

## Myanmar polls results due by end of January

### Says polls official

AFP, Naypyidaw

An official from Myanmar's junta-stacked election commission said yesterday that the results of its upcoming and widely disputed national poll are expected by the end of January next year.

"The final election result is expected by the end of January 2026," an official of the Union Election Commission (UEC) told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Myanmar has been consumed by a civil war since the military deposed the government of democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, making unsubstantiated allegations of electoral fraud.

The commission held a news conference yesterday in Naypyidaw, where it said six political parties would run for national office in staggered polls beginning on December 28.



Protesters gather outside Nepal's Army headquarters during a curfew imposed to restore law and order in Kathmandu yesterday. Shops, schools and colleges stayed shut in the Nepali capital and surrounding areas, but some essential services had resumed.

PHOTO: AFP

## TRUMP-NETANYAHU TIES

# Qatar bombing tests the limits of the alliance

REUTERS, Washington

Less than four months ago, President Donald Trump met with the leader of Qatar, praising his opulent palace and signing a sweeping defense agreement with the Gulf monarchy, a key ally that hosts the biggest US base in the Middle East.

Israel's surprise attack on Tuesday against Hamas leaders in Doha has jolted that relationship, angering Trump and drawing fierce condemnation from Doha and Western allies.

Ordered by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and targeting the political offices of the Palestinian militant group, the strikes killed a Qatari security agent and five others, but failed to kill the Hamas leaders. Trump said he was "very unhappy about every aspect" of the Israeli operation.

But for all the indignation, the strikes are unlikely to change the president's fundamental approach toward Israel, analysts and US officials say. If anything, the bombings underlined the cold calculus beneath the Trump-Netanyahu relationship.

Israel has shown it is not afraid to act against US interests. The administration of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not formally warn Washington of its impending bombing campaign on Tuesday, US officials said.

That lack of warning recalled Israel's September 2024 attack on Hezbollah, when Israel wounded thousands of the militant group's

members with booby-trapped pagers, without informing then-President Joe Biden.

Trump, for his part, has occasionally expressed displeasure with Netanyahu. But his administration has strongly supported Israel's campaign to weaken Hamas and allowed it to largely take the lead on key issues such as Iran's nuclear program.

"On this one, I think Trump is

Tuesday night, during which he said the bombings did not advance US or Israeli interests.

"However," Trump wrote, "eliminating Hamas, who have profited off the misery of those living in Gaza, is a worthy goal."

The Israeli Embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

Some analysts declined to rule out the possibility that Netanyahu



annoyed by Netanyahu's tactics," said Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and veteran US peace negotiator.

But, Miller added, "(Trump's) instinct is that he agrees with Netanyahu's notion that Hamas cannot just be hollowed out as a military organization. It needs to be fundamentally weakened."

Asked for comment, the White House referred Reuters to remarks by Trump on Truth Social on

may yet exhaust Trump's patience if he springs more surprises on Washington. In practice, that could mean a withdrawal of political cover for Israel's ongoing invasion of Gaza, which has provoked outrage among European and Arab nations as famine conditions spread.

Israel's campaign in the Palestinian enclave was triggered by a Hamas-led rampage in southern Israel on October 7, 2023.

## SANAA STRIKES

# Israeli army intercepts missile fired from Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

Israel's army said it had intercepted a missile yesterday fired from Yemen, a day after Israeli forces carried out air strikes there that killed 35 people and wounded more than 130.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the missile attack on Israel.

But the Iran-backed Houthi rebels have repeatedly launched missiles and drones at Israel since their Palestinian ally Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel sparked the Gaza war.

"Following the sirens that sounded a short while ago in several areas in Israel, a missile launched from Yemen was intercepted," Israel's army said.

The Houthi armed forces' media operation in Sanaa, the rebel-held capital, was hit by Israel Wednesday, along with a Houthi complex in Jawf province, the group said.

Thirty-five people died and 131 were wounded, Houthi health ministry spokesman Anees Alasbahi posted on X, adding it was not a final toll.

The toll included 28 dead and 113 wounded in Sanaa, and seven dead and 18 wounded in Jawf, which borders Saudi Arabia, Alasbahi said.

## NEPAL POLITICAL CRISIS

# Army recaptures 200 prisoners

## Thousands still on the run

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's army said yesterday it has recaptured nearly 200 prisoners after mass jailbreaks during deadly protests that toppled the government, a fraction of the thousands on the run.

Around 13,500 detainees escaped from prisons nationwide during the chaos, police said, leaving security forces scrambling to regain control.

It has added to the challenges facing the army and police as they try to restore order in the wake of the most violent protests in decades.

"The Nepali Army has recaptured 192 prisoners," the army said in a statement, saying they had fled jail in the southeastern city of Rajbiraj.

At another prison in Ramechhap, east of the capital Kathmandu, fighting erupted and the Nepali Army "opened fire, injuring 12 prisoners and killing two", the statement added.

India's border force said it had detained scores of fugitives who tried to sneak across the vast and porous frontier into the neighbouring states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, before handing them back to Nepali authorities.

"We have detained and handed over at least 60 prisoners who escaped from multiple Nepali prisons," an Indian border force official said, who was not authorised to speak to journalists.

Nepal's army said it had also recovered nearly 100 weapons looted in the uprising, during which protesters were seen brandishing automatic rifles.

## RUSSIAN DRONE RAID

# Poland restricts air traffic in the east

AFP, Warsaw



Poland yesterday said it would restrict air traffic in the eastern part of the country, a day after it shot down reported Russian drones over its territory.

Air traffic along Poland's border with Belarus and Ukraine will be closed to civilian flights up to an altitude of three kilometres (1.9 miles)

until December 9, the PZP air traffic control agency said in a statement.

The restrictions "do not concern civilian aviation" flying above three kilometres, it said.

The restriction zone reaches between 26 and 46 kilometres inside Polish territory, it said.

All drones in the restricted area are banned "day and night", it said. The measures were "being put in place to assure national security", it said.

Poland said it had called an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to discuss violations of its airspace.

The incident was "an attempt to test the mechanism of action within Nato and our readiness to respond", Polish President Karol Nawrocki said yesterday during a visit to an airbase in western Poland.

Polish authorities said on Wednesday that the Nato and EU member's airspace was violated 19 times on Wednesday, with at least three drones shot down as Poland and Nato allies scrambled jets.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday urged Kyiv's allies to rethink their own air defence capabilities after incursions into Polish airspace by drones that Warsaw said were Russian.

## N Korea's Kim Ju Ae 'likely successor'

### Says S Korea spy agency

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's spy agency said yesterday that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's daughter, Ju Ae, who recently accompanied him on a high-profile visit to Beijing, is understood to be his recognised successor.

The teenager drew global attention earlier this month when she made her first official overseas trip with her father, as he met with China's Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Analysts have long seen her as Kim's likely successor, although some have suggested Ju Ae has an older brother who is being secretly groomed as the next leader.

South Korea's spy agency "assesses that she (Ju Ae) secured sufficient 'revolutionary narrative' needed to strengthen her position as a likely successor," following her China trip, lawmaker Lee Seong-kweun told reporters after being briefed by the agency.

## JEFFREY EPSTEIN LINKS

# Britain sacks Mandelson as US ambassador

REUTERS, London

Peter Mandelson, Britain's smooth-talking ambassador to the US, was sacked yesterday after his long-term association with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein became a further distraction for under pressure Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Mandelson, dubbed the "Prince of Darkness" for his behind-the-scenes manoeuvring during the last Labour government, was forced from the most sought-after diplomatic post after his letters and emails to Epstein were published this week.

The 71-year-old, a veteran Labour politician, had come under scrutiny over his relationship with Epstein after a birthday book was released including a letter purportedly from the now ambassador describing Epstein as "my best pal".

Further emails were published in the media showing that Mandelson had advised Epstein to fight for early release when he faced charges over soliciting a minor.

"In light of the additional information in emails written by Peter Mandelson, the prime minister has asked the foreign secretary to withdraw him as ambassador," Britain's foreign ministry said. "The emails show that the depth and extent of Peter Mandelson's relationship with Jeffrey Epstein is materially different from that known at the time of his appointment."

The ministry said the revelation of Mandelson's suggestion that Epstein's first conviction was wrongful and should be challenged was "new information."



Former police officer Sam Pulia places flags at the South Reflecting Pool ahead of the annual 9/11 Commemoration Ceremony at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in New York City yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Belarus frees 52 political prisoners

AFP, Vilnius

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's government has freed 52 political prisoners, his Lithuanian counterpart said yesterday, crediting US efforts to secure their release.

President Gitanas Nausėda wrote on X that "52 prisoners safely crossed the Lithuanian border from Belarus today," including six Lithuanians, saying he was "deeply grateful" for Washington and President Donald Trump's involvement.

According to Belta, 14 with foreign citizenship were among those freed -- six Lithuanians, two Latvians, two Poles, two Germans, one French national and a Briton.

Trump has pushed Belarus to free political prisoners in contacts with Lukashenko, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, stamping out free media and political opposition.