road features, while Prototype vehicles are ultra-lightweight and designed for maximum efficiency.

The vehicles use one of three energy classes: internal combustion engine, battery electric, or



hydrogen fuel cell. Teams employ advanced engineering techniques, aerodynamics, lightweight materials and innovative designs to maximise efficiency.

Beyond technical excellence, Shell Eco-marathon fosters collaboration, teamwork and problem-solving, providing a platform for young innovators to showcase their creativity and commitment to sustainability. Through Shell Eco-marathon, Shell continues to inspire and support the next generation of engineers, scientists and innovators in their pursuit of sustainable solutions.

Shell Eco-marathon Qatar 2026 is made possible through the valuable support of both local and in-

ternational sponsors and partners. Locally, Qatar Museums, Qatar Auto Museum, Qatar Airways, Seashore, and Rayyan Water play a prominent role in supporting the students and the event, while Lusail International Circuit, Qatar's premier motorsport and entertainment destination, will be hosting it.

Key global technical partners, such as Southwest Research Institute and Schmid Elektronik, provide critical engineering expertise and technical systems that underpin the competition, while partners including Havas Media and Ansys, part of Synopsys, support the programme through communications, analysis and technology platforms.