

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Venezuelan Nobel Peace Prize winner presents her medal to Trump

**NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, JAN 16** : Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado said she presented her Nobel Peace Prize to US President Donald Trump, who described it as a “wonderful gesture of mutual respect.”

Machado, who has on previous occasions said that she would give her Nobel prize to Trump, met the American President in the White House Thursday, a closely-watched meeting that came days after the US carried out a military strike in Venezuela and captured its leader Nicolás Maduro.

“It was my Great Honour to meet María Corina Machado, of Venezuela, today. She is a wonderful woman who has been through so much. María presented me with her Nobel Peace Prize for the work I have done. Such a wonderful gesture of mutual respect. Thank you María!” Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

A photograph released on social media shows Machado standing in the Oval Office with Trump, who is holding a frame that contains the Nobel Peace Prize, with a caption “the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize Medal awarded to María Corina Machado.”

“To President Donald J Trump – In gratitude for your extraordinary leadership in promoting peace



through strength, advancing diplomacy and defending liberty and prosperity,” a message accompanying the medal said.

“Presented as a personal symbol of gratitude on behalf of the Venezuelan people in recognition of President Trump’s principled and decisive action to secure a free Venezuela.” The courage of America and its president Donald J. Trump will never be forgotten by the Venezuelan people,” the message, signed by Machado and dated Washington, January 15, 2026 said.

After her meeting, Machado told reporters that she “presented the President of the United States the medal of the Nobel Peace Prize... medal of the Nobel Peace Prize as recognition for his unique commitment with our freedom.”

Trump has long coveted the Nobel Peace Prize, an honour that was bestowed on former US President Barack

Obama within months of his presidency in 2009.

Trump has repeatedly taken credit for ending eight wars, including the May 2025 conflict between India and Pakistan, in as many months of the first year of his second term in the White House. He has said that he deserves the Nobel Peace Prize for each of the eight wars that he has ended. Trump has also questioned why Obama was given the Nobel Prize, saying the former president did not do anything to deserve the honour.

Last week, Trump said that no one in history is more deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize than him since he has stopped eight wars. He rebuked Obama for the getting the Nobel Peace Prize shortly after assuming office in 2009 even though he “didn’t do anything.”

“I can’t think of anybody in history that should get the Nobel Prize more than me

and I don’t want to be bragging, but nobody else settled wars. Obama got the Nobel Prize. He had no idea why. He still has no idea. He walks around, he says, ‘I got the Nobel Prize’. Why did he get a Nobel Prize? He got it almost immediately upon attaining office, and he didn’t do anything, and he was a bad president.” Trump had said.

Trump asserted that one should get a Nobel Prize for “every war you stopped. These were major wars. These were wars that nobody thought could be stopped... So in theory, you should get the Nobel Prize for every war you stopped. Every one of them was major. But I don’t care about that. What I care about is saving lives. I’ve saved tens of millions of lives,” he had said.

Nobel Peace Centre, the museum about the Nobel Peace Prize, in a post on X, quoted the Norwegian Nobel Committee as saying that the Nobel prize cannot be transferred to others.

“Once a Nobel Prize is announced, it cannot be revoked, shared, or transferred to others. The decision is final and stands for all time,” the Committee has said.

Noting that “one truth remains”, the Nobel Peace Centre added that “a medal can change owners, but the title of a Nobel Peace Prize laureate cannot.” (PTI)

## EC ‘Gaslighting’ Citizens: Rahul On Indelible Ink Row In Maharashtra Civic Polls

**NEW DELHI, JAN 16**: Amid the row over the quality of ‘indelible’ ink used in marker pens in Maharashtra civic polls, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday asserted that “vote chori is an anti-national act” and accused the Election Commission of gaslighting citizens.

Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) on Thursday evening said it would conduct a thorough probe into the quality of the ‘indelible’ ink in marker pens used for the civic polls, after opposition leaders alleged that the mark on a voter’s finger could be removed easily, enabling bogus voting.

Amid polling for 29 municipal corporations, including the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), social media was flooded

with videos claiming to demonstrate how the ink could be removed using chemicals such as acetone, even as Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis dismissed the claims.

Gandhi shared on X a media report on the row which stated that “opposition, voters cry foul over fading ink markers”.

“Election commission gaslighting citizens is how trust has collapsed in our democracy. Vote Chori is an anti-national act.” Gandhi said in his post on X.

Speaking with news agency, State Election Commissioner Dinesh Waghmare said that in view of the controversy, the SEC will not use marker pens for the coming Zilla Parishad elections but revert to the traditional

ink — produced by Mysore Paints and Varnish Limited, a company of the Karnataka government — used in assembly and Lok Sabha elections.

“The SEC has decided to conduct a probe....it will cover not only the ink quality but also the videos which were circulated throughout the day. The probe into videos is to ascertain whether the ink was applied on the finger while voting or in a mischievous way,” Waghmare said.

“We will do a random sampling of marker pens used today across the state and verify the quality of the ink supplied to us. The formula for the quality of the ink is finalised by the Election commission of India and a private company supplied the

pens to the SEC,” the state election commissioner said.

“We have been using these pens since 2011 for all local body elections,” he added.

Another SEC official said Kores (India) Ltd had supplied the marker pens, and those were as per the commission’s specifications. Three marker pens were provided for each polling booth, he added. Earlier, Mumbai Congress leader and Lok Sabha member Varsha Gaikwad posted a video of her party colleague using acetone to wipe off the ink from his finger. Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray also raised the issue after casting his vote in Dadar. Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray said he too received reports of ink being washed away.

## Lawyer should move beyond articulation of grievances: CJI Surya Kant



**NEW DELHI, Jan 16**: Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Thursday called upon lawyers to wholeheart-

edly engage on the administrative side of the justice delivery system and move beyond “articulation of grievances”.

CJI Kant, who was speaking at an event organised by the Delhi High Court Bar Association (DHCB) to felicitate him, said when the Bar and the bench share the ownership of “administrative innovation”, the system is more

likely to command trust even during the period of transition.

A Bar that is prepared, ethical and conscious of its duties strengthens the administration of justice, and by encouraging such a Bar and acknowledging its strength, the foundation for the establishment is reinforced, the CJI said.

“The Bar must extend be-

yond the articulation of grievances to proactive engagement. It is here that I call upon the members of the Bar to engage wholeheartedly in the administration side of justice by offering practical suggestions, volunteering new systems and participating in consultative processes to ensure that reforms are not only well-intended, but are workable also,” CJI Kant said.

## Fire breaks out in Seoul’s last-remaining shanty town

**SEOUL, JAN 16** : A fire on Friday in one of Seoul’s last-remaining shanty towns burned makeshift houses and forced dozens of residents to flee, but no casualties were immediately reported.

Much of the fire was under control about 6 1/2 hours after the blaze broke out in Guryong village in southern Seoul, fire officials said.

Local fire officer Jeong Gwang-hun told a televised briefing that rescuers were searching each house in the burned area to look for possible victims.

More than 1,200 personnel including firefighters and police officers were deployed to the scene, he said, adding the cause of the fire was under investigation.

The hillside village has occasionally had fires over the years, a vulnerability that observers say is linked to its tightly packed homes built with materials that easily



burn.

The village is located near some of Seoul’s most expensive neighbourhoods, with towering high-rise apartments and lavish shopping districts, and has long been a symbol of South Korea’s stark income inequalities.

The village was formed in the 1980s as a settlement for people who were evicted from their original neighbourhoods under massive house clearings and redevelopment projects.

Hundreds of thousands of people in the city were re-

moved from their homes in slums and low-income settlements during those years, a process then military-backed leaders saw as crucial in beautifying the city for foreign visitors ahead of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. (AP)

## Social media platforms removed 4.7 million accounts after Australia banned them for children

**WELLINGTON, JAN 16** : Social media companies have revoked access to about 4.7 million accounts identified as belonging to children in Australia since the country banned use of the platforms by those under 16, officials said.

“We stared down everybody who said it couldn’t be done, some of the most powerful and rich companies in the world and their supporters,” communications minister Anika Wells told reporters on Friday. “Now Australian parents can be confident that their kids can have their childhoods back.”

The figures, reported to Australia’s government by 10 social media platforms, were the first to show the scale of the landmark ban since it was enacted in December over fears about the effects of harmful online environments on young people. The law provoked fraught debates in Australia about technology use, privacy, child safety and mental health and has prompted other countries to consider similar measures.

Under Australian law, Facebook, Instagram, Kick,

Reddit, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, X, YouTube and Twitch face fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars (\$33.2 million) if they fail to take reasonable steps to remove the accounts of Australian children younger than 16. Messaging services such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are exempt.

To verify age, platforms can either request copies of identification documents, use a third party to apply age estimation technology to an account holder’s face, or make inferences from data already available such as how long an account has been held.

About 2.5 million Australians are aged between 8 and 15, said the country’s eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant, and past estimates suggested 84% of 8- to 12-year-olds held social media accounts. It was not known how many accounts were held across the 10 platforms but Inman Grant said the figure of 4.7 million “deactivated or restricted” was encouraging.

“We’re preventing predatory social media companies from accessing our children,”

Inman Grant said.

The 10 biggest companies covered by the ban were compliant with it and had reported removal figures to Australia’s regulator on time, the commissioner said. She added that social media companies were expected to shift their efforts from enforcing the ban to preventing children from creating new accounts or otherwise circumventing the prohibition.

Australian officials didn’t break the figures down by platform. But Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and Threads, said this week that by the day after the ban came into effect it had removed nearly 550,000 accounts belonging to users understood to be under 16.

In the blog post divulging the figures, Meta criticized the ban and said smaller platforms where the ban doesn’t apply might not prioritize safety. The company also noted browsing platforms would still present content to children based on algorithms — a concern that led to the ban’s enactment.

The law was widely popular among parents and child safety campaigners. Online

privacy advocates and some groups representing teenagers opposed it, with the latter citing the support found in online spaces by vulnerable young people or those geographically isolated in Australia’s sprawling rural areas.

Some said they had managed to fool age assessing technologies or were helped by parents or older siblings to circumvent the ban.

Since Australia began debating the measures in 2024, other countries have considered following suit. Denmark’s government is among them, saying in November that it had planned to implement a social media ban for children under 15.

“The fact that in spite of some skepticism out there, it’s working and being replicated now around the world, is something that is a source of Australian pride,” Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Friday.

Opposition lawmakers have suggested that young people have circumvented the ban easily or are migrating to other apps that are less scrutinized than the largest platforms.

## Trump announces ‘Board of Peace’ as US launches phase two of Gaza plan

**WASHINGTON, JAN 16** : US President Donald Trump announced the formation of the “Board of Peace” to oversee Gaza, months after Israel and Hamas reached a fragile ceasefire following two years of conflict.

As part of Phase Two of his 20-Point Peace Plan to end the Gaza conflict, Trump shifted the focus from a ceasefire to demilitarisation, technocratic governance, and reconstruction.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump said the United States has “officially entered the next phase” of the Gaza peace plan, following what he described as record levels of humanitarian aid delivered during the ceasefire period.

“Since the ceasefire, my team has helped deliver record levels of humanitarian aid to Gaza, reaching civilians at historic speed and scale. Even the United Nations has acknowledged this achievement as unprece-

ented,” Trump said.

“It is my Great Honor to announce that THE BOARD OF PEACE has been formed,” Trump posted on Truth Social. “The members of the Board will be announced shortly, but I can say with certainty that it is the greatest and most prestigious board ever assembled at any time, any place.”

Almost an hour and a half later, Trump announced that “we have OFFICIALLY entered the next phase of Gaza’s 20-Point Peace Plan,” citing special envoy Steve Witkoff.

“As Chairman of the Board of Peace, I am backing a newly appointed Palestinian technocratic government, the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, supported by the Board’s High Representative, to govern Gaza during its transition,” he wrote on Truth Social. “These Palestinian leaders are unwaveringly committed to a PEACEFUL future!”

The president said that, with the support of Egypt, Turkey, and Qatar, the US will secure a “COMPREHENSIVE Demilitarization Agreement with Hamas, including the surrender of ALL weapons and the dismantling of EVERY tunnel.”

“Hamas must IMMEDIATELY honor its commitments, including the return of the final body to Israel, and proceed without delay to full demilitarisation,” Trump continued. “As I have said before, they can do this the easy way or the hard way. The people of Gaza have suffered long enough. The time is NOW. PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH.”

US envoy Steve Witkoff announced the formal start of Phase Two of President Donald Trump’s plan to end the war in Gaza, confirming that a technocratic Palestinian government has been established in the territory.

Under Phase One, Hamas and Israel agreed to a ceasefire in October, along with a

hostage-prisoner exchange, a partial Israeli withdrawal, and a surge in humanitarian aid.

Witkoff said Phase Two would also include the reconstruction and full demilitarisation of Gaza, including the disarmament of Hamas and other Palestinian groups.

“The US expects Hamas to comply fully with its obligations,” Witkoff said, noting that these include the return of the body of the final deceased Israeli hostage. “Failure to do so will bring serious consequences.”

The president’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who worked with Witkoff as a special adviser on the Middle East, praised the announcement. However, two key elements of Phase Two could prove problematic. Hamas has previously refused to give up its weapons without the creation of an independent Palestinian state, while Israel has not committed to a full withdrawal from Gaza. (UNI)

## Russia condemns interference, incitement, threats of force against Iran: Envoy

**United Nations, Jan 16** : Russian UN ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said that his country condemns all forms of external interference, incitement to violence, and threats of use of force against Iran.

At a Security Council meeting on the situation in Iran, Nebenzia called on the United States to put an end to its escalatory actions.

He noted that “the extremely dangerous and irresponsible rhetoric” in recent days by the U.S. leadership has gone as far as openly calling for the takeover of state institutions of Iran and threats to assist the protesters. “Such statements amount to nothing other than incitement to violently overthrow the constitutional order of a sovereign state,” said the ambassador.

“What is happening in Iran is yet another example of the use of tried and tested meth-



ods for a color revolution in which specially trained armed provocateurs transform peaceful protests into senseless violence,” said Nebenzia.

“As we have already seen repeatedly in a number of states, all these actions are either directed or supported by external forces that are interested in a so-called regime change,” he noted.

The ambassador said that the United States and its

“cheerleaders” are actively exploiting the economic and social difficulties faced by ordinary Iranians — caused by unlawful sanctions imposed on Iran by Western states — to inflame public tensions and destabilize the domestic political situation.

“What is most concerning is Washington’s aggressive course toward the use of military force and threats of its use against Iran. We condemn such actions, no mat-

ter what arguments are used to justify them, as a gross violation of international law and the UN Charter,” said Nebenzia.

“We strongly urge the hot-heads in Washington and other capitals, who seem to be contemplating a repeat military venture, to come to their senses and avoid a repetition of the tragedy of June 2025, when U.S.-Israeli aggression nearly resulted in a major nuclear catastrophe with inevitable humanitarian and environmental consequences,” he said.

Russia demands that the United States and its like-minded partners refrain from further reckless steps, including those involving nuclear facilities, and rather focus on providing solid assurances against further confrontation and resume joint efforts to find potential solutions, said the ambassador.