

News in brief

◆ **The United States should pressure Russia** by “carrying out some sort of operation” to remove Chechen head Ramzan Kadyrov from power, just like it did with Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday. In comments to journalists, Zelensky said the operation to remove Maduro showed that Washington had the power to influence Moscow if it really wished, arguing that deposing Kadyrov would make Russian President Vladimir Putin “think twice” about his ongoing offensive on Ukraine. US special forces snatched Maduro and his wife from Caracas last Saturday, shocking Washington’s allies and drawing condemnation from Venezuela’s partner Moscow. Kadyrov, the leader of Russia’s Muslim-majority region of Chechnya since 2007, is one of Putin’s most vocal supporters and sent thousands of soldiers to fight in Ukraine.



US should topple Chechen leader after Maduro, Zelensky says

◆ **Iran clashes during protests kill two people, wound 30: local media**

◆ **Clashes in southwest Iran** yesterday killed two people and wounded 30, the Fars news agency said on the 11th day of a wave of protests in the Islamic republic. Fars reported that shopkeepers were protesting in Lordergan when “rioters began throwing stones at the police”. “Among them, there were individuals with military and hunting weapons who suddenly opened fire on the police,” Fars added, without specifying whether those killed were police officers or protesters.

◆ **Hamas officials** told AFP that search operations for the remains of the last Israeli hostage held in Gaza resumed yesterday after a two-week pause due to bad weather. Israel has previously said it is awaiting the return of Ran Gvili’s body before beginning talks on the second phase of the fragile ceasefire agreement with Hamas which came into effect in October. A Hamas official told AFP that the Palestinian Islamist movement’s armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, “accompanied by Red Cross teams, are resuming today search operations for the body of the last Israeli captive in the Zeitun neighbourhood in southeastern Gaza City.” Another official said that search operations had been suspended over the past two weeks due to stormy weather and heavy rain, which had prevented excavators and other machinery from reaching Zeitun. “The search operations resumed today, and we hope to recover the body to close the exchange file,” the official added, urging pressure on Israel to complete the first stage of the ceasefire agreement and open the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt.

Hamas says search resumes for last Israeli hostage body in Gaza



SPOTLIGHT

‘Never expected this’: Creator of viral AI Maduro image comes forward

AFP | Washington, United States

The man who created an AI-generated image of Nicolas Maduro that went viral has come forward, telling AFP he was shocked the fake racked up millions of views online.

The image depicting Maduro flanked by US forces exploded across social media after Washington seized the Venezuelan leader and his wife in a raid on Caracas on Saturday. Many posts called it the first photo of Maduro in custody.

But the X user who first posted the image, who goes by Ian Weber and describes himself as an “AI video art enthusiast” based in Spain, told AFP in an exclusive interview that he used Nano Banana Pro, an image generator within Google’s Gemini, to create it.

“I never expected this to become the most shared picture worldwide,” he said Tuesday in a series of direct messages on X, where his account has fewer than 100 followers.

As the news broke, Weber gave the image generator a simple prompt, according to a screenshot of the chat shared with AFP. Translated from Spanish, it read: “Nicolas Maduro detained by American assault forces. Put granular photo.” He cropped out the Gemini watermark and posted the result on X within 20 minutes of US President Donald



Representative image

Trump announcing the operation on Truth Social.

“I just wanted to see if an account on X with fewer than 78 followers at the time could make a picture go viral organically,” he told AFP.

Almost immediately, it did. Weber watched as users asked Grok, Elon Musk’s AI tool, to verify the image. In some cases, the chatbot responded that it was authentic.

Prominent accounts misrepresented the image, and further manipulated versions soon spread online.

“That was when the avalanche began,” Weber said. “Everyone was suddenly desperate to publish the first picture of his arrest.”

AFP and other news agencies quickly debunked the fake, noting that Gemini said it contained a SynthID, an invisible watermark attached to AI content created using Google’s tools.

Trump says doubts ‘NATO would be there for us’ if needed

US leader added that the NATO member countries are “all my friends”

● **Russia and China have “zero fear of NATO” without the United States**

AFP | Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump, whose renewed threats to seize Greenland from NATO member Denmark have rattled the transatlantic alliance, said yesterday he doubted allies would “be there for us if we really needed them.”

“We will always be there for NATO, even if they won’t be there for us,” he wrote on his Truth Social platform, a day after the White House said it was not ruling out military intervention to acquire Greenland.

In his post, Trump repeated his frequent assertion that many members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had failed to meet military spending commitments until he intervened.

“The USA was, foolishly, paying for them! I, respectfully, got them to 5% GDP, AND THEY PAY, immediately,” he wrote.

But the US leader added that the NATO member countries are “all my friends.”

Trump, who has cast himself



A tourist looks at the statue of Hans Egede (1686-1758), a Dano-Norwegian Lutheran missionary, in Nuuk, Greenland

as a global peacemaker, also touched on a personal grievance.

“I single-handedly ENDED 8 WARS, and Norway, a NATO Member, foolishly chose not to give me the Noble Peace Prize,” he said, misspelling the name of the prestigious award that instead went to Venezuelan op-

position leader Maria Corina Machado.

Trump concluded by saying that Russia and China have “zero fear of NATO” without the United States as part of the alliance.

“The only Nation that China and Russia fear and respect is the

DJT REBUILT U.S.A.” he said, referring to himself by his initials.

Trump’s designs on the mineral-rich, self-governing Danish territory of Greenland has set off alarm bells among European NATO members, who see such a move as an existential threat to the alliance.

Trump weighs military option to acquire Greenland

AFP | Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump is discussing options including military action to take control of Greenland, the White House said Tuesday, upping tensions that Denmark warns could destroy the NATO alliance.

Trump has stepped up his designs on the mineral-rich, self-governing Danish territory in the arctic since the US military seized Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro last weekend.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said that “acquiring Greenland is a national security priority” for Trump to deter US adversaries like Russia and China. “The president and his team are discussing a range of options to pursue this important foreign policy goal, and of course, utilizing the US military is always an option at the commander in chief’s disposal,” she said in a statement to AFP.

The Wall Street Journal reported Secretary of State Marco Rubio told lawmakers that Trump’s preferred option is to buy Greenland from Denmark, adding the threats did not signal an imminent invasion.

Denmark has warned any move to take Greenland by force would mean “everything would



This aerial view shows snow-covered buildings in Nuuk, Greenland

stop,” including NATO and 80 years of close transatlantic security links.

Any US military action against Greenland would effectively collapse NATO, since the alliance’s Article Five pledges that member states will defend any of their number that come under attack.

Greenland’s Foreign Minister Vivian Motzfeldt wrote on social media that they’d sought a meeting with Rubio throughout 2025 but “it has so far not been possible.” Denmark’s Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said meeting Rubio should “clear up certain misunderstandings.”

And Greenland Prime Minister

Jens-Frederik Nielsen insisted that the island was not for sale, and only its 57,000 people should decide its future.

‘Not acceptable’

Allies have rallied around Denmark and Greenland while simultaneously trying not to antagonize Trump.

The leaders of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain joined Denmark in a statement on Tuesday saying they would defend the “universal principles” of “sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders.”

French President Emmanuel

Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer both sought to play down the row as they attended Ukraine peace talks in Paris alongside Trump’s envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner.

“I cannot imagine a scenario in which the United States of America would be placed in a position to violate Danish sovereignty,” Macron said. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said Wednesday he believed the US was committed to NATO, but he suggested European leaders were prepared to strike back against potential US “intimidation.”



Greenland is the world’s largest island – covering about 2.17 million square kilometres – and more than 80 per cent of it is covered by an ice sheet, making its icy expanse second only to Antarctica’s in size