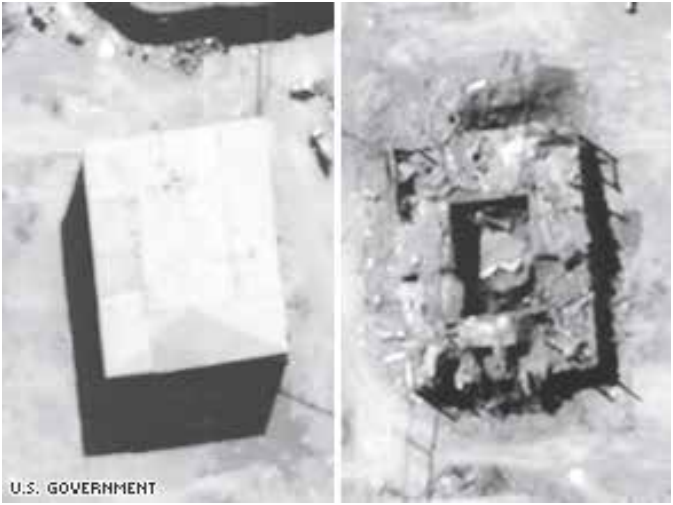


Secret Assad-era Syrian nuclear reactor was almost complete: UN



AFP | Vienna, Austria

A near-complete nuclear reactor built secretly during the rule of toppled Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad would have been able to produce material to make nuclear weapons, the UN nuclear watchdog chief said yesterday.

Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) last month visited two sites, one in Deir Ezzor and a second undisclosed location identified to them by Syrian authorities.

In a report seen by AFP last week, the IAEA said it found that Syria's previous government was building a nuclear reactor.

Assad was toppled in December 2024 and the current Islamist government came to power.

IAEA head Rafael Grossi said it was "obvious that the previ-

ous government was pursuing a number of clandestine" activities.

"They didn't want the world to know what they were doing," he told reporters after opening the Vienna-based agency's quarterly board of governors meeting.

"Given the configuration, the technical features of that type of reactor, this is a reactor that is very efficient in the production of fissile material that could be used directly for the fabrication of nuclear weapons," he said, adding that building the reactor was a "very important step".

He said the reactor -- which is currently being excavated -- "was almost completed".

It was "very possible... that the then Syrian authorities also performed some explosions in order to... hinder any possibility of an investigation," he added.

Russia orders German consulate in Saint Petersburg to close



The Russian consulate general is pictured in Bonn-Bad Godesberg, Germany

AFP | Moscow, Russia

Russia yesterday ordered the German consulate in Saint Petersburg be shut, giving diplomats until September 18 to leave the country and demanding the employees of Germany's Goethe Institute -- which it closed last week -- exit by the end of the week.

Moscow-Berlin ties -- already massively tense since Russia's Ukraine offensive -- spiralled further last week, with Germany accusing Russia of orchestrating a drone attack on Leipzig airport.

Germany last week shut Russia's consulate in Bonn and Moscow's cultural centre in Berlin.

Russia's foreign ministry said in a statement it was "revoking its consent to the operation of the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany in Saint Petersburg."

It said the consulate "must cease its work no later than September 18, 2026 and all of its staff must leave the Russian Federation no later than that date."

It said Goethe Institute employees must leave by September 13.

Rescue operations end after Delhi building collapse kills seven

AFP | New Delhi, India

Indian rescuers pulled at least a dozen people out of the rubble of a collapsed building in New Delhi before ending operations yesterday, police said, a day after seven people were killed when the five-sto-

rey block crashed down.

"The rescue operations have been completed by the agencies," Delhi police said in a statement.

India's National Disaster Response Force said it had pulled 12 people from the site, six of whom were deceased.

US average diesel price rises to record \$5.90 a gallon: AAA

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Average diesel prices in the United States climbed to a new record yesterday, the motorists' association AAA said, as damage to Gulf refineries during the war against Iran disrupted supplies.

The price of the fuel largely used in road hauling, agriculture and construction hit \$5.9015, the AAA said, around 30 cents higher than the average just one week earlier.

Steep fuel price increases since the US and Isra-



el launched attacks on Iran six months ago are putting pressure on President Donald Trump ahead of midterm congressional elections in November.

He has vowed to tackle higher costs of living but the ongoing war against Tehran has severely impacted tanker shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, sending fuel prices higher across the board.

Diesel cost just \$3.71 on average a year ago, and the higher prices are squeezing farmers and truckers, which could be forced to pass on the increases to consumers.

Average prices for regulator gasoline stood at \$4.15 a gallon on Monday -- when millions of Americans typically travel by car for the Labor Day holiday.

That is up from \$3.20 on average a year ago. In western US states prices are even higher, with regular gas costing \$5.86 in California and \$4.54 in Arizona, the AAA said.

Trump suggests renaming New Mexico state 'New America'

AFP | Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump's name-changing spree found an unlikely new target yesterday when he suggested the state of New Mexico could become "New America."

His proposal, which was immediately dismissed by the state's governor, comes days after he signed an order to rename Lake Ontario as "Lake America" in the middle of a trade war with neighboring Canada.

"Many people suggested changing the name of New Mexico... to NEW AMERICA," the Republican president posted on social media. "So much more prestigious and beautiful for the people of that State. Wow, I Love It!!!"

The White House reposted an image showing the Mexico part of the state's name crossed out

and replaced with "America."

Some US media reports said the idea originated as an internet hoax.

State governor Michelle Lujan Grisham told Fox News that the name "isn't up for debate -- it's been ours since before the United States existed."

She said the president wanted to "distract Americans" from issues such as soaring gas prices.

Trump last week suggested renaming the Strait of Hormuz as "Trump Strait" as the war with Iran continues -- then hours later implied he was not serious about the plan.

He renamed the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America" on his first day back in the White House in 2025 in a move rejected by Mexico.



Israel says will continue to 'remove threats' after strikes on Lebanon

● The Israeli military said it had struck Hezbollah "infrastructure sites" across southern Lebanon

● In a separate statement, it said it killed a Hezbollah member in the area of the Beaufort fortress

● Israeli forces are operating inside a self-declared "security zone" around 10 kilometres (six miles) deep inside Lebanon along the border.

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

Israel's military said yesterday it was committed to the ceasefire but would continue to "remove threats" from Hezbollah, after the Lebanese health ministry reported 12 people killed in overnight strikes.

The Israeli military said it had struck Hezbollah "infrastructure sites" across southern Lebanon in response to the launch of two explosive drones towards its



An excavator digs as rescuers search for survivors amidst the rubble following an overnight Israeli airstrike on the village of Kfar Roummame in southern Lebanon

Israeli rubble-clearing in Gaza could erase 'atrocities crimes' evidence: UN expert

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

A UN expert warned yesterday that large-scale rubble removal in parts of Gaza under Israeli control risked erasing traces of "atrocities crimes", and preventing the recovery and identification of human remains.

Francesca Albanese, the United Nations special rapporteur on the Palestinian territories, warned in a statement that the implications of Israel's "ongoing removal, crushing and relocation of rubble in Gaza" were "profound".

"Gaza's rubble contains human remains and physical evidence relevant to the investigation of alleged international crimes, including genocide," she said, pointing to estimates from Palestinian authorities that more than 10,000 people remain buried under the debris in the war-ravaged Palestinian enclave.

The Italian-born independent expert has faced harsh criticism from Israel and some of its allies over her long-standing accusations that Israel is committing genocide and other war crimes against Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

Albanese, who was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2022 but who does not speak on behalf of the United Nations, said she had received credible information from multiple sources last month of "deliberate and widespread removal, crushing and transport of rubble".

In the devastated, Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory, "rubble is not just construction waste", the expert insisted. "It is part of a crime scene, a graveyard, and the material record of what happened during a brutal and senseless bombing campaign that lasted two years."

troops, as well as "several terrorists" it said were transferring weapons.

In a separate statement, it said it killed a Hezbollah member in the area of the Beaufort fortress who opened fire on its troops from inside a building, and that "during the close-quarters encounter, two IDF soldiers were lightly injured".

Eleven of the victims in the overnight strikes, which included two children and four women, died in one attack on a building in Kfar Rumman, the Lebanese health ministry said.

An AFP photographer saw the three-story building completely destroyed.

"The claim that several involved individuals were harmed as a result of the strikes is being reviewed," the Israeli military said, adding that the it "will continue to operate to remove threats while remaining committed to the ceasefire agreement".

Violence has decreased since a US-Iran memorandum of understanding on the broader regional conflict in June and an Israel-Lebanon framework agreement later that month.

Israeli forces are operating inside a self-declared "security zone" around 10 kilometres (six miles) deep inside Lebanon along the border.

On Thursday, Israel announced it had taken control of the Ali Taher ridge, which had served as a strategic position for Hezbollah in the Nabatiyeh governorate. The Lebanese movement has not confirmed the statement.

On Sunday, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun urged Washington and the international community to help stop Israeli attacks.

Fresh talks are expected this month between Lebanese and Israeli officials, although no date has yet been announced.



More than 340,000 people remain displaced in southern Lebanon, while around 80 public schools are being used as shelters as the conflict continues.