

News in brief

◆ **The death toll from** mall fire in Pakistan's biggest city rose to at least 55 people on Thursday, with rescuers in Karachi still searching for more missing in the devastating inferno. Investigators are yet to announce what caused the fire, five days after the blaze gutted the three-storey Gul Plaza. "A total of 55 bodies have been recovered since Saturday night," said Javed Nabi Khoso, deputy commissioner of Karachi's southern district. Families have criticised the slow pace of the recovery operation, with more than 50 giving DNA samples in the hope of finding their missing relatives. "We will hand over the bodies to the family, once DNA samples are matched," health official Summaiya Syed told journalists on Wednesday. Faraz Ali, whose father and 26-year-old brother were inside the mall, told AFP he wants "the bodies to be recovered and handed over to their rightful families".



Death toll in Pakistan mall fire rises to at least 55

Japan suspends restart of world's biggest nuclear plant

◆ **The restart** of the world's largest nuclear power plant was suspended in Japan yesterday, with the operator saying it does not know when the problem would be solved. The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata province had been closed since the 2011 Fukushima disaster, but operations to relaunch it had begun on Wednesday after it received the final green light from the nuclear regulator. However, its operator the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) said Thursday that "an alarm from the monitoring system... sounded during the reactor startup procedures", causing it to suspend operations. "We don't expect this to be solved within a day or two. There is no telling at the moment how long it will take," site superintendent Takeyuki Inagaki told a news conference. "We will for now fully focus on trying to identify the cause of what happened," he said.

◆ **Talks to end** the war in Ukraine have made "a lot of progress" and are "down to one issue" between Kyiv and Moscow, US special envoy Steve Witkoff said on Thursday ahead of a trip to Russia. "I think we've got it down to one issue, and we have discussed iterations of that issue, and that means it's solvable. So if both sides want to solve this, we're going to get it solved," Witkoff said at a Ukrainian event on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. Asked by AFP for details about the remaining issue, Witkoff declined to comment, saying he would talk after his trip. President Donald Trump's envoy will travel to the Russian capital later on Thursday with the US leader's son-in-law Jared Kushner. Witkoff said the pair would not stay in the Russian capital overnight and would fly straight to Abu Dhabi, where talks would continue in "military to military" working groups. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in December there were two main sticking points in a draft plan being negotiated with the United States.

Trump envoy says Ukraine-Russia talks 'down to one issue'



SPOTLIGHT

'Sinners' breaks all-time Oscars record with 16 nominations



(L/R) US actors Lewis Pullman, Danielle Brooks, British producer Lynette Howell Taylor and Bill Kramer, CEO of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences pose for pictures during the 98th Academy Awards nominations announcement at the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre in Beverly Hills, California,

Los Angeles, United States

Vampire period horror film "Sinners" smashed the all-time Oscars record with 16 nominations, the Academy announced yesterday.

The blues-inflected drama set in the 1930s segregated US South from director Ryan Coogler scored nominations in nearly every category possible, including best picture.

It blasted past the previous record of 14, jointly held by "All About Eve," "Titanic" and "La La Land."

The tally included a best actor nomination for Michael B. Jordan, who plays twins battling supernatural forces and racists, as well as nods for

everything from screenplay to score.

"Sinners" also picked up a nomination for best casting, the first new category to be added to Hollywood's most prestigious awards in more than two decades.

"One Battle After Another" came second with 13 nods including best actor for Leonardo DiCaprio.

The top two films both came from Warner Bros, the movie studio that is currently the target of a bidding war between Netflix and Paramount.

"Frankenstein," "Marty Supreme," and "Sentimental Value" each bagged nine nominations, while "Hamnet" secured eight.

Trump unveils Board of Peace, 'New Gaza' plans at Davos

Countries have been asked to pay \$1 billion for permanent membership

● **Key US allies including France and Britain have expressed doubts**

● **A large part of the ceremony was devoted to talking about its plans for shattered Gaza**

● **Trump said he expected around 50 countries to join**

● **Gaza's newly appointed administrator said in a video message that the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip will reopen in both directions next week.**

AFP | Davos, Switzerland

US President Donald Trump unveiled his new Board of Peace at Davos yesterday, casting himself again as a global peacemaker despite widespread scepticism over a plan that aims to rewrite the global order. Trump officials also unveiled ambitious plans for a "New Gaza" during the ceremony at the World Economic Forum, with the US leader describing the devastated Palestinian territory as "great real estate."

The board was created after Trump expressed frustration at failing to win the Nobel Peace Prize and ramped up his accusations that the United Nations had failed to resolve a host of international conflicts.

"Well this is exciting," Trump said as he was joined on stage by leaders and officials from 19 countries to sign the Board of Peace's founding charter in the Swiss ski resort.

"This board has the chance to be one of the most consequential bodies ever created," he said.

The Board of Peace, of which Trump is the chairman, was initially designed to oversee the Gaza truce and the reconstruc-



US President Donald Trump holds a signed founding charter at the "Board of Peace" meeting during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos

tion of the strip after the war between Hamas and Israel.

But its purpose has since morphed into resolving all sorts of international conflicts, sparking concerns that the US president wants to create a rival to the UN.

However, countries have been asked to pay \$1 billion for permanent membership of the board.

And the invitation for Russia's Vladimir Putin, whose country invaded Ukraine in 2022, has sparked controversy.

Gaza 'master plan'

Key US allies including France and Britain have expressed doubts, with London saying Thursday it would not attend the ceremony.

Trump however told the gathering of the global elite in the Swiss mountain resorts that the organisation would work "in conjunction" with the United Nations.

A large part of the ceremony was devoted to talking about its plans for shattered Gaza.

Gaza's newly appointed administrator said in a video message that the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip will reopen in both directions next week.

Then Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, like the president a former property devel-

oper, showed slides of what he billed a "master plan" for its reconstruction.

The slides included maps of new settlements in the Gaza Strip and artist renderings of gleaming seafront hotels and apartments under the caption "New Gaza".

"It could be a hope. It could be a destination," Kushner said.

Trump however told Hamas to disarm under the next phase of the Gaza ceasefire accord or it would be the "end of them". He added that he was ready to "talk" with regional foe Iran.

'Not so popular'

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces an International Criminal Court arrest warrant over the war in Gaza, had said he would join but was not at the ceremony.

The representatives of the 19 countries on stage with Trump included two close populist allies, Hungary's Viktor Orban and Argentina's Javier Milei, and officials from a host of Middle Eastern monarchies.

Trump joked that they were "in most cases very popular leaders, some cases not so popular".

"That's the way it goes in life," he said.

Trump said he expected around 50 countries to join but

the full extent of its membership remains unclear.

Egypt said President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi had accepted Trump's invitation to join but he was not on stage.

Trump meanwhile said Putin had agreed to join, though the Russian leader said he was still studying the invite.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who met Trump at Davos on Thursday, has also been invited but has said that he could not envisage working alongside arch-foe Putin.

Trump said yesterday he was hopeful of a deal soon to end Russia's invasion of Ukraine -- which he admits he thought would be the easiest conflict to resolve but has proved the hardest.



Donald Trump was the first United States president to take office without having previously held elected public office or served in the military.

US, Denmark to renegotiate 1951 Greenland defence pact: source

AFP | Davos, Switzerland

The United States and Denmark will renegotiate a 1951 defence pact on Greenland, a source familiar with talks between President Donald Trump and NATO chief Mark Rutte told AFP Thursday.

The source said that European allies would also step up Arctic

security, but insisted that placing American bases on Greenland under US sovereignty had not been discussed.

"The 1951 agreement will get renegotiated," the source said.

The defence agreement, updated in 2004, already gives Washington freedom to ramp up its troop deployments, provided it informs the authorities

in Denmark and Greenland in advance.

The US currently has one base on Greenland -- the Pituffik Space Base on the northwest of the island that constitutes a crucial link in the US missile defence system.

Trump on Wednesday announced a framework deal after talks with Rutte at the

World Economic Forum in Davos, but the details of the purported agreement remained vague.

Rutte said on Thursday one "work stream" to emerge from the meeting was "that we ensure that the Chinese and the Russians will not gain access to the Greenland economy" or militarily.