

Iraq PM front-runner slams Trump's interference

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's main candidate for the premiership, Nouri al-Maliki, yesterday denounced Washington's "blatant interference", after President Donald Trump threatened to end all support to the country if Maliki took the post.

"We categorically reject the blatant American interference in Iraq's internal affairs," Maliki said on X, adding that "we consider it a violation" of Iraq's "democratic system", in place since the 2003 US-led invasion.

Trump on Tuesday said that Iraq would make a "very bad choice" if Maliki were selected for the top post. He warned that because of Maliki's "insane policies and ideologies, if elected, the United States of America will no longer help Iraq".

Maliki was endorsed as Iraq's next prime minister by the Coordination Framework.



Demonstrators take part in a vigil and protest in New York City on Tuesday over the fatal shooting of a man identified as Alex Pretti by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US. Inset, federal agents detain a man during an immigration enforcement action in Saint Paul, Minnesota. PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

Trump warns of 'bad things' if GOP loses midterms

AFP, Clive

Donald Trump warned Tuesday of "very bad things" if Republicans lose the US midterm elections, as the US president kicked off a travel blitz under the shadow of unrest in Minneapolis and voter worries about the economy.

At a rally in Iowa -- one of the first stops for primary campaigns in US presidential elections -- Trump said his party must win both the Senate and the House in November despite his own poor approval ratings.

"I'm here because I love Iowa, but I'm here because we're starting the campaign to win the midterms. Got to win the midterms," second-term president Trump said in his speech.

"If we lose the midterms, you'll lose so many of the things that we're talking about, so many of the assets that we're talking about, so many of the tax cuts that we're talking about -- and it would lead to very bad things."

But Trump's economy-focused speech was largely overshadowed by events in the neighboring state of Minnesota, where two people have died this month in a deadly immigration crackdown.

Minneapolis mayor 'playing with fire'

Trump blasts Jacob Frey's vow not to enforce federal immigration laws

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump yesterday slammed comments by Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey who said the northern city "does not and will not" enforce federal immigration laws.

In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said he was surprised by Frey's statement since the two had "a very good conversation" following the fatal shooting of two Minneapolis residents by federal agents amid massive immigration raids there.

"Could somebody in his inner sanctum please explain that this statement is a very serious violation of the Law, and that he is PLAYING WITH FIRE!" Trump wrote.

On Tuesday, Trump suggested he would "de-escalate a little bit" in the city, as a senior White House aide said US immigration agents may have breached "protocol" in Minneapolis before shooting dead a nurse during protests.

The comments came the same day a man sprayed Minnesota Congresswoman Ilhan Omar with a syringe of unknown liquid at a Minneapolis town hall meeting, where she called for curbing the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller told AFP the administration is evaluating



A man is tackled after spraying an unknown substance at US Representative Ilhan Omar during a town hall in Minneapolis on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

whether the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents who gunned down 37-year-old Alex Pretti on Saturday failed to follow "clear guidance" to "create a physical barrier between the arrest teams and the disruptors."

Two federal officers fired their weapons during the shooting of Pretti in Minneapolis, according to a Department of Homeland Security report to Congress published Tuesday by US media.

Trump told Fox News on Tuesday that Gregory Bovino, a hardline Border Patrol commander who

is now expected to leave the city, was "a pretty out-there kind of a guy" whose presence may not have helped the situation. He sent top US border security official Tom Homan to meet with officials there.

The turmoil could result in a fresh US government shutdown, with Democrats calling for broad reforms to federal immigration operations at DHS and threatening to block approval of its funding, as part of the spending bills that go up for votes in the Senate later this week.

Europe told to boost defence amid Trump rift

AFP, Brussels

Europe must step up efforts on defence and play a bigger role in Nato as US President Donald Trump has "shaken the transatlantic relationship to its foundation", EU top diplomat Kaja Kallas said yesterday.

Trump rocked European allies this month by threatening to seize Greenland from Nato and EU member Denmark -- before eventually backing off.

The crisis -- the latest to buffet ties since his return to power a year ago -- has reinforced calls for the continent to cut its decades-long reliance on Nato's dominant military superpower for protection.

"Let me be clear: we want strong transatlantic ties. The US will remain Europe's partner and ally. But Europe needs to adapt to the new realities. Europe is no longer Washington's primary centre of gravity," Kallas told a defence conference in Brussels.

"This shift has been ongoing for a while. It is structural, not temporary... Europe must step up -- no great power in history has outsourced its survival and survived." Kallas remained clear-eyed that Nato remains the bedrock of European security.

US intel doubts Venezuela leader's cooperation

REUTERS, New York

US intelligence reports have raised doubts about whether interim Venezuelan President Delcy Rodriguez will cooperate with the Trump administration by formally cutting ties with US adversaries, four people familiar with the reports said in recent days.

US officials have said publicly they want the interim president to sever relations with close international allies like Iran, China and Russia, including expelling their diplomats and advisers from Venezuela.

But Rodriguez, whose swearing-in ceremony was attended by representatives of those countries early this month, has yet to publicly announce such a move. She became president after the US captured former Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on January 3.

The US intelligence reports said it was not clear if she is fully on board with the US strategy in her country, according to the sources.

Meanwhile, the US has started unblocking Venezuelan funds that were frozen due to sanctions, the interim president said on Tuesday.

"We are unfreezing resources from Venezuela that belong to the Venezuelan people," Rodriguez said on state TV.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio was expected to warn yesterday that oil-rich Venezuela's leader will suffer the fate of US deposed predecessor Nicolas Maduro if she fails to comply with US wishes.

'Nothing normal' in dealing with US: Canada PM

AFP, Toronto

There's currently "nothing normal" about dealing with the United States, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney told Parliament Tuesday, as he faced questions over his handling of relations with President Donald Trump.

Carney has returned to Ottawa after delivering a widely acclaimed speech at last week's World Economic Forum, which argued that the rules-based international order led by Washington for decades was enduring a "rupture."

The speech -- which also cautioned middle powers against hoping "compliance" would spare them from major power aggression -- also earned rare cross-party praise in Canada.

Opposition leader and Conservative Party head Pierre Poilievre, normally a relentless partisan brawler, has called it "well-crafted and eloquently delivered."

The leader of the separatist Bloc Quebecois, Yves-Francois Blanchet, said it was "reassuring and promising." But as parliament began a new legislative session on Tuesday, Blanchet took aim at Carney over his management of the US relationship.

"A speech, in itself, doesn't make money, it doesn't create jobs and it doesn't protect jobs," the Bloc leader said.

Blanchet noted there has been no progress towards easing Trump's sectoral tariffs battering key parts of Canada's economy and asked Carney if negotiations with the United States are "normal and cordial."

"The world has changed. Washington has changed. There's almost nothing normal in the United States now. That's the truth," the prime minister said in French.



'Hard to survive'

Kyiv's elderly shiver after Russian attacks on power, heat

AFP, Kyiv

Shivering in her flat after Russian strikes knocked out the heating, 91-year-old Lidia Teleshuk said she couldn't remember a winter this harsh since World War II.

Russia has this month stepped up its strikes against Ukraine's power and heating infrastructure, plunging Kyiv residents into darkness and cold as temperatures dropped as low as -20C.

"In 1942, it was even worse," Teleshuk said. "There hasn't been a winter like this since. It's been awful. It will be hard for us to survive."

The heavy targeting of the Ukrainian capital -- which Russia failed to seize at the start of its invasion -- has forced residents to find makeshift solutions to stay warm.

It has been particularly painful for elderly people like Teleshuk.

In her flat deprived of electricity, heating and hot water, the 91-year-old showed AFP how she gets through the day.

Running her hand through her brittle white hair, she mimed heating water on a gas stove to wash herself in the cold mornings.

She had also poured some of the hot water into plastic bottles, turning them into small sources of heat.

"But it's not enough, dear children. It's just enough for me to warm up a little," she said.

The temperature inside her apartment hovered between 8C and 11C.

Volunteers from the Starenki foundation, which delivers food and essentials to the elderly, were visiting Teleshuk to check in on her.

She beamed as one of them, programme director Alina Diachenko, gave her a battery-powered fairy light.



Palestinians walk amid the rubble of residential buildings destroyed in the war, in Gaza City yesterday. Israel has cleared land in southern Gaza for a camp for Palestinians that may feature surveillance and facial recognition technology at its entrance, a retired Israeli general who advises the military said. PHOTO: REUTERS

India reports 2 Nipah virus infections

Thailand, Malaysia step up screening

REUTERS

India is monitoring Nipah virus infections, with two reported from its eastern state of West Bengal since December, the health ministry said, as some Southeast Asia nations step up scrutiny of air travellers.

Tuesday's confirmation came a day after Thailand said it had tightened airport screening measures, with neighbouring Malaysia following suit.

"Speculative and incorrect figures regarding Nipah virus cases are being circulated," the Indian ministry warned in a statement that put the tally of infections at two.

Authorities have identified and traced 196 contacts linked to both cases, it added, with none showing symptoms.

Thailand has assigned designated parking bays for aircraft arriving from areas with Nipah outbreaks.