

UN-backed climate banking alliance ceases operations

AFP, Paris

The Net-Zero Banking Alliance, a UN-backed initiative seeking carbon neutral investments by banks, announced Friday its immediate shutdown – at a time of faltering climate commitments in the United States and Europe.

Launched in 2021 under the UN Environment Programme's Finance Initiative, the NZBA aimed to get banks to slash the carbon footprint of their loans and investments, and help drive the transition to a net-zero economy by 2050.

At its peak, the group counted nearly 150 members.

But the alliance had been losing members since late last year, after Donald Trump won the US presidential election with his “drill, baby, drill” mantra promoting oil and gas production.

The NZBA had paused its activities in late August while waiting for the result of a vote by its members.

“Members of the Net-Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA) have voted to transition from a member-based alliance and to establish its guidance as a framework,” an NZBA spokesperson said in a statement.

“As a result of this decision, NZBA will cease operations immediately,” the spokesperson said.

The NZBA said banks can still use the initiative's “Guidance for Climate Target Setting for Banks”, which focuses on decarbonisation targets.



Demonstrators take cover using riot police shields as they clash with the police during a rally commemorating the 57th anniversary of the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre in Mexico City yesterday.

PHOTO:AFP

Notion of a safe zone in southern Gaza ‘farcical’

Says UN, calls these zones ‘places of death’

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday insisted there was no safe place for Palestinians ordered to leave Gaza City, and that Israeli-designated zones in the southern Gaza Strip were “places of death”.

Since launching its air assault on Gaza City in August ahead of its ground offensive there, the Israeli military has repeatedly told Palestinians to head south.

“The notion of a safe zone in the south is farcical,” James Elder, a spokesman for the UN children’s agency UNICEF, told journalists in Geneva.

Speaking from Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, Elder pointed to how “bombs are dropped from the sky with chilling

predictability; schools, which had been designated as temporary shelters are regularly reduced to rubble, (and) tents... are regularly engulfed in fire from air attacks”.

The Israeli military has urged Palestinians to relocate to a “humanitarian area” in Al-Mawasi on the coast, where it says aid, medical care and humanitarian infrastructure will be provided.

Israel first declared the area a safe zone early in the two-year war but has carried out repeated strikes on it since, saying it is targeting Hamas.

Elder insisted that “the issuance of a general or a blanket evacuation order to civilians does not mean that those who remain behind lose their protection as civilians”.

At the same time, he warned, the “so-called

safe zones ... are also places of death”.

Al-Mawasi, he pointed out, “is now one of the most densely populated places on Earth.”

“It’s grotesquely overcrowded and has been stripped of the most basic essentials of survival.”

The UN had begun in late 2023 “debunking this concept of a unilaterally-declared safe zone”, Elder said.

“The law is very clear,” he stressed.

“It is the responsibility of the occupying power – Israel – to ensure that a safe zone has all the essentials for survival: that is nutrition, shelter and sanitation.

“None of those are present in a level that is fitting of a population,” Elder said, adding that the UN at the start had “at least assumed that these places would not be bombed”.

Sarah Mullally first woman to lead Church of England

AFP, London

A 63-year-old former nurse, Sarah Mullally, was named as the first female Archbishop of Canterbury Friday, pledging to improve safety at the Church of England following an abuse scandal that ousted her predecessor.

The former midwife becomes the first woman to lead the centuries-old mother church of the world’s 85 million strong Anglican community.

Her nomination by a committee tasked with finding a successor to Justin Welby, who stepped down earlier this year, was approved by King Charles III, the UK government said in a statement.

Mullally acknowledged the “huge responsibility” of her new role and vowed to “confront the dynamics of power” that had led the church to cover up the abuse of dozens of boys and young men several decades ago.

She cautioned that it would “not be easy”, due to a “history of safeguarding failures” that has “left a legacy of deep harm and mistrust” in the Church of England, which can trace its origins back to the Roman Empire.

“We must all be willing to have light shone on our actions, regardless of our role in the church,” she said during an appearance at Canterbury Cathedral in southeast England following her appointment.

“As Archbishop, my commitment will be to ensure that we continue to listen to survivors, care for the vulnerable, and foster a culture of safety and well-being for all,” Mullally added.

The Church of England became the country’s state establishment church following King Henry VIII’s split from the Roman Catholic Church in the 1530s.

The British monarch is its supreme governor, while the Archbishop of Canterbury is seen as the spiritual leader of Anglicans worldwide.

Mullally, who is married with two children, will become the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury, the first having been appointed in the late sixth century, when she officially takes up the role following a ceremony due in January.

She worked in Britain’s state-run National Health Service for more than three decades, rising to become its chief nursing officer for England in 1999.

Ordained a priest in 2002, she became the first female Bishop of London in 2018, only four years after the church began allowing women bishops following years of bitter factional wrangling.

GEN Z PROTESTS

Madagascar leader under pressure to resign

REUTERS, ANTANANARIVO

Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina said yesterday he was ready to listen to find solutions to problems facing the poor island nation, but ignored calls for his resignation by a nationwide youth-led protest movement.

Inspired by similar “Gen Z” demonstrations in Kenya and Nepal, the protests have grown since last week into the largest wave of unrest Madagascar has seen in years, tapping into widespread discontent with high levels of poverty and corruption.

The president disbanded the government late on Monday in an attempt to quell public anger, but the move has done little to address grievances that initially erupted in the capital on September 25 over worsening water shortages and power outages.

The United Nations says at least 22 people were killed and more than 100 injured in the first few days of the protests. The government rejects those figures.

“No one benefits from the destruction of the nation. I am here, I stand here ready to listen, ready to extend a helping hand, and above all, ready to bring solutions to Madagascar,” Rajoelina said in a speech broadcast on his Facebook page.

He said, without providing evidence, that some politicians were plotting to take advantage of the protests and had considered staging a coup while he was addressing the United Nations in New York last week.

In a post on his X account on Friday, Rajoelina said he had also met various groups for the past three days to discuss the situation.



Hoses mounted on the ladder of a firefighting vehicle are used to contain a fire that broke out at the Chevron refinery in El Segundo, California, US, on October 2, 2025.

PHOTO:REUTERS

US govt shutdown seen dragging into next week

AFP, Washington

The US government shutdown appeared likely to stretch into next week as senators prepared Friday to vote for a fourth time on a funding fix proposed by Donald Trump’s Republicans that has little hope of success.

Federal agencies have been out of money since Wednesday – with a wide range of public services crippled – as a result of deadlocked talks in Congress on how to keep the lights on.

Senate leaders currently have no plans to keep the upper chamber of Congress in session over the weekend.

That means an afternoon vote on a short-term fix that has already been repeatedly rejected will be the last chance of the week for an off-ramp in a crisis that many analysts fear could drag on.

Ahead of the action in the Senate, the Trump administration suspended the publication of a key employment report, casting a fog over the health of the world’s biggest economy.

It was the latest in a series of delayed

economic releases this week that have deprived government officials and business leaders of indicators used in decision-making.

At the center of the standoff in Congress is a Democratic demand for an extension of health care subsidies that are due to expire – meaning sharply increased costs for millions of low-income Americans.

Republicans – who control the legislature and the White House but need Democratic votes on government funding bills – have announced no plans to address the issue.

Democrats are trying to force their hand by refusing to help ruling Republicans fund the government.

Amid widespread pessimism over the possibility of a quick solution, Republicans voiced hopes that a fourth failed vote might push some moderates in the opposition to cross the aisle.

And Politico quoted Republican Senate leader John Thune leaving the door open to crisis talks with his Democratic counterpart Chuck Schumer to seek a compromise.

– ‘Tremendous’ pressure –

“Chuck Schumer is under a tremendous amount of pressure from far-left activists in his party to pick a fight with President Trump,” Thune posted on social media.

“Three of my Democratic colleagues have joined us and voted to keep the government open. All we need is a few more to end this.”

Senate Democrats are expected to hammer out strategy for week two of the shutdown at their caucus lunch just ahead of the vote, while House Republicans have scheduled a call with all members on Saturday.

Some 750,000 employees are likely to be put on furlough – a kind of enforced leave with backpay after the shutdown – across a wide range of agencies as the funding crisis spills into a new week.

Overshadowing efforts to strike a deal is the threat from Trump to turn thousands of those furloughs into permanent redundancies, strip funding and slash benefits as he ramps up pressure on the Democrats.

Trump sets Sunday deadline for Hamas

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On the ground on Friday, Gaza’s civil defence agency reported heavy air bombardment and artillery shelling on Gaza City.

At least 49 Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks across the Gaza Strip, including 31 in Gaza City alone, according to medical sources speaking to Al Jazeera.

The Israeli military is waging an air and ground offensive on the territory’s largest urban centre, from which hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee.

The UN yesterday reiterated there was no safe place in Gaza and that Israel-designated zones in the south were “places of death”.

“The notion of a safe zone in the south is farcical,” UNICEF spokesman James Elder said from the Gaza Strip.

Amnesty International condemned a “catastrophic wave of mass displacement” as Israel intensified its Gaza City offensive.

The rights group said hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, many of whom had already been displaced multiple times, were being forced into “overcrowded enclaves in the south... that lack access to clean water, food, medical care, shelter and life-sustaining infrastructure”.

As the war nears the two-year mark and the death toll continues to rise, protesters around the world have rallied at Israel’s interception of a flotilla carrying pro-Palestinian activists and aid for Gaza.

As Hamas mulled Trump’s peace plan this week, a Palestinian source close to the group’s leadership told AFP on Wednesday that the Islamist movement wanted to amend some clauses, including the one on disarmament.

Hamas leaders also want “international guarantees” for a full Israeli withdrawal and that no assassination attempts would be made inside or outside Gaza, the source added.

Another source familiar with the negotiations told AFP that the group was split over Trump’s plan.

Structurally, the group’s leadership is divided between officials based in the Gaza Strip and those abroad, particularly in Qatar.

Much of Hamas’s leadership has also been wiped out in Israeli attacks throughout the war.

The source told AFP that “the first (opinion) supports unconditional approval, as the priority is a ceasefire

under Trump’s guarantees, with mediators ensuring Israel implements the plan”.

“The second has serious reservations regarding key clauses... They favour conditional approval with clarifications reflecting Hamas’s and the resistance factions’ demands,” the source added.

Hugh Lovatt, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said “ultimately it’s not just about convincing Hamas leadership in Doha, but also the leadership in Gaza, as well as Hamas members and fighters in Gaza”.

At least 49 Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks across the Gaza Strip, including 31 in Gaza City alone, yesterday, according to medical sources speaking to Al Jazeera.

“Additionally, Hamas must then be able to convince other factions in Gaza,” he added.

Since October 7, 2023, Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 66,288 Palestinians, according to health ministry figures in the Hamas-run territory that the United Nations considers reliable.

Their data does not distinguish between civilians and combatants, but indicates that more than half of the dead are women and children.

Candidates to get signal soon

FROM PAGE 12

Salahuddin also commented on Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus’ interview with journalist Mehedi Hasan in New York.

“At one stage in the interview, the chief adviser said the interim government has been formed, but its time limit was not mentioned. They themselves will decide this time. Some people want it to stay for 5, 10, even 50 years,” he said, adding that it would have been better if the chief adviser did not raise this matter.

The chief adviser himself already fixed the time. He did not set December for holding the election; he set February for the polls, the BNP leader said. “We are waiting for the election schedule to be announced.”