

# Nuuk, Copenhagen mull Greenland independence in Trump's shadow

AFP | Copenhagen, Denmark

Greenland hopes to cut all ties with Copenhagen, but leaders are proceeding cautiously with independence plans for the Danish self-governing territory despite US President Donald Trump's threats to take over the Arctic island.

Trump has repeatedly claimed that the United States needs Greenland for its national security, while Denmark and Greenland have stressed the island is not for sale and that Greenlanders themselves must decide their own future.

"We have an agreement with our Greenland fellow citizens that they decide their future in freedom, based on their own assessments and their own will," Danish historian and former diplomat Bo Lidegaard told AFP.

"For us, it's a violation of everything we stand for, and everything we have agreed with the Greenlanders, if that decision is not taken in freedom and without coercion."

It is therefore out of the question to succumb to US

pressure and sell a territory that has repeatedly said it does not want to be bought.

But for Denmark, it is also out of the question to hold onto the vast Arctic island at any cost.

Greenland was a Danish colony until 1953, gaining home rule 26 years later.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has called Greenland's independence drive "both legitimate and understandable", but stressed that she herself wants to develop the Danish kingdom, which in addition to Greenland also includes the Faroe Islands.

"This is not the time for internal debates. This is the time for unity and for continuing to build the community we know," echoed Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen on Tuesday.

Ole Waever, a political science professor at the University of Copenhagen, told AFP that "in modern times in the Nordic countries, if a territory wants to secede and become independent, it must be authorised to do so".

"Whether it was Norway in 1905 (which broke free of a union with Sweden) or Iceland in 1944 (which declared independence from Denmark), there has never been a civil war."

## 'Very difficult'

In the streets of Copenhagen, Danes are fine with Greenland separating from Denmark as soon as it feels ready.

"It's okay for them to be independent," said Charlotte Moltke, a 68-year-old pensioner.

"But I think it will be very difficult for such a small country for the time being ... on their own, when they know a big country like the US wants them," she added.

On the eve of high-stakes Greenland talks at the White House, the territory's prime minister said that if Greenland had to make a choice right now between remaining part of Denmark or becoming part of the United States, "we choose Denmark".

A roadmap for Greenland's independence

was laid out in a 2009 Self-Government Act adopted by the Danish parliament.

"We are smarter than the Brits. We don't do a Brexit and then afterwards try to find out what it means. The arrangement is clear," smiled Waever, referring to the UK's acrimonious pull-out from the European Union.

Article 21 of the act stipulates that if the Greenlandic people decide to seek independence, negotiations must begin between the governments in Nuuk and Copenhagen.

At the heart of the thorny talks would be the question of the subsidies that Denmark gives Greenland each year -- currently some 4.5 billion kroner (\$703 million), equivalent to around a fifth of Greenland's GDP.

Any independence agreement reached between Copenhagen and Nuuk has to be approved by both parliaments and endorsed by a referendum in Greenland, according to the act.

## Fragile economy

A sovereign Greenland would have to solve the major question of its economy.

The island is almost entirely dependent on fisheries and will have to contend with the consequences of an ageing population, according to a recent report from Denmark's central bank.

"I don't think they're in a place where they can be economically independent. But if they want to try, sure, go for it. It's not up to us to decide," said Joachim Ziegler, a 24-year-old student.

While a large majority of Greenlanders are in favour of independence, most do not support the idea of a swift secession.

This is even though the sole opposition party, Naleraq, campaigned on such a platform in the 2025 legislative elections and won 24.5 percent of the vote.

Naleraq has lunged at the opportunity to push for a speedy breakaway.

"I find it distasteful. What is happening is awful right now and they're using the situation to get independence," Inger Olsvig Brandt, an entrepreneur in Nuuk, told AFP.

At the political level, the current coalition government, backed by 75 percent of votes in the 2025 election, has been working on a more gradual plan for independence, based on a draft constitution from 2024.

"No self-respecting Greenlandic politicians up until a year ago would state that he would rather stay within the Kingdom of Denmark and it's very difficult to go back," said Mikaela Engell, a Greenland specialist and former Danish representative on the island.

"But it's first an internal discussion in Greenland," she said.



## How AI 'deepfakes' became Elon Musk's latest scandal

AFP | Paris, France

Elon Musk's company xAI has faced global backlash in recent days over sexualised "deepfake" images of women and children created by its Grok chatbot.

Here are the essential facts about the scandal, how governments have responded and the company's attempts to cool the controversy.

'Put her in a bikini'

Grok -- Musk's version of the chatbots also offered by OpenAI and other generative AI companies -- has its own account on the X social network allowing users to interact with it.

Until last week, users could tag the bot in posts to request image generation and editing, receiving the image in a reply from Grok.

Many took advantage of the service by sending Grok photos of women or tagging the bot in replies to women's photo posts.

They would ask it to "put her in a bikini" or "take her clothes off" -- receiving photorealistic altered images in response.

Such AI-powered nonconsensual "nudifying" services had previously been available on niche websites, but Grok became the first to take it mainstream with social media integration and offer it for free.

Outrage grew as some users were discovered generating sexualised images of children and minors.



A poster featuring an image of US billionaire and businessman Elon Musk, calling for users of his X social media platform to delete their accounts due to the AI chatbot Grok's image-creation feature, is pictured installed in a bus stop by activists from UK collective 'Everyone Hates Elon', in London

Still others used the tool to generate bikini images of women killed in the deadly New Year fire at Swiss ski resort Crans-Montana, as well as the woman shot and killed by an immigration officer in Minneapolis.

Last week, an analysis of more than 20,000 Grok-generated images by Paris non-profit AI Forensics found that more than half depicted "individuals in minimal attire" -- most of them

women, and two percent appearing to be under-18s.

## How have countries reacted?

Indonesia on Saturday became the first country to block access to Grok entirely, with neighbouring Malaysia following on Sunday.

India said Sunday that X had removed thousands of posts and hundreds of user accounts in response to its complaints.

Speaking on condition of an-

onymity, a government source told AFP 3,500 posts and 600 accounts had been removed.

Britain's Ofcom media regulator -- which can fine companies up to 10 percent of global revenue -- said Monday it was opening a probe into whether X failed to comply with UK law over the sexual images.

"If X cannot control Grok, we will -- and we'll do it fast," British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told MPs from his Labour Party.

France's commissioner for children Sarah El Hairy said Tuesday she had referred Grok's generated images to French prosecutors, the Arcom media regulator and the European Union.

Digital affairs minister Anne Le Henanff had earlier called the restriction of image creation to paying users "insufficient and hypocritical".

And the European Commission, which acts as the EU's digital watchdog, has ordered X to retain all internal documents and data related to Grok until the end of 2026 in response to the uproar.

The bloc has already been investigating X over potential breaches of its digital content rules since 2023.

"We will not be outsourcing child protection and consent to Silicon Valley," Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said Monday.

"If they don't act, we will."

## How did the company respond?

"We take action against illegal content... including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) by removing it, permanently suspending accounts, and working with local governments and law enforcement," X's safety team posted on January 4.

Musk himself said last week that anyone using Grok to "make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they

upload illegal content".

But he made light of the controversy in a separate post, adding laughing emojis as he reshared to his 232 million followers on X a post featuring a toaster wrapped in a bikini.

By January 9, Grok began responding to all requests for image generation or editing by saying the service was restricted to paying subscribers.

Musk has also fired back at politicians demanding action.

Critics of X and Grok "just want to suppress free speech" Musk posted on January 10.



Grok is named after a term from a 1961 science-fiction novel (*Stranger in a Strange Land*), where "to grok" means to understand something so deeply that you almost become one with it -- a fitting name for an artificial intelligence designed to deeply grasp context, not just facts.