

More than 38,000 women, girls killed in Gaza war by end of 2025: UN

AFP | Geneva

Over 38,000 women and girls were killed in the Gaza war by the end of 2025, the UN estimated yesterday, amounting to over half of the 71,000 deaths recorded by the territory's health ministry.

"Between October 2023 and December 2025, more than 38,000 women and girls were killed in Gaza -- the result of Israeli air bombardment and land military operations," the UN Women agency's spokeswoman Sofia Calltorp told a press briefing in Geneva.

"This includes over 22,000 women and 16,000 girls, amounting to an average of at least 47 women and girls killed every day."

"On top of a staggering death toll, nearly 11,000 women and girls in Gaza have sustained injuries so devastating that they survive only with life-long disabilities," said Calltorp.

British PM says 'furious' after fresh revelations over sacked US envoy



Peter Mandelson

AFP | London

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday he was "furious" after it emerged his sacked US ambassador Peter Mandelson was appointed despite failing security vetting, as the scandal again threatens his hold on power.

The beleaguered British leader, who has been dogged for months by the controversy, claimed he and other ministers were not told Mandelson had failed the vetting process, branding that "unforgivable".

Starmer has faced repeated calls to quit since his 2024 decision to appoint Mandelson as Britain's top diplomat in Washington backfired spectacularly over the envoy's longstanding ties to late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Trump signals Iran deal near, hails 'brilliant day for world'

US president claims major progress on Hormuz and nuclear negotiations

● **Talks in Pakistan ongoing**

● **US blockade still enforced**

AFP | Washington

US President Donald Trump signaled yesterday that an Iran peace deal was all but done, trumpeting agreements on the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran's nuclear program.

In a rapid-fire stream of social media posts, Trump hailed a "GREAT AND BRILLIANT DAY FOR THE WORLD!" but without specifically announcing a deal with Iran.

The celebratory tone continued with a series of shout-outs to mediator Pakistan and Gulf allies -- and a rebuke to NATO to "STAY AWAY" as he rejected an offer from the Western alliance to help secure the strait. Iran had earlier said it was opening the Hormuz strait for the duration of a Middle East ceasefire.

"Iran has agreed to never close the Strait of Hormuz again. It will no longer be used as a weapon against the World," Trump said in one of around a dozen posts on his Truth Social network.

Touting further progress towards a deal, Trump also said that Iran was removing sea mines from the strait, with US help.

The US leader had earlier said "THANK YOU!" to Iran over the Hormuz reopening, while insist-



Despite reports suggesting a \$20 billion exchange for Iran's enriched uranium, President Trump used social media to vehemently deny that any money would change hands, referring to the material as "Nuclear Dust."

ing that an American blockade of Iranian ports would remain in "full force" until completion of a peace deal.

"This process should go very quickly in that most of the points are already negotiated," Trump said yesterday.

US-Iran talks led by Vice President JD Vance last weekend in Pakistan failed to produce a deal, but Trump has repeatedly hinted that a breakthrough was close.

He had said Thursday that Iran had agreed to give up its uranium stockpile, that a second round of talks in Islamabad was likely, and that he himself might go to Pakistan to sign an eventual deal.

Yesterday, Trump again talked up the likelihood of a nuclear deal while insisting that no money would change hands after an

Axios report that Washington was considering a \$20 billion cash-for-uranium exchange.

"The U.S.A. will get all Nuclear 'Dust,' created by our great B2 Bombers - No money will exchange hands in any way, shape, or form," Trump said in another post.

Trump meanwhile also talked up a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon.

Referring to a possible Iran deal, Trump added: "This deal is not tied, in any way, to Lebanon, but we will, MAKE LEBANON GREAT AGAIN!"

Trump's hints at a deal continued as he thanked Pakistan's "fantastic" Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and powerful army chief Asim Munir for brokering the Iran negotiations.



Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (4thL), British Prime Minister Keir Starmer (C-L), French President Emmanuel Macron (C-R) and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (6thR) attend an international summit on efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz at the Elysee Palace in Paris

France, UK to lead Hormuz mission

Multinational force to escort ships and clear mines but awaits hostilities end

● **Over dozen countries pledge assets**

● **Mission awaits full regional peace**

● **US and Iran absent from talks**

AFP | Paris

France and Britain said yesterday they will lead a multinational mission to ensure freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, while emphasising the force would be entirely defensive -- and only deployed once a peace in the region was agreed.

"I can confirm that, along with France, the UK will lead a multinational mission to protect freedom of navigation as soon as conditions allow," British Prime Minister Starmer said after co-chairing a meeting in Paris

on the issue alongside French



The proposed multinational mission is specifically designed to be defensive, focusing on reassuring commercial shipping and performing mine clearance operations only after a formal cessation of hostilities has been reached in the region

President Emmanuel Macron.

The event brought together over 30 other heads of state and government, most of them main-

ly attending by video link. Neither the United States nor Iran participated.

"This will be strictly peaceful and defensive as a mission to reassure commercial shipping and support mine clearance," said Starmer, adding that "over a dozen countries have already offered to contribute assets".

As the Paris talks were being held, Iran announced that the key shipping route would be open to commercial vessels as long as a ceasefire in the Middle East lasts.

US President Donald Trump responded by saying his navy's blockade just outside the Strait of Hormuz of ships going to or from Iranian ports remains "in full force and effect".

Iran imposed its blockade on the Strait of Hormuz -- a critical shipping bottleneck through which 20 percent of the world's oil passes in peacetime -- immediately after the US and Israel launched their war against the Islamic republic on February 28.

Trump followed up with his US



I can confirm that, along with France, the UK will lead a multinational mission to protect freedom of navigation as soon as conditions allow. This will be strictly peaceful and defensive as a mission to reassure commercial shipping and support mine clearance. Over a dozen countries have already offered to contribute assets

KEIR STARMER

Navy blockade of vessels visiting Iranian ports after April 11-12 talks aimed at failed to yield any breakthrough.

The Paris talks' participants welcomed Tehran's announce-

ment of the strait's reopening, but urged a "full, unconditional reopening by all the parties", Macron said.

He said the announcement made the multinational mission "all the more important because it is what will allow these announcements to be consolidated in the short term and, above all, to have a chance of lasting."

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who also attended the meeting in person, emphasised that such a force would need to await a "cessation of hostilities" but added: "Italy is ready to participate".

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said in Paris it would be "desirable" to have US participation in any mission.

Merz said Germany would "take part in the further military planning discussions that are taking place, and we would also welcome, if possible, the participation of the United States of America".