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News & views of Muslims in the UK

EDITORIAL
Board of Peace:
Peace without Palestinians, riviera for Trump & friends
p2

COMMENT
Yemen between the hammer of secession and the anvil of guardianship
p3

INDIA
Muslims assaulted by Hindu vigilantes & hate speech surge
p4

HOME NEWS
37 Muslims honoured in New Year Honours
p5

SPORT
Senegal's AFCON walk-off drama lingers, and other sport updates
p12

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Trump's "Board of Peace": From Gaza reconstruction to a global agenda without Palestinians

Ahmed J Versi

US President Donald Trump launched his controversial "Board of Peace" (BoP) initiative at the World Economic Forum in Davos earlier this month, presenting it as a bold new mechanism for global peacebuilding. The announcement came as phase two of a ceasefire took effect in Gaza, where Israel's military operations have already killed over 71,000 Palestinians and injured more than 171,000 since October 2023. Despite the ceasefire, Israel has continued military operations, reportedly violating the agreement over 1,300 times and killing at least 483 Palestinians while wounding 1,287. As Trump unveiled the BoP in Davos, airstrikes continued across the Strip. Against this backdrop, Palestinians have voiced strong opposition to the BoP and its subsidiary bodies, arguing that the initiative was designed to Israeli and US specifications and serves Washington's long-standing vision for Gaza, widely dubbed the "Middle East Riviera."

From Gaza mandate to global ambition

The BoP was introduced last year as part of a narrowly defined, two-year UN Security Council mandate to manage post-war Gaza under Resolution 2803. Several Security Council members supported the resolution believing it would bind Trump to a specific Gaza ceasefire and reconstruction framework. Yet the BoP's official charter makes no direct reference to Gaza at all. Instead, it outlines a sweeping and permanent mandate to promote peace and "good governance" worldwide, explicitly calling for a departure from existing international institutions on the grounds that they have "too often failed." The board is described as "pragmatic," "results-oriented," and "more nimble and effective" than the UN — language that closely mirrors Trump's long-standing criticism of multilateral institutions. What began as a mechanism to implement a Gaza ceasefire has thus morphed into a vehicle for a broader Trump-led global order, untethered from the specific conflict it was meant to address.

No Palestinians at the table

The announcement has sparked widespread controversy, not least because of the complete absence of Palestinian representation at the top of the initiative. While the BoP includes a prominent Israeli businessman, Yakir Gabay, no Palestinian figures sit on the board or its executive arm, despite Gaza being the initiative's original focus.Palestinians are relegated instead to a lower-tier body, the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), which falls under the Gaza Executive Board, itself fully subordinate to the BoP. Composed of 15 members and led by Ali Shaath, the NCAG is tasked with day-to-day governance but has little real authority, operating under strict oversight from above. Advocacy groups and analysts argue this structure effectively excludes Palestinians from meaningful decision-making about their own future, reducing them to administrators of policies imposed from outside rather than partners in shaping peace.

A vision imposed, not consulted

The absence of Palestinian agency was further underscored when Jared Kushner unveiled a $30 billion "Trump development plan" for what he termed "New Gaza." The glossy presentation envisioned a bulldozed and rebuilt Strip, dominated by luxury developments and a skyscraper-lined coast, all under BoP supervision. The presentation, riddled with Arabic spelling errors, indicates Palestinians were not consulted on this vision of a 'prosperous future.'

Palestinian rejection and legal concerns

Palestinian civil society has strongly rejected Resolution 2803 and Trump's accompanying 20-point plan, arguing that both normalise Israel's occupation and fail to hold it accountable for genocide in Gaza. "This resolution was imposed on the Palestinian people without their consent, constituting a blatant violation of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination," said a joint statement from the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) and the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC). The groups warned that the BoP would wield sweeping powers over finance, immigration, civil administration, and reconstruction in Gaza without any legitimate Palestinian participation or oversight mechanism. Even token Palestinian involvement in subsidiary bodies, they stressed, does not alter the fundamentally foreign and imposed nature of the initiative.

Power concentrated in Washington

Trump retains exclusive authority over the BoP and its subsidiaries. He can create, reshape, or dissolve them at will.

A former adviser to US ambassador David Friedman and an outspoken defender of Israeli settlements, he embodies the very biases the BoP claims to transcend. His reported involvement in the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, linked to deadly aid distribution failures, only deepens concerns. This is not peacebuilding. It is command and control.

Global reactions: division and refusal

A number of Middle Eastern and Muslim-majority states — including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, Qatar, Türkiye, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Kuwait — have agreed to participate, often framing their involvement as a means to secure a ceasefire and humanitarian access for Gaza. Israel has also joined, despite earlier reservations.Others have refused outright. Spain declined the invitation, with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez citing the board's lack of Palestinian representation and its position outside the UN framework. "The future of Gaza should be decided by Palestinians," Sánchez said, calling instead for a dialogue-based process rooted in international law and the two-state solution. France, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Slovenia have similarly declined, warning that the BoP risks undermining the UN-based international order. The UK has said it is "not ready to sign up," while Canada's invitation was rescinded by Trump following critical remarks from Canadian officials. Several major powers, including Germany, Italy, Japan, India, China, and Russia, have yet to commit.



A parallel order without accountability

Human rights groups have been scathing. Amnesty International said the creation of the BoP "lays bare a brazen disregard for international law and human rights." Critics argue that the BoP entrenches power hierarchies, privileges wealthy or politically aligned states, reportedly requiring a $1 billion contribution for permanent membership, and sidelines both Palestinian self-determination and long-standing multilateral institutions.

For Palestinians, the message is clear: a body originally framed as a mechanism to rebuild Gaza has evolved into a global project that speaks about their future without including them — transforming peacebuilding into something done to Palestinians, rather than with them.

The most glaring feature of the BoP is not what it says, but who it excludes. There are no Palestinians on the board or its executive arm, despite Gaza being the original pretext for the initiative. By contrast, an Israeli businessman, Yakir Gabay, has been granted a seat , a choice that speaks volumes about whose interests are being prioritised.

This structure ensures that Palestinians remain subjects of governance rather than political actors — administrators of decisions made elsewhere, by others, about their land, their economy, and their future.

Reconstruction without consent

This vision exposes the colonial logic at the heart of the BoP.

Palestinians were not consulted. The presentation itself, riddled with basic Arabic spelling errors, betrayed a complete absence of local input. Gaza, in this vision, is not a society to be rebuilt with its people, but a tabula rasa onto which an external economic fantasy can be imposed. This is reconstruction as erasure.

Palestinian rejection ignored

Palestinian civil society has unequivocally rejected both Trump's plan and Resolution 2803, warning that they normalise occupation and entrench foreign control rather than ending it. "This resolution was imposed on the Palestinian people without their consent," said a joint statement from the Palestinian NGO Network and the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council, calling it a violation of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Their objections have been dismissed. The BoP grants itself sweeping authority over finance, immigration, civil administration, and reconstruction, without any legitimate Palestinian oversight. Even token Palestinian participation in lower-level bodies does nothing to change the fundamentally imposed nature of the project.

Power concentrated in Washington

Trump retains exclusive authority over the BoP and its subsidiaries. He can create, reshape, or dissolve them at will. Two White House advisers, Aryeh Lightstone and Josh Gruenbaum, have been installed as senior advisers, ensuring direct US control. Lightstone's record is especially alarming. A former adviser to US ambassador David Friedman and an outspoken defender of Israeli settlements, he embodies the very biases the BoP claims to transcend. His reported involvement in the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, linked to deadly aid distribution failures, only deepens concerns. This is not peacebuilding. It is command and control.

Peace without Palestinians

Human rights organisations have condemned the initiative. Amnesty International described it as a "brazen disregard for international law and human rights." Critics warn it entrenches power hierarchies, privileges wealth and political alignment, reportedly requiring a $1bn contribution for permanent membership, and sidelines existing multilateral institutions. But for Palestinians, the issue is simpler and more devastating.

A body created in their name, justified by their suffering, and empowered to reshape their land excludes them from real authority altogether. Gaza becomes a case study, a proving ground, a gateway to a broader geopolitical experiment — while Palestinians are expected to accept decisions made for them as the price of "peace." The BoP is not a failure of inclusion. It is a deliberate architecture of exclusion. And it makes clear that, once again, Palestinians are being asked to disappear politically so that others can decide what peace should look like.

Photo: U.S. President Donald Trump delivers a speech during the Board of Peace session held as part of the 56th World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on January 22.
(Credit: Harun Özalp/AA)

Editorial p2



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BOARD OF PEACE: Peace without Palestinians

US President Donald Trump has cast himself as the architect of Gaza's ceasefire. His supporters present it as evidence of decisive leadership: Israel's bombs briefly silenced, negotiations nudged into motion, and a pathway to "rebuilding" finally opened. But this narrative collapses under even minimal scrutiny. The ceasefire Trump now claims credit for arrived only after catastrophe on a historic scale. More than 700,000 Palestinians have been killed, the vast majority of them women and children. Over 171,000 have been injured. Around 84 per cent of the Gaza Strip has been destroyed—rising to more than 90 per cent in areas such as Gaza City. More than 330,000 housing units have been damaged or obliterated, with over 90 per cent of all homes affected. Entire neighbourhoods have been wiped from the map.

Hospitals were not spared. Al-Shifa, Nasser, Al-Quds, and dozens of other health facilities were bombed, raided, or rendered inoperable through attacks and the systematic denial of fuel and medical supplies. More than 500 schools were damaged or destroyed, many while sheltering displaced families. Hundreds of mosques were reduced to rubble. Gaza's social, cultural, and physical infrastructure has been deliberately dismantled. And even now, despite the ceasefire, Palestinians continue to be killed almost daily. Israel routinely violates the agreement, restricts humanitarian aid, and maintains a siege that ensures suffering does not end—it is merely managed.

It is against this backdrop that Trump unveiled his so-called Board of Peace (BoP) at the World Economic Forum in Davos, presenting it as a bold alternative to the UN and a new model for peacebuilding. In reality, the BoP represents something far more dangerous: power without accountability, and peace without Palestinians.

From ceasefire mechanism to parallel global order

The Board of Peace was initially marketed as a narrowly defined mechanism linked to a UN Security Council resolution overseeing Gaza's post-war recovery. Several states backed the resolution believing it would bind the United States to a ceasefire and reconstruction framework.

Yet the BoP's official charter makes no direct reference to Gaza at all. Instead of a temporary body focused on one devastated territory, the board claims a permanent, global mandate to promote "peace" and "good governance," explicitly positioning itself as an alternative to existing international institutions. Its language mirrors Trump's long-standing hostility to multilateralism: the UN is dismissed as slow and ineffective; the BoP is cast as "nimble," "pragmatic," and results-driven. What was framed as a response to Gaza has thus morphed into a Trump-controlled parallel order—untethered from international law, unconstrained by accountability, and designed to operate according to Washington's political preferences.

No Palestinians at the table

The most striking feature of the Board of Peace is not what it proclaims, but who it excludes.There are no Palestinians on the board or its executive arm. None. This is despite Gaza serving as the original justification for its creation. By contrast, an Israeli businessman, Yakir Gabay, has been granted a seat—an inclusion that speaks volumes about whose interests are prioritised.Palestinians are instead confined to a subordinate body, the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), responsible for day-to-day administration under strict external oversight. The NCAG holds no authority over borders, finance, reconstruction, or political direction. It exists to manage, not to decide.This is not inclusion; it is containment.

The structure ensures Palestinians remain objects of governance rather than political actors—administrators of decisions made elsewhere about their land, their economy, and their future.

Erasure as reconstruction

The logic of exclusion was laid bare when Jared Kushner unveiled a $30 billion "development plan" for what he termed "New Gaza." The proposal envisions the wholesale bulldozing of the Strip and its transformation into a luxury economic zone—a "Middle East Riviera"—under Board of Peace supervision.

Palestinians were not consulted. The presentation materials, riddled with basic Arabic spelling errors, betrayed a profound absence of local knowledge or engagement. In this vision, Gaza is not a living society to be rebuilt with its people, but a blank slate onto which an external economic fantasy can be imposed.

That erasure is compounded by the fact that Gaza itself is largely the product of earlier dispossession: a small coastal district turned into one of the world's most densely populated refugee concentrations after 1948. To propose its redevelopment without acknowledging this history is to repeat it.

Reports suggest Palestinians would be confined to a fenced-off area near Rafah—effectively refugees on their own land for a second time—while the rest of Gaza is redeveloped for investment, tourism, and elite consumption. This is not reconstruction. It is dispossession repackaged as prosperity.

A divided world, a clear warning

Some states, particularly in the Middle East, have joined the Board of Peace hoping to secure humanitarian access or restrain further violence. Others have refused outright. Spain, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Slovenia have declined participation, citing the exclusion of Palestinians and the board's position outside the UN framework. Spain's prime minister was unequivocal: Gaza's future must be decided by Palestinians.

Human rights organisations have been equally forthright. Amnesty International has described the BoP as a "brazen disregard for international law and human rights." Critics warn that it entrenches power hierarchies, privileges wealth and political alignment—reportedly requiring enormous financial contributions for permanent membership—and sidelines established multilateral norms.

Peace without Palestinians is not peace

For Palestinians, the message is devastatingly familiar.

A body created in their name, justified by their suffering, and empowered to reshape their land excludes them from real authority. Gaza becomes a testing ground for a broader geopolitical experiment, while Palestinians are expected to accept decisions imposed upon them as the price of "peace."

The Board of Peace is not a failure of inclusion. It is an architecture of exclusion by design.

And it makes one reality unmistakably clear: once again, Palestinians are being asked to disappear politically so that others can decide what peace should look like.

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Reluctance to name Islamophobia speaks volumes

Sir, Why is Prime Minister Keir Starmer reluctant not only to adopt a definition of Islamophobia agreed by Muslim communities, but even to accept the term "Islamophobia" itself, despite its long-standing use by Muslims and academics in the UK and internationally? The term has been in use for decades. Yet while Labour figures, along with sections of the right-wing press, readily accept a definition of antisemitism developed in consultation with the Jewish community, similar recognition is denied to Muslims. This double standard only reinforces the perception that Islamophobia remains deeply entrenched across both the Labour and Conservatives.

Yours,
Sarah Ahmed
London

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UN special envoy challenges UK reluctance to name Islamophobia

By Zahra Adoul

The UK's continued reluctance to adopt the term 'Islamophobia' has been criticised by the UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia.

Miguel Ángel Moratinos told MPs, civil society leaders and Muslim organisations on January 12 that the issue was no longer merely social, but a political challenge requiring coordinated action at both national and international levels.

The UN High Representative for the UN Alliance of Civilisations appeared exasperated at the UK government's continued use of the term "anti-Muslim hatred" instead of Islamophobia, despite the term being backed by 115 UN member states through a historic General Assembly resolution in 2024.

Speaking at a Parliamentary event hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims, Moratinos said, "So let me begin with a simple but essential truth. Islamophobia is real. It is rising and you know better than anybody and it having serious consequences on people's lives."

He explained that "Islamophobia erodes trust between citizens and institutions. It undermines social cohesion and when left unaddressed, it becomes a gateway to other forms of exclusion, radicalisation and democratic vacuum."

He added, "What I hear consistently from Muslim communities, whether in Europe, North America, Asia or the world, is not a demand for special treatment, but only for equal treatment."

Given the contradiction between international momentum and the UK's hesitation, Moratinos's remarks caused a visible stir in the audience, many visibly agreeing with what appeared to be the elephant in the room.

He also said, "Across many societies, including longstanding democracies - France, Austria, Germany, Spain - we are witnessing a tragic normalisation of anti-Muslim rhetoric. What before existed on the margins in some cases is now part of the mainstream political discourse, media narrative and online space."



By comparison, the UK government has, for almost a decade, refused to adopt the internationally accepted term 'Islamophobia', instead choosing to coin their own - 'anti-Muslim hatred'.

The impact of Islamophobia manifesting itself in wider society was also addressed.

Labour MP Afzal Khan said, "In the UK we have seen how Islamophobia manifests in multiple ways, through hate, crime, discrimination, exclusion from public life, and the erosion of trust between communities and institutions. These experiences are well documented, yet they persist." He continued, "This is also about moving beyond awareness alone… acknowledgement without action means nothing."

British Muslim Trust Chair, Shabir Randeree, added, "Anti-Muslim hatred is not abstract. It is experienced directly by individuals and by communities across our country. It shapes where people feel safe, the zones, the areas, the geography of where they feel safe, how visible they feel able to be practising their faith and their persona shaped by Islamophobia. In particular, when incidents go unaddressed or not reported, confidence in our hate crime system erodes rapidly. People disengage and they withdraw and cohesion suffers as a result."

He also stressed the importance of robust data, transparent governance and sustained resourcing if Islamophobia was to be tackled effectively. "This cannot be done with a shoestring budget," he said. "This has to be done professionally and properly, so the data is captured and is believable."

Mark Dunpride, founder and Director of the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, said, "This is not a challenge for Muslims alone. Islamophobia damages social cohesion, weakens democracy as a whole, and undermines the values of equality and dignity that we seek to uphold." The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government was contacted for comment. The event was hosted by the APPG on British Muslims in collaboration with the UK Forum for Cultural Diplomacy and the British Muslim Trust.

Photo: Miguel Ángel Moratinos, UN High Representative for the UN Alliance of Civilisations (Credit: CasAmerica/Flickr CC)

Zahra Adoul,
Academic Copy Editor

COMMENT

Yemen between the hammer of secession and the anvil of guardianship

Mohammed Al Jabri,
Sana'a, Yemen

In the opening days of January 2026, Yemen underwent a seismic historical shift that radically reshaped its political and military landscape, placing the fragile question of Yemeni Unity at the centre of a geopolitical firestorm.

In a matter of weeks, the narrative swung violently from the imminent declaration of a breakaway southern state controlling key territories to the total collapse of that project. The dissolution of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) following a decisive regional intervention has echoed the memories of the 1994 civil war, albeit with entirely new geopolitical contours.

The unification of Yemen on 22 May 1990 was not merely a fleeting diplomatic moment, but the culmination of decades of tension between the North (Yemen Arab Republic) and the South (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen). Despite early optimism, the unity quickly frayed overpower-sharing disputes and military integration, leading the South's Vice President, Ali Salim Al Beidh, to retreat to Aden in 1993.

The 1994 civil war remains the seminal event that established the narrative of southern grievance. Skirmishes in April and May of that year escalated into full-scale war following Al Beidh's declaration of secession. The conflict ended on July 7, 1994, with northern forces entering Aden. The victory resulted in widespread infrastructure destruction and a deep political rift caused by the exclusionary policies that followed.

Crucially, in 1994, Gulf support for secession was limited to financial and logistical aid, insufficient to alter the military equation on the ground.

Dynamics shifted dramatically following the Arab Spring of 2011 and the Ansar Allah [Houthi] takeover of Sana'a in 2014, leading to the formation of the STC in 2017 with direct backing from the United Arab Emirates.

On December 2, 2025, the STC launched "Operation Promising Future," seizing control of the strategic Wadi Hadhramaut, Al Mahra, and Shabwa governorates. This culminated in a "Constitutional Declaration" for a State of the South on January 2.

However, this expansion crossed the "red lines" of Saudi Arabia and Oman, both of whom viewed an unchecked separatist entity on their borders as a strategic threat. The response was swift and decisive. On December 30 2025, Saudi airstrikes targeted the port of Mukalla, destroying Emirati arms shipments. This escalation forced a total withdrawal of UAE forces.

By January 7, the Saudi-backed Nation Shield forces had regained control of Aden, Hadhramaut, and Al Mahra. STC President Aidarus Al Zoubaidi fled the country, and the Council was officially dissolved on January 9.

The tectonic shifts of January cannot be understood in isolation; they were defined by three pivotal, interlocking dimensions that operated beneath the surface of the conflict. Militarily, the Houthi group adopted a posture of "strategic neutrality," maintaining a fragile ceasefire while content to watch their southern adversaries consume one another, a tactical pause they utilised to quietly fortify their own defences in Marib and Hodeidah. This manoeuvring unfolded amid deepening humanitarian devastation. Oil exports came to a complete halt, widening Yemen's funding gap. The UN has warned that, by 2026, an estimated 21 million people will require humanitarian assistance.

Externally, the geopolitical calculus was dictated by a resurgent Washington. Under President Donald Trump, the United States gave its tacit blessing to Saudi efforts to consolidate the anti-Houthi front. Viewed through the lens of a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iranian allies, the administration concluded that a strong central state, rather than the unpredictability of militia rule, offered the only viable guarantee for securing vital international waterways.

While Yemeni Unity has technically survived the partition attempt of 2026, its preservation was the result of a regional decree rather than internal cohesion, secured with international blessing.

Riyadh is now moving to fill the political vacuum through the Southern Dialogue Conference, attempting to contain Southern demands within the framework of a single state. The future of Yemen now hinges on the drafting of a new social contract that guarantees equitable partnership—moving beyond the binary of "victor and vanquished" that has haunted the nation from 1994 to 2026.







Hate speech against Muslims and Christians surges in India, report finds

Nadine Osman

Hate speech targeting religious minorities in India rose sharply in 2025. Muslims experienced the highest number of incidents, according to the report Hate Speech Events in India 2025, published on January 13 by India Hate Lab, a research initiative of the Washington DC–based Center for the Study of Organised Hate (CSOH).

The report documented 1,318 in-person hate speech events across the country last year — a 13 per cent increase compared with 2024 and nearly double the number recorded in 2023. Its findings highlight the growing visibility and normalisation of hostile rhetoric against religious minorities in India's public sphere.

India Hate Lab defines hate speech events as public gatherings, including political rallies, religious processions, protest marches, and nationalist meetings, where speakers openly target religious communities.

Muslims were the most frequently targeted group, with incidents rising by nearly 12 per cent year-on-year. Hate speech against Christians increased by around 41 per cent, marking the steepest annual rise recorded for the community. Together, speeches targeting Muslims and Christians accounted for most incidents documented in 2025.

Researchers said minorities were routinely portrayed as outsiders, anti-national actors or demographic threats, language that has become increasingly commonplace at public events.

BJP-RULED STATES DOMINATE FIGURES

The highest number of hate speech events were reported in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Delhi, which together accounted for almost two-thirds of all incidents nationwide.

Nearly 88 per cent of the events took place in states governed by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), either directly or through coalition governments, a notable increase compared with the previous year.

India Hate Lab said the pattern suggests inflammatory rhetoric has persisted beyond election periods and is now sustained throughout the year.

Eviane Leidig, director of research at the centre, said, "The data show that while domestic and international events continued to trigger episodic spikes in hate speech, the more striking trend was the persistence of an elevated baseline throughout the year.

"Unlike previous years, where hate speech tapered off outside election cycles, 2025 saw sustained mobilisation even during non-election periods, pointing to a strategic shift rather than reactive mobilisation alone."

CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND CALLS FOR VIOLENCE

Nearly half of all recorded speeches referenced conspiracy theories such as love jihad, population jihad or halal jihad, terms promoted by Hindu nationalist groups to accuse Muslims of covertly undermining India's Hindu majority.

Researchers stressed that these claims lack factual basis but remain widely circulated in political rhetoric and online discourse.

The report also highlighted a rise in the severity of language used. Almost one in four speeches contained direct calls for violence, while others promoted social or economic boycotts or called for the demolition of mosques and churches.

Prominent religious sites, including the Gyanvapi Mosque and the Shahi Idgah Mosque, were repeatedly referenced during hate speech events.

Hindu nationalist organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal were identified as among the most frequent organisers of such gatherings. Researchers also noted the growing involvement of religious figures, including Hindu monks and priests, whom the report said helped legitimise anti-minority narratives among audiences.

SOCIAL MEDIA AMPLIFICATION

Social media played a key role in amplifying hate, with videos from 1,278 of the 1,318 events shared or live-streamed online—mostly on Facebook, followed by YouTube, Instagram and X.

Researchers said inconsistent enforcement of platform policies has allowed such content to circulate widely. India Hate Lab warned that the sustained spread of hate speech has increased the vulnerability of Muslims and Christians to harassment, discrimination and violence. The report noted that the rise in hostile rhetoric has coincided with policy decisions and legal measures that disproportionately affect religious minorities, including stricter anti-conversion laws and increased scrutiny of Muslim communities.

It concluded that the continued normalisation of hate speech risks further entrenching social divisions and weakening protections for minority groups across India.

Beaten in public, tied to a pole – and then taken into custody: Muslim man assaulted by Hindu vigilantes in Bihar

Nadine Osman

A Muslim man in Bihar was tied to an electric pole and beaten in public by a mob of Hindu men – and was later taken into police custody while investigations into the assault continue.

The December 27 attack occurred as Ahmed Azad rode his motorbike through the Mathiya area of Gopalganj district. Eyewitnesses said the men, reportedly linked to Hindu nationalist groups, stopped him, searched his belongings without legal authority, and claimed to have found beef.

In several Indian states, including Bihar, the sale or slaughter of cow meat is restricted or banned. Rights groups have long warned that such laws are frequently misused to target Muslims, many of whom work in the meat trade.

Videos circulating on social media show Azad pleading for help as a crowd gathers, with the assault continuing for some time before police arrived.

In one clip, a man can be heard claiming: "We have caught him with banned meat. There is a temple nearby. He had bad intentions." Another voice alleges his motorbike was stolen. No evidence has been presented to support either claim.

A local shopkeeper described the scene as harrowing. "He was crying and asking for help, but people were afraid. No one dared to intervene," the witness said.

Police eventually rescued Azad, seized his motorbike and the alleged meat, and placed him in judicial custody. Authorities did not immediately confirm whether any of the attackers had been detained.

Residents condemned the attack. "If there was any wrongdoing, the police should have dealt with it. Beating a man like this in public is unacceptable," said one local resident.

Human rights activists said the incident reflects a wider pattern of targeting Muslims over suspicions of cow slaughter or beef possession and warned that vigilante attacks persist when accountability is delayed.

India has seen multiple lynchings and assaults in recent years linked to cow-related allegations, with rights groups repeatedly cautioning that weak enforcement against vigilante groups allows such attacks to continue.

Investigations into Azad's assault are ongoing, while the local Muslim community in Gopalganj has expressed growing fear and insecurity over the possibility of further attacks.

Muslim lynched by Hindutva mob in Jharkhand over alleged cattle theft

Nadine Osman

A Muslim man was beaten to death by a Hindutva mob in the Indian eastern state of Jharkhand, in what his family say was a Islamophobic lynching.

Pappu Ansari, 45, a cattle transporter, was killed in Godda district on January 7. His body was found the following morning, in a field between Matihani and Latta villages, within the jurisdiction of Podaiyahat police station. According to his family, Ansari had travelled to the area to deliver cattle. They say he was called back under the pretext of settling payment, before being ambushed. The allegation of cattle theft, they insist, was fabricated and used as a justification to attack him because he was Muslim.

"My brother went early in the morning with a driver and took the money," said Mohammad Naseem, Ansari's brother. "Later, he was told the cattle would not be handed over and was asked to leave. When he tried to escape, he was attacked from behind and beaten severely."

Family members allege that once Ansari was detained, the attackers subjected him to extreme violence after identifying him as Muslim. "They removed his trousers to check his identity, identified him as Muslim, and then killed my brother," Naseem said. "He was attacked with a sharp weapon, beaten with sticks, and struck repeatedly. Everyone who had something in their hand attacked him."

"They kept saying, 'He is Muslim, kill him.' Is being Muslim a crime in this country?" he asked.

Relatives said the assault continued for a prolonged period, with the mob using sticks and sharp weapons until Ansari succumbed to his injuries. Police recovered blood-stained sticks, slippers, a burnt mobile phone, and other items from the scene. Police officials stated that villagers detained Ansari at around 1 am on suspicion of cattle theft and assaulted him. Senior officers arrived after receiving information about the incident,



and the body was sent for a post-mortem examination. Authorities confirmed that Ansari died as a result of the beating and said investigations were ongoing to identify and arrest those responsible. However, police also claimed that Ansari had previous criminal cases related to cattle and copper theft, allegations his family strongly disputes.

The family maintains that Ansari was a lawful cattle transporter who had been working in the trade for years and possessed the necessary documentation.

The killing has once again drawn attention to India's long-running pattern of mob violence linked to so-called "cow protection". Cows are considered sacred by many Hindus, and self-styled vigilante groups, often aligned with Hindutva, a hardline Hindu nationalist ideology, have repeatedly targeted Muslim men involved in the cattle trade. While regulations vary by state, cattle trading and transport remain legal in many parts of India.

Jharkhand has seen several such incidents in recent years, prompting comparisons with earlier lynchings, including the 2019 killing of Tabrez Ansari, who was forced to chant religious slogans before dying from his injuries. The family said no senior officials or elected representatives had visited them following the killing.

"No elected representative and no senior official came to see us," Naseem said. "My brother was murdered in a very cruel way. He has five children, four daughters and a young son. What will happen to their future?" They have called for strict action against those responsible and accountability from the authorities. "We are citizens of this country. We want justice," Naseem said. "The administration must give the harshest punishment to the culprits."

Human rights groups have repeatedly warned that mob lynchings linked to cow protection have created widespread fear among Muslims across India, particularly in rural areas where such attacks often go unpunished. Critics argue that the persistence of these killings reflects a broader climate of impunity and deepening communal polarisation under the influence of Hindutva politics.

Photo: Pappu Ansari, 45. (Credit:Flickr CC)

India: Muslim boys booked after Hindu group disrupts birthday party accusing attendants "love jihad"

Nadine Osman

Two Muslim teenagers were booked by police for "breach of peace" after attending a Hindu friend's birthday celebration at a café in Bareilly, northern India, following an intervention by members of a Hindu right-wing group who alleged "love jihad".

The incident took place last month when a nursing student hosted a small birthday gathering for her classmates. According to police, the group comprised ten students, six girls and four boys, of whom only two were Muslim. Midway through the celebration, members of the Bajrang Dal, a Hindu nationalist organisation, entered the café and accused the Muslim boys of involvement in "love jihad", a conspiracy theory promoted by Hindu extremist groups alleging Muslim men seek to convert Hindu women through relationships. Police later said there was no basis to the claim. Eyewitnesses said the Bajrang Dal members verbally abused the group and physically assaulted one of the Muslim boys. The birthday host was also allegedly attacked when she tried to intervene. Videos circulated on social media show police restraining the young woman as she resisted being taken away from the scene.

Following an inquiry, police said no wrongdoing was found on the part of the students. However, two Muslim boys and a café staff member were booked under preventive laws for allegedly disturbing public order.

No arrests were made among the Bajrang Dal members, who were advised by police to disperse.

Speaking to *The Times of India,* the birthday host said the accusations were false and misleading. "They crashed my birthday party and attacked my friend. There were only two Muslims present, most of my guests were Hindus. The videos shared by right-wing members showed only selective footage and did not capture the full incident. The claim of 'love jihad' was completely unfounded," she said.

Police officials reiterated that the event was a private celebration among classmates and confirmed that the "love jihad" allegation had been ruled out.

The case has sparked criticism on social media and among civil society groups, who have raised concerns over selective policing and growing religious intolerance. Critics argue that booking the students rather than those who disrupted the event reflects a wider pattern of preventive laws being used disproportionately against minorities.

A mosaic of service: thirty-seven Muslims honoured in New Year Honours list



Home Affairs Correspondent

The 2026 New Year Honours List recognises 37 British Muslims for their exceptional contributions across the UK. Awards include two CBEs, 15 OBEs, 16 MBEs, and four BEMs, reflecting a wide range of service and achievement.

Recipients include entrepreneurs advancing diversity, healthcare professionals from Wales to the Falklands, and educators creating new opportunities. Grassroots champions delivering community relief, interfaith work, and refugee support are also recognised, alongside leaders in arts, culture, and sport.

The honours highlight operational excellence during major national events, voluntary service, and work in pandemic preparedness, fintech innovation, and diplomacy. From surgeons and charity directors to teaching assistants and volunteers, these awards showcase the vital role British Muslims play across every level of national life.

Grassroots Change and Community Impact

The list shines a light on those building resilience from the ground up. **Asma Haq BEM,** co-founder of the Marks Gate Relief Project in East London, embodies this spirit. A chemical engineer who pivoted to philanthropy, she has created a model of support in one of the UK's most deprived areas. Her project bridges secular and spiritual education, offering free GCSE and A-Level Chemistry lessons alongside Qur'anic studies with Tajweed. Beyond education, she has spearheaded initiatives tackling food poverty and social isolation, creating safe skill-development spaces for women. Her approach extends to fostering community bonds through litter picks, gardening in local allotments, and cricket sessions for vulnerable women and girls. Her interfaith work with Khalij Group, UK, aimed at highlighting shared values across religions, earned her recognition from the Faith and Belief Forum in 2023.

Speaking to *The Muslim News*, Haq dedicated her award "to the many quiet people whose daily acts of care make communities possible; it reminds me that service is rarely solitary and that small, steady kindnesses shape the world more than grand gestures."

Also recognised for strengthening communities is **Sajda Khatoon Shah MBE**, a strategy and transformation leader. Born in Bradford during a period of unrest, she channelled a transient upbringing into a commitment to social justice. Her "unconventional path" saw her build bridges between communities and institutions, working with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to improve global maternal health, mentoring medical students at Queen Mary University of London in culturally sensitive care, and serving as a Magistrate. She now strengthens governance at the international charity Muslim Aid.

In a statement to *The Muslim News*, Shah said, "I am deeply honoured to receive the MBE. This recognition reflects not only my own efforts but the collective work of the colleagues, mentors, and communities I have been privileged to serve throughout my career. I hope this award will inspire others, particularly women and individuals from underrepresented communities, to embrace unconventional paths, lead with authenticity, and believe in the transformative power of service and Amanah (trust)."

Monwara Ali MBE, CEO of Waltham Forest Community Hub, has dedicated three decades to public service and civil society, advocating for vulnerable communities. Her early leadership began at 18 as a youth worker, and by 20 she was a trustee and chair of a community organisation. She also undertook a formative internship in South Carolina, USA, supporting prisoners on Death Row, many wrongly imprisoned or disadvantaged, an experience that deepened her commitment to justice.

As CEO of Waltham Forest Community Hub for over 15 years, Monwara has developed the Hub into a cornerstone of community wellbeing, overseeing programmes ranging from youth advisory and employability support to wellbeing sessions, older people's clubs, housing advice, and community walks. She has also served as Co-Chair of the VCS Health & Care Leadership Group and as Founder and Director of Stow Inspire CIC, empowering women from underserved communities.

Her work extends to leadership development, mentoring women through her Trailblazer Leadership Programme and advancing skills-building and financial independence initiatives internationally. Reflecting on her MBE, Monwara told *The Muslim News*, "I feel deeply touched and humbled to be awarded an MBE. It's such an honour to accept recognition from incredible efforts by my nominees. I appreciate this is no small thing. If my father were alive today, he would never stop talking about 'Daddy's girl'."

Health and Pandemic Preparedness

The honours pay tribute to lifetimes of work safeguarding public health. **Dr Bassam Hallis OBE**, Deputy Director at the UK Health Security Agency, was recognised for 35 years of work in vaccine development and pandemic preparedness. His expertise in immunogenicity and evaluating therapeutics for diseases like influenza and COVID-19 has been instrumental. He collaborates across academia and industry, committed to building scientific capability globally, especially in the Global South, supporting the '100 Days Mission' for pandemic response. Dr Hallis said, "I'm delighted to be given the Officer of the Order of the British Empire award. This is in recognition of the work of my team, colleagues and collaborators in support of national and global health security."

Technology, Skills and Innovation

Shah Ruhul Amin OBE, co-founded the identity verification firm Onfido in 2012, growing it from an Oxford startup into a global AI and machine learning company acquired by Entrust for over $650 million in 2024. His work in combating digital fraud and deepfakes is critical to digital trust.

He told *The Muslim News*, "Receiving an OBE is a huge honour. When we started Onfido, it was a simple belief that identity could be a secure and seamless way for people to access services... I grew up in East London as the son of Bangladeshi immigrant parents who came here for a better life. Their hard work, and their belief in education, community and entrepreneurship, shaped everything that followed."

Similarly, **Mohamed 'Mo' Isap OBE**, CEO of IN4 Group, has dedicated 30 years to expanding access to technology careers. His skills provider, headquartered at MediaCity in Salford, operates on a place-based model to unlock local talent. To date, IN4 has supported over 6,000 people into tech roles (59% women, 37% from underrepresented groups) and delivered careers education to more than 2,000 schools. He said, "I'm deeply honoured to receive this award for services to education and skills. It reflects a lifetime of work across education, skills and enterprise, and the belief that talent exists everywhere if people are given the right opportunities. Education is where long-term change happens, and it plays a vital role in creating opportunity for individuals, families and communities."

Arts and Cultural Leadership

Shanaz Gulzar MBE, was honoured for her services to culture in Bradford. The acclaimed artist, producer, and presenter served as Creative Director of Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture. She led a programme that embedded the district's heritage at its heart, ensuring local people were central to its delivery. Gulzar said, "This honour isn't just for me, it also marks the work of all my remarkable colleagues... The people of our city and district have completely owned this year, which has been a privilege and a delight to witness." Under her direction, the year became a catalyst for long-term transformation, with early estimates indicating over 3 million attendees at more than 5,000 events.

Logistical Excellence and Public Service

Fatima Benzbir MBE, Regional Manager at National Express, played a key role during the State Funeral of Queen Elizabeth II in 2022. She oversaw the temporary relocation of Victoria Coach Station to Wembley Stadium, ensuring hundreds of coach services and thousands of passengers moved safely amid extensive London road closures. She told *The Muslim News*, "I am thrilled and humbled to receive an MBE from The King, and proud that my contributions to the coach transport industry have been recognised in such a prestigious way. More importantly, I want to thank all my brilliant colleagues at National Express. Delivering complex operations is always a team effort, and this award reflects the dedication, professionalism and commitment of colleagues and partners who work tirelessly to provide a brilliant service to passengers every day."

Community Recognition Across Britain

These Muslim recipients form part of a wider celebration of service across British society. The honours also recognised 27 members of the Jewish community, including two Damehoods, two CBEs, four OBEs, ten MBEs and nine BEMs, alongside 31 Hindu & Sikh recipients, whose awards included two damehoods, a knighthood, a CB, three CBEs, six OBEs, twelve MBEs and six BEMs.

Pictured: Dr Bassam Hallis OBE, Fatima Benzbir MBE and Mohamed Isap OBE. Bottom row: Sajda Khatoon Shah MBE, Shah Ruhul Amin OBE and Monwara Ali MBE. (Courtesy of recipients)

The full list of Muslim recipients of the 2026 New Year's Honours is available in the online edition of this issue.



GAZA - RELATED COVERAGE

COMMENT

Children of Gaza: Spiritual heroism, forged amid ruin and hunger

Jeni Myftari

At the southern edge of the Mediterranean lies the Gaza Strip, not merely a narrow territory home to 2.1 million people, but a place where hope and suffering intertwine, forging a reality that defies human imagination. The past two-years of war have unleashed widespread death, destruction, and displacement, etching scars into civilian lives and exposing a form of spiritual heroism that words alone cannot capture.

Since October 7, 2023, when the conflict between Israeli forces and Hamas escalated, Gaza has come to epitomise urban warfare with catastrophic consequences for civilians. Humanitarian organisations report that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been killed or injured, with children bearing the brunt of the suffering.

In this land of ruins, where homes have turned to ash and hunger has replaced the table, the children of Gaza are writing one of the most extraordinary chapters of human resilience. Orphaned, homeless, and hungry, they navigate a world marked by trauma and fear at every step.



Yet, in this suffocating darkness, something extraordinary, beyond logic, unfolds. Five hundred children from Gaza, survivors of bombings, hunger, and profound trauma, have completed the memorisation (hifdh) of the Qur'an. An achievement that defies conventional academic measures, accomplished not in peace and comfort, but amidst ruins, hunger, pain, and fear.

These children are silent heroes. They have discovered that faith is not only found in illuminated classrooms but in temporary shelters, damaged mosques, and roofless rooms under open skies. They recited verses not in safety, but as the heavens trembled with bombardments. They carried its words in their hearts, even as the world seemed to have forgotten them.

Where did they find their strength? In faith. In the conviction that the word of Allah becomes a refuge when no other shelter exists, a light when all around them is dark. When bread is scarce, the Qur'an nourishes the soul. When bodies are wounded, the it heals the heart. When the world is silent, the Qur'an speaks.

These children have transcended the human. They have shown that resilience is not merely about survival but about preserving dignity, hope, and a connection to God even in the harshest, most inhumane conditions. Through memorising the Qur'an, they have transformed Allah's book into a beacon illuminating their hearts, a light that neither bombs, nor hunger, nor global neglect can extinguish.

Their heroism is an indictment of national and international silence. It holds up a mirror to the world, forcing a question that cannot be ignored: how is it possible that children, hungry and wounded, display greater moral courage than the very international powers and organisations that claim to protect human rights?

The achievement of these 500 children is living proof that the faith Allah plants in believers' hearts cannot be uprooted by force. On the contrary, the more one tries to suppress it, the stronger, deeper, and brighter it grows. Even wounded, Gaza continues to generate hope; even besieged, it speaks loudly through patience and unwavering faith.

Beyond shocking statistics of loss, malnutrition, and despair, the spiritual resilience of these children reveals the enduring power of human faith. It defies any notion that violence, hunger, or global indifference can break the human spirit.

The children of Gaza have achieved the ultimate victory, even amid death, abuse, or the threat of hunger inflicted by those who claim humanity. They have triumphed over the world's most destructive forces, those that unite to rain bombs on women and children. In doing so, they have become a beacon illuminating the grey horizon of this land we call our shared home.

This is not just a Palestinian story; it is a universal message for all oppressed people worldwide: hope does not depend on circumstances, but on what we carry in our hearts. And when the heart is anchored in God, no earthly power can defeat it.

Respect, honour, and glory to the children of Gaza and to the martyred Palestinians, who, even amid destruction, continue to demonstrate that the light of faith is stronger than any darkness!

Photo: Palestinian children in Gaza attend a makeshift Quran shelter, continuing to memorise the Holy Quran amid relentless Israeli bombardment and the presence of Israeli tanks nearby. (Credit: @doamuslims)

Israel ranks bottom of global nation brand index for second year running

Nadine Osman

Israel has placed last in the Nation Brands Index (NBI) for the second consecutive year, according to figures released on January 7 by BrandIL, a private research firm.

The result marks Israel's lowest position in the index in almost two decades.

The NBI, developed by policy adviser Simon Anholt, measures countries' global reputations across six categories: tourism, people, culture, immigration and investment, exports, and governance.

Japan, Germany, Canada, Italy, Switzerland and Britain ranked among the highest-performing nations. Israel, however, placed below countries including India, Kenya, Russia, Ukraine and Namibia. The Palestinian Authority, which is not internationally recognised as a sovereign state, ranked lower than Israel.

The survey, conducted between August and September 2025, shows Israel's overall score fell by 6.1 per cent compared with the previous year.

Israel also ranked lowest for perceptions of exports and consumer products, reflecting growing international reluctance to purchase goods and services associated with the country.

According to the report, global sentiment towards Israel has hardened significantly between 2024 and 2025. Crucially, negative perceptions now extend beyond criticism of the Israeli government to attitudes towards Israeli citizens themselves, a shift linked directly to the war on Gaza.

Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth reported that Israelis are increasingly viewed abroad as persona non grata. Since October 2023, Israeli forces have killed more than 72,000 Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. The report comes amid mounting evidence of a sharp decline in Israel's global standing. Israeli media have noted that increasing numbers of Gen Z respondents now describe Israel as "illegitimate" and "colonial".

Products labelled "Made in Israel" have also been directly affected, as international boycott campaigns continue to gain momentum.

Although the Nation Brands Index does not measure consumer behaviour directly, BrandIL warned of broader economic consequences, including declining global trust, reduced foreign investment, damage to tourism, and long-term harm to Israel's international reputation.

Israel's position in global opinion surveys has fallen steeply since October 2023. A YouGov poll conducted between 12 and 26 May found public support for Israel in Europe at its lowest level in 2025, with fewer than one in five respondents in Britain, France, Germany, Denmark, Spain and Italy expressing a favourable view. In the United States, a Pew Research Center poll published in April found that 53 per cent of Americans now hold an unfavourable opinion of Israel, up from 42 per cent in March 2022, prior to the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack and Israel's subsequent military campaign in Gaza.

While Democrats remain far more likely than Republicans to view Israel negatively—69 per cent compared with 37 per cent—the proportion of Republicans holding unfavourable views has risen by 10 percentage points since 2022.

Another Pew survey found that majorities in 20 of the 24 countries surveyed between January and April 2025 held negative views of Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Although unfavourable perceptions of Israel have long prevailed in Arab and Muslim-majority countries, the polling highlights a marked increase in disapproval across Europe and East Asia. Support is also declining in Western Europe and among younger generations worldwide.

Pro-Palestinian activists acquitted over alleged damage to Israeli-made products

Elham Asaad Buaras

Three pro-Palestinian activists have been cleared of criminal damage charges linked to an incident involving Israeli-made products at a supermarket in west Belfast.

Martin Rafferty, 58, of Carnmoney Road in Newtownabbey, and Eoin Davey, 57, and Yasmary Perdomo, 50, both of Springfield Road in Belfast, were jointly charged over an alleged incident at the Sainsbury's store in the Kennedy Centre in July 2024.

The three were accused of placing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) stickers on Sodastream fizzy water products. All denied causing any damage.

When the case came before Belfast Magistrates' Court on January 19 for a scheduled trial, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) offered no evidence. District Judge Anne Marshall dismissed the case, formally acquitting all three defendants.



Outside court, their solicitor, Aiden Carlin, criticised the prosecution, saying there was "literally no evidence of any alleged damage" and describing the outcome as a "spectacular" result.

He said the case had involved 13 separate court hearings and questioned why it had been allowed to continue for so long.

"It is an injustice that our clients were required to attend court multiple times since last June, only for the PPS to offer no evidence at this stage," he said, adding that similar cases against other BDS activists should now be dropped.

In a statement, the PPS said it has a duty to keep prosecution decisions under review as cases progress and to reassess matters when circumstances change. "Following a change in the evidence available in this case, it was determined that the test for prosecution was no longer met," the PPS said.

The BDS movement campaigns for economic and cultural boycotts of Israel and Israeli settlements.

Photo: Three pro-Palestinian activists cleared of criminal damage charges over supermarket incident involving Israeli-made products. (Credit: Wikimedia)

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British-Palestinian surgeon cleared in landmark 'lawfare' tribunal ruling

Home Correspondent

Prominent British Palestinian surgeon, academic and human rights advocate Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah was formally cleared of professional misconduct on January 9, after a medical tribunal dismissed allegations of antisemitism and support for terrorism as unfounded and politically motivated.

The ruling followed a three-day hearing before the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS), convened after the General Medical Council brought a complaint prompted by submissions from the pro-Israel legal advocacy group UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI).

Dr Abu-Sittah, a consultant plastic and reconstructive surgeon who has worked extensively in Gaza and other conflict zones, was accused of professional misconduct over a newspaper article and a series of historic social media posts, which UKLFI claimed amounted to antisemitism and endorsement of violence.

In a unanimous decision, the tribunal dismissed all allegations. Tribunal Chair Ian Comfort said the panel had assessed



the material in full and rejected claims that selective quotation supported the accusations. "The tribunal did not cherrypick quotations but considered the article in its entirety," Comfort said, adding that the panel "could not identify anything that was antisemitic or supportive of terrorism or violence."

Addressing a social media post cited in the complaint, the tribunal concluded that an ordinary reader would understand it as a reference to a historical anniversary, rather than as providing support to a terrorist organisation. Dr Abu-Sittah welcomed the ruling, describing the complaint as part of a coordinated attempt to silence criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza and the wider occupied Palestinian territory.

"This forms part of a broader lawfare strategy which aims to instrumentalise regulatory processes to intimidate, silence and exhaust those who speak out against injustice in Palestine," he said. He revealed that the case was the tenth complaint lodged against him by UKLFI to various institutions, including universities, professional regulators and public bodies, none of which has resulted in disciplinary action.

The verdict prompted sharply divided reactions. UKLFI condemned the outcome, describing the decision as "shocking" and reiterating its claim that Dr Abu-Sittah's statements breached professional standards.

By contrast, Jewish Voices for Liberation welcomed the ruling, calling it "a significant rebuff to UKLFI" and praising the tribunal for remaining "unswayed by the general hysteria surrounding criticism of Israel." Legal observers and Palestine solidarity groups described the ruling as a landmark moment, warning that regulatory and professional bodies are increasingly being drawn into political disputes over Israel and Palestine.

The decision comes as UK Lawyers for Israel itself is under investigation by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) following a formal complaint alleging that the group has deployed a pattern of vexatious and legally baseless legal threats to suppress Palestine solidarity activism.

The complaint accuses UKLFI of abusing legal processes in a manner consistent with strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). The SRA has confirmed that the investigation is ongoing, though no findings have yet been published.

For Dr Abu-Sittah and his supporters, the tribunal's ruling is viewed as both a personal vindication and a wider challenge to the growing use of legal and regulatory mechanisms to police political speech on Palestine. "This decision matters far beyond me," he said. "It is about whether professionals are allowed to speak about war crimes without being dragged through years of intimidation."

Photo: Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah, a prominent British Palestinian surgeon was formally cleared of professional misconduct after a medical tribunal ruled that allegations of antisemitism and support for terrorism were unfounded and politically motivated. (Credit: Raşid Necati Aslım/AA)

Adelaide Writers' Week cancelled after mass boycott over removal of Palestinian academic



Harun Nasrullah

Adelaide Writers' Week has been cancelled after an unprecedented escalation of a boycott by writers, journalists and commentators protesting the removal of Palestinian-Australian academic and author Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah from the programme.

What began with nearly 50 withdrawals has since grown into a mass walkout involving around 180 participants, rendering the literary event unviable and triggering resignations, an official apology, and a dramatic reversal by the Adelaide Festival Corporation.

The controversy erupted after the festival board removed Abdel-Fattah from the 2026 programme, citing "cultural sensitivity" concerns following a recent terror attack in Bondi, a beachside suburb of Sydney. The board stressed that it was not suggesting Abdel-Fattah or her work had any connection to the attack but pointed to her past statements on Israel and Palestine as the basis for its decision.

Adelaide Writers' Week, the literary strand of the long-running Adelaide Festival of Arts, was due to take place from February 28 to March 5 in the Pioneer Women's Memorial Garden, featuring free public panels and discussions with writers from Australia and abroad.

On January 9, the festival temporarily removed its online programme, stating it was responding to withdrawals from the Writers' Week 2026 line-up. By that afternoon, 47 writers had confirmed they were boycotting, with many more signalling they would follow unless Abdel-Fattah was reinstated.

Among the first wave of withdrawals were some of Australia's most prominent literary figures, including Helen Garner, Chloe Hooper, Sarah Krasnostein, Michelle de Kretser, Drusilla Modjeska, Melissa Lucashenko, and Stella Prize-winning poet Evelyn Araluen. Best-selling novelist Trent Dalton, who had been scheduled to deliver a keynote address at Adelaide Town Hall, also withdrew. Senior journalists from Australia's public broadcaster, the ABC, including David Marr and Jonathan Green, confirmed they would no longer participate. Other withdrawals included commentators Jane Caro and Peter FitzSimons, Cheek Media co-founder Hannah Ferguson, journalist and academic Peter Greste, First Nations academic Prof Chelsea Watego, political analyst Amy Remeikis, and economist and author Yanis Varoufakis.

Authors Bri Lee and Madeleine Gray said they would only take part if Abdel-Fattah was reinstated.

Abdel-Fattah, a lecturer at Macquarie University in Sydney, had been scheduled to appear at the festival for the second time, having hosted panels and sessions in 2023. In a statement issued on January 8, the festival board said it had decided that "it would not be culturally sensitive to continue to programme her at this unprecedented time so soon after Bondi."

The board acknowledged that Abdel-Fattah was not linked to the attack but referenced her previous comments on Zionism and Israel. Abdel-Fattah has long faced criticism from Australian political parties, Jewish organisations and some media outlets for outspoken views on Palestine, including remarks that Zionists had "no claim or right to cultural safety."

The decision drew fierce condemnation from across the literary community. Hannah Ferguson described it as "censorship", while Amy Remeikis accused the board of making a "deliberate choice to silence a prominent Palestinian-Australian academic without offering any clear or convincing rationale". Former New South Wales premier and foreign affairs minister Bob Carr, however, defended the board's decision. While critical of Israel's invasion of Gaza, Carr argued that some of Abdel-Fattah's past statements had been counterproductive to the Palestinian cause and said the board should be supported. Iranian-Australian Booker Prize nominee Shokoofeh Azar said she understood the board's reasoning and initially confirmed she would still participate, arguing that cultural spaces should allow for dialogue rather than a single dominant voice.

As the boycott intensified, the fallout widened. The Australia Institute, a public policy think tank, withdrew its sponsorship of the festival, saying Adelaide Writers' Week had historically stood for "bravery, freedom of expression and the exchange of ideas".

By mid-January, the number of withdrawals had swelled to around 180 writers and speakers, leaving only a handful of sessions with confirmed participants. The Adelaide Festival Corporation subsequently announced that Adelaide Writers' Week 2026 would be cancelled.

In the days that followed, senior figures associated with the festival resigned, and a newly constituted board issued a formal public apology to Abdel-Fattah. The board retracted its earlier statement, acknowledging that the way the decision had been communicated caused significant harm, and invited Abdel-Fattah to participate in a future Writers' Week, tentatively in 2027.

Speaking earlier to Australia's ABC Radio, Abdel-Fattah described her removal as "egregious and unabashedly anti-Palestinian", calling it "an obscene attempt to associate me with an atrocity that I had nothing to do with". While welcoming the solidarity shown by fellow writers, she said the damage caused by the decision could not be undone easily. She has since issued a defamation concerns notice against South Australian premier Peter Malinauskas, alleging that public comments made during the controversy falsely linked her to extremism and harmed her reputation.

Photo: Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah (Credit: Speaking Out/CC)



Trump's Greenland ambitions break the façade of climate denial



Despite US President Donald Trump's claim that climate change is a hoax, his ambitions to annex Greenland for greater access to trade routes and critical minerals due to melting ice, imply that he knows that climate change is happening and wants to cash in on it.

Greenland boasts a strategic location between North America, Western Europe, and the Arctic, and 80% of its 2.17 million square kilometres landmass is covered in ice, though it is melting at an accelerated rate, losing an estimated 30 million tonnes an hour— the equivalent of 88 million Olympic swimming pools each year. Since the early 1990s, Greenland's ice sheet has lost close to four trillion tonnes of ice, with the rate of loss now around seven times higher than it was three decades ago.

These warming conditions are opening shipping corridors in the Arctic and melting permafrost, which not only exposes critical minerals but also releases millions of tonnes of carbon and methane into the atmosphere, further accelerating global warming. Trump views these shipping routes and minerals as strategically important to dominating China and Russia in global trade and technological innovation.

Shipping routes

The US sees the Arctic as the next frontier of global trade. Travel times for cargo ships can be significantly shortened by traveling through the once largely inaccessible Arctic. A Chinese vessel, for example, cut its journey by half through the corridor. Arctic shipping traffic has more than doubled since 2013 as summer sea ice retreats, turning previously theoretical routes into commercially viable passages.

While ice remains in the region, specialized ice-breaking vessels are necessary to travel through it. Russia has 40 ice-breaker vessels, including a nuclear-powered fleet, compared to the US's three and China's five. The increase in Arctic shipping, which has more than doubled since 2013, also accelerates ice melt, as black carbon from vessels settles on ice and warms surfaces up to ten times faster than airborne emissions, threatening the fragile Arctic ecosystem. The very trade routes enabled by melting ice are now helping to hasten its disappearance. Both the US and China are building more ice-breakers to better compete in the region.

Critical minerals

Greenland is also endowed with a variety of rare earth minerals necessary for clean energy and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. These critical minerals are used to make smartphones, televisions, electric vehicle batteries, AI data centres, wind turbines and solar panels, and together represent 25 of the 34 minerals classified as critical by the European Union and 40 of the 50 deemed necessary for US national security. Currently, China has an edge, boasting an abundance of these minerals domestically as well as the infrastructure to refine them.

Last year, Greenland's foreign minister discussed the possibility of cooperating with EU countries to partner on critical mineral supply chains, amid Trump's overtures to annex the island. And in October 2025, Greenland's prime minister addressed the European Parliament to call for stronger collaboration on mining and strategic resources, emphasising that "Greenland needs the European Union, and the European Union needs Greenland", including in areas such as critical minerals and sustainable development. Greenland already exports fish to the EU, and the areas are more aligned on environmental concerns regarding mining than they would be with the US under Donald Trump, who has done away with clean energy projects and much environmental oversight.

Last September, the UK signed a critical mineral cooperation agreement with Greenland as part of negotiations towards a UK–Greenland Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement (PTCA), aimed at developing resilient and responsible supply chains. The Department for Business and Trade stated, "Developing these supply chains responsibly together with Greenland and our partners will safeguard strategically important industries, strengthen British and European long-term economic security and reduce dependence on volatile global markets."

Such cooperation opens discussions about logistics and infrastructure projects, as many of the mineral-rich areas are remote and undeveloped.

Climate research and Ocean currents

In January of this year, the US President grew stronger in his rhetoric about annexing Greenland, going so far as to impose tariffs on UK and EU nations opposed to his plans. Trump's recent brazen capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and decision to "run" the South American nation adds to their concerns. Should the US take Greenland through military action, the implications for the region would be far-reaching. Scientists who have done important climate research in Greenland are concerned that a US annexation would put valuable research on the back burner, given Trump's general approach to climate change and scientific research.

Greenland has welcomed researchers from around the world to carry out influential studies that have uncovered historical climate trends and helped build predictive models. Each year, hundreds of scientists work across dozens of projects on the island, supported by major research facilities such as Summit Station, while international conferences attract researchers from across the globe.

Without such access, researchers could lose their ability to gather valuable data that much of the world relies upon to understand where climate change is headed. Rapid ice melting in Greenland could also alter the ocean current referred to as AMOC (Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation), which is a "really vital current not only for Greenland but for the whole of the northern hemisphere because it keeps the UK especially and Western Europe much warmer than it otherwise would be… any change to that could have really significant impacts for our climate and our weather," says Dr Ella Gilbert, a climate scientist at the British Antarctic Survey.

Climate change has changed Greenland rapidly in recent years. The pristine and sparsely populated island has played a significant role in climate projections and now geopolitics. Trump's pursuit of Greenland relies entirely on the realities of a warming planet — melting ice, newly navigable seas and newly exposed resources — laying bare the contradiction at the heart of his climate denial. Should the US's ambitions succeed, the methods by which Trump opens the island's economy could spell disaster for climate research.

Photo: A view of Nuu Port in Greenland, the world's largest island, on January 13, Greenland is home to some of the richest natural resource reserves globally, including critical raw materials such as lithium and rare earth elements that are vital for green energy technologies and the global energy transition. Alongside its mineral wealth, fishing remains one of the most important sources of income for the local population, forming the backbone of Greenland's economy and sustaining many coastal communities.

(Credit: Lokman Vural Elibol/AA)

Sarah Sakeena Marshall,
Data Assistant

Add fibre to your diet for better health



As we head into the end of January, many people may already be giving up on their New Year's resolutions. Exercising more, losing weight, and eating more healthily are common goals we set ourselves, but it can take real commitment to stick to major changes in our diets and routines – and our resolve can wear off. Instead of trying to make too many drastic changes, focusing on smaller adjustments and adding healthier items to our diet can be more successful in gradually changing eating habits, leading to long-term improvements in diet and health.

Simple swaps or additions to our diet can feel less like 'dieting' and denying ourselves food. For example, swapping white bread and pasta for wholemeal options, replacing sugary breakfast cereals with porridge or muesli, and reducing sugary drinks in favour of water or teas. You could also swap one red meat meal a week for fish. Focusing on adding to our diet can also help change what we eat – by including more portions of vegetables in our meals, eating more fruit as a snack, or dried fruit/nuts instead of a biscuit, adding fruit to our breakfast cereal/porridge – all of which can help to ensure we meet our '5 a day'. You can start with making a few swaps/ additions a week and build up from there. Plus, eating a wider variety of foods, especially fruit and veg, will help provide all the nutrition the body needs to stay healthy. In addition, drinking more water helps maintain proper hydration.

FIBRE-RICH FOODS TO HELP ADULTS REACH 30G A DAY

• 2 slices of wholemeal bread	3.5g
• Small bowl of porridge oats	2.3g
• I medium apple (skin on)	4.0g
• I medium banana	3.0g
• I cup cooked broccoli	5.0g
• I cup of peas	8.0g
• 1 baked potato (with skin)	6.0g
• 80g cooked chickpeas	4.0g
• Handful almonds	3.5g

One area we can all focus on is increasing the amount of fibre that we eat. Studies consistently show that in the UK, most adults are not eating enough fibre The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (2019 -2023) reported that only 4% of UK adults meet the recommended 30g a day. Even though we cannot digest it, fibre (which is made by plants) is an essential part of the diet. Firstly, it adds bulk and this helps the digestive tract move contents along the intestines and bowels, which helps to prevent constipation. Fibre reduces the risk of major diseases such as cardiovascular disease and stroke as it helps lower cholesterol, promoting heart health. It helps with appetite control and maintaining blood glucose levels, as fibre rich foods are more filling and fibre slows down the absorption of carbohydrates, which helps with weight control and reduces the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Fibre is also an important prebiotic, which is food that is beneficial for our gut bacteria and helps support a health gut microbiome, which is linked to better digestion, immune function, reduced inflammation and mood regulation. Fibre also helps to reduce the risk of developing colorectal cancer.

Given that fibre is such an important part of our diet why are most of us not eating enough The main reason is that our modern diets now include a lot of refined grains, sugars and processed starches – for example white flour is made from wheat that has had the hard outer layer (the bran and the germ) removed – which is where most of the fibre is found. This is then used in bread, pasta, pastries, biscuits, ultra-processed snacks and cakes. Fruit juices may contain some vitamins but will contain little of the fibre that was in the original fruit. In addition, our diets have changed away from traditional high fibre staples such as beans, wholegrains and vegetables, and the rise of convenience and ready-made meals has only compacted the issue. Also, recently there has been more focus on eating protein and lowering carbohydrates for muscle building and fitness, but animal-based protein sources such as eggs, meat and fish will not contain fibre, only plant-based foods will contain fibre; options such as beans, lentils, chickpeas, peas and nuts contain protein and fibre.

If you are planning to improve your health and diet this year, consider increasing your consumption of wholegrain foods (wholemeal bread and pasta) and adding more fruit, vegetables, pulses and lentils. Not only will this boost your vitamin and mineral intake, but it will also increase your fibre intake, helping control appetite and improve overall long-term health. If you currently do not eat much fibre, it is advisable to increase the amount you eat slowly to avoid digestive issues and to ensure you drink enough fluids to aid digestion.

Photo: Boost your health this year by adding fibre-rich foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes to your diet, small swaps for long-term benefits

(Credit: Freepik)

Rachel Kayani,
Science Tutor & Writer

Hijab-wearing Muslim women face surge in abuse across Australia post Bondi Beach attack



Harun Nasrullah

Muslim women wearing the hijab are reporting a wave of harassment and abuse across Australia in the aftermath of the December 14 Bondi Beach attack, which left 15 people dead and was formally declared a terrorist incident. Authorities have charged 24-year-old Naveed Akram over the attack, which also saw his father shot dead by police.

While politicians and religious leaders condemned the violence, the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) says Muslim communities have since become targets of widespread hostility, extending far beyond Sydney.

Sharp rise in Islamophobic incidents

ANIC reports a near 200 per cent increase in anti-Muslim hostility since the attack. Its Action Against Islamophobia initiative, which runs a national helpline, has documented 62 formal incidents, including verbal abuse, physical harassment, online threats, and vandalism at mosques and Islamic centres.

Community leaders say women wearing the hijab have been particularly targeted. ANIC senior adviser Bilal Rauf described the scale of abuse as "deeply distressing" for communities across the country:

"In the few weeks' period since the horrific murders at Bondi, we're talking hundreds in terms of the level of increase [in hate incident reports]. We've had a number of incidents where young girls have been spat at and, in one instance, the hijabs ripped off, and many other abusive comments directed at women. People have reached out to express their utter devastation, distress, concern, fear, and many of these [incidents] have also been raised with the authorities, including police.

"It's been very difficult for the community in having to deal with that and confront such hatred, sadly in part flowing from the divisive rhetoric of some politicians and statements made in some quarters of media."

First-hand experiences of harassment

The impact has been immediate and deeply personal. In Leppington, south-west Sydney, a Muslim disability support worker had her hijab forcibly removed by a passing couple while assisting clients onto a bus. "It was terrifying and profoundly humiliating," she said. In Redfern, an inner-city Sydney suburb, lawyer Sibat Sheikh recounted being egged and verbally abused on her way to work. "My pants were dirtied and my shoes covered in raw eggs. I'm one of the very few women who wear hijab at my work, and now there is an elephant in every room we walk into," she said.

In Perth, another woman reported being spat at in public while wearing a hijab. Several others said they had been followed, verbally abused, or told to "go back to where you came from" in supermarkets and on public transport. One mother said her 14-year-old daughter is now afraid to wear her hijab to school.

Mosques and Islamic centres targeted

Several mosques and Islamic centres across Australia have reported vandalism, threats or security incidents since the Bondi Beach attack. In Sydney's south west, Lakemba Mosque (Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib Mosque) received online threats referencing past terror attacks that prompted urgent police investigations. A similar online threat was also directed at Padstow Mosque / United Muslims of Australia Centre.

In response to rising threats, community members began sleeping overnight at Minto Mosque in south west Sydney as a precautionary security measure. Australian Islamic House – Masjid Al Bayt Al Islami in Edmondson Park also reported an alarming online threat referring to the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks.

Further afield, Masjid Taqwah in Bald Hills, Brisbane was vandalised with Islamophobic and antisemitic graffiti, drawing solidarity from other faith leaders and police attention. Another mosque in Brisbane was reportedly defaced with white supremacist graffiti, including swastikas and anti Muslim slurs, highlighting the breadth of incidents affecting Muslim worship sites nationally.

Political and community leadership reactions

Jihad Dib, a New South Wales Parliament member and senior Muslim political figure, said he was "disappointed but not surprised" by the rise in reported incidents, highlighting the particular vulnerability of women:

"I am talking about women, particularly who wear the hijab, who have been sworn at, who have been harassed. I think it's a real cheap shot, it's a real low thing to do. I would ask that if you see somebody act in a hateful way to another person or treat them in a bad way … no matter who they are, we've also got an obligation to be upstanders and not bystanders."

NSW Premier Chris Minns called the surge in aggression "horrifying" and "disgusting," warning that such behaviour would not be tolerated:

"Racism will not be tolerated. It's not vigilantism, it's not retribution, it's hateful racism in our community."

Community response and broader impact

ANIC warns that divisive rhetoric in media and political discourse has worsened the situation, inflaming anti-Muslim sentiment. Local leaders emphasise the toll on mental health, social confidence, and the ability of Muslim communities to feel safe in public spaces.

For many Muslim women who wear the hijab, fear has become a constant companion. Students no longer feel safe walking to class alone, mothers worry about their children wearing visible religious clothing, and daily routines are being altered to avoid harassment. "People are afraid to go about their normal lives," a community organiser said. "Even small things, like going to the shops or taking your child to school, now feel risky."

Advocates are calling for practical responses, including stronger protection for places of worship, accessible reporting systems for harassment, and national education campaigns to challenge prejudice and promote understanding.

Photo: The Australian National Imams Council senior adviser Bilal Rauf said the scale of abuse directed at Muslim women had been deeply distressing for communities across the country. (Credit: Australian National Imams Council)

Teen girl Islamophobically attacked in Bolton town centre

Elham Asaad Buaras

A teenage girl was reportedly subjected to a racist and Islamophobic attack in broad daylight in Bolton town centre on December 28. Greater Manchester Police have confirmed they are investigating the incident after witnesses said a man hurled hot coffee at the 17-year-old and shouted a racial slur as she walked with her mother near the Market Place shopping centre.

Family members said the girl was left badly shaken by the assault and is now fearful of returning to her normal routines in the town.

Her uncle said the incident had underscored the vulnerability felt by many families and forced them to take extra precautions in everyday life.

"We've now had to make arrangements so that she doesn't have to go through the town," he said, adding that the attack "showed it can happen to others as well".

Police described the morning assault, which occurred near Knowsley Street, as distressing and deeply upsetting for the victim and her family.

Witnesses reported that the suspect fled the scene on foot before officers arrived. CCTV footage from the area is now being reviewed as part of the investigation.

The teenager told police the attacker was a man believed to be in his mid-30s to early 40s. He is understood to have purchased coffee from the McDonald's on Knowsley Street shortly before carrying out the assault.

Her uncle said a police officer attended the family home, and that he had also contacted Halliwell councillor Hanif Alli to raise concerns about the incident. Cllr Alli said the attack had heightened his worries about Islamophobia and the wider tone of public debate around race and racism in the UK.

Members of Bolton's Muslim community have since called for increased police patrols and stronger support measures, describing the incident as part of a wider pattern of hostility experienced by many residents.

Community leaders also urged anyone who has suffered hate-motivated abuse to report it to police or through specialist reporting services.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Myanmar accused of genocide against Rohingya Muslim minority as UN court hearings begin

Elham Asaad Buaras

Myanmar has begun defending itself at the United Nations' highest court against accusations that its military orchestrated a campaign of genocide against the Rohingya Muslim minority, allegations brought by The Gambia that centre on claims of state-directed violence, mass displacement and an attempt to erase an entire people from Myanmar.

The case, filed in 2019 by the West African nation, accuses Myanmar of breaching the 1948 UN Genocide Convention through its treatment of the Rohingya, particularly during a brutal military crackdown in 2017 that killed thousands and forced more than 700,000 people to flee to Bangladesh.

Oral hearings on the merits of the case opened at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague on January 12, marking the first full genocide case heard by the court in more than a decade. Judges heard detailed accusations from The Gambia during the first week, before Myanmar began its defence on January 16.

In its opening submissions, The Gambia accused Myanmar of pursuing a long-term policy aimed at destroying the Rohingya as a protected group under international law.

Addressing the court earlier this week, The Gambia's Foreign Minister, Dawda Jallow, said Myanmar sought to eliminate the Rohingya through "genocidal policies".

He told judges the Rohingya "had suffered decades of appalling persecution and years of dehumanising propaganda", culminating in a military campaign and "continual genocidal policies meant to erase their existence in Myanmar".

The Gambia said it brought the case out of a "sense of responsibility", informed by its own experience of military rule, and argued that the scale and nature of the violence, including the killing of civilians, the burning of villages and the targeting of women, children and the elderly — could not plausibly be framed as counter-terrorism.

"When the court considers... all of the evidence taken together, the only reasonable conclusion to reach is that a genocidal intent permeated and informed Myanmar's myriad of state-led actions against the Rohingya," said Philippe Sands, representing The Gambia, which has the backing of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

Judges heard evidence relating to the 2017 operations in Rakhine State, during which entire Rohingya communities were driven out amid reports of mass executions, sexual violence and systematic arson.

More than one million Rohingya refugees now live in camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar region, among the largest and most densely populated refugee settlements in the world.

A UN fact-finding mission reported in 2018 that senior figures in Myanmar's military should be investigated for genocide in Rakhine State and crimes against humanity elsewhere. Myanmar dismissed the findings and has repeatedly rejected allegations of genocidal intent.

Myanmar, which has been under military control since the overthrow of its civilian government in 2021, began responding to the allegations , denying that its actions amounted to genocide.

Ko Ko Hlaing, a representative of the military-backed government, told the ICJ that the accusation was "unsubstantiated".

Myanmar has maintained that its 2017 campaign was a legitimate security operation, not an attack on civilians.

Hlaing told the court that "Myanmar was not obliged to remain idle and allow terrorists to have free reign of northern Rakhine states", where the majority of Rohingya lived.

"These attacks were the reasons for the clearance operations, which is a military term referring to counterinsurgency or counter-terrorism operations," Hlaing said.

He also told judges that Myanmar remained committed to "achieving the repatriation to Myanmar of persons from Rakhine State currently living in camps in Bangladesh", while attributing delays to external factors such as Covid-19.

"Myanmar's commitment and constant efforts since 2017 contradict Gambia's narrative that Myanmar's intention is to destroy or forcibly deport this population," Hlaing said.

He warned that "a finding of genocide would place an indelible stain on my country and its people", arguing that the case was of "fundamental importance for my country's reputation and future".

The ICJ has reserved three days during the hearing period to hear testimony from witnesses, including Rohingya survivors. These sessions will be held behind closed doors.

A final judgment is expected towards the end of 2026, according to Reuters. Legal observers say the ruling is likely to influence how the Genocide Convention is applied in future cases, including proceedings brought by South Africa against Israel over the war in Gaza.

The Genocide Convention, adopted in 1948 in the wake of the Holocaust, defines genocide as crimes committed "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

Reform UK mayoral candidate sparks backlash over niqab stop-and-search proposal



Home Affairs Correspondent

Reform UK's London mayoral candidate has triggered widespread condemnation after suggesting police should stop and search women wearing the niqab or burqa in the capital, prompting warnings that the proposal is discriminatory and risks fuelling anti-Muslim hostility.

Laila Cunningham, 49, Reform UK's newly announced candidate for the 2028 London mayoral election and a Westminster City councillor, made the remarks in interviews with *The Standard* podcast and *The Telegraph,* arguing that face coverings should automatically attract police scrutiny on security grounds. "If you're hiding your face, you have to be assumed to be hiding it for a criminal reason," she said, according to excerpts circulated online. Cunningham went further, vowing to "give orders to the police that any face coverings are a reason for stop and search", adding, "You shouldn't cover your face."

Her comments prompted a swift rebuke from London Mayor Sir Sadiq Khan, who said the proposal was offensive and incompatible with London's values. Responding to Cunningham's remarks, Sir Sadiq told *ITV News London*, "I would never dream of telling a woman how to dress, nor would I think that's a reason to arrest them or charge them with anything."

He added, "The idea you can stop and search somebody because of the clothes they wear, or their God worship, I think all English people, all decent English people, all British people, all Londoners would find it offensive." He continued, "What I will say is one of the joys about London is our diversity. For me it's a strength and not a weakness."

Cunningham, who is herself Muslim, also claimed that "Islamic dress" had transformed parts of the capital, saying some areas "feel like a Muslim city" due to the visibility of religious clothing and non-English signage. She argued Britain should have "one civic culture", which she described as British.

Referring to the hijab and niqab, she said, "That's not religion. There's nowhere in the Koran that says you have to cover your face or cover your hair. It says you have to be modest."

She added, "Where covering your hair and the burka comes is Wahhabism in Saudi. And these are very extreme traditions. In the Middle East, before the extreme Muslim takeover of it, people were in bikinis in Iran and Egypt. It wasn't like it is today."

Muslim advocacy organisations and civil liberties groups warned that the proposal would legitimise racial and religious profiling and place Muslim women at greater risk of harassment and violence.

Baroness Shaista Gohir, Chief Executive of the Muslim Women's Network UK, described the remarks as dangerous, warning they could embolden abuse against visibly Muslim women.

She said, "This kind of rhetoric is dangerous. It legitimises discrimination and sends a message to Muslim women that they do not belong." Labour MP Dawn Butler also condemned the proposal, saying, "London is built on freedom, fairness and respect, not profiling people because of their faith or appearance."

Labour MP Afzal Khan described Cunningham's remarks as politically motivated, calling them "a deliberate and cynical ploy", and warning:

"This is all about divisive ideas being pumped into society deliberately for electoral benefits."

He pointed to research showing that Boris Johnson's past comments comparing veiled Muslim women to letterboxes were followed by a surge in anti-Muslim attacks and incidents of abuse."There are consequences for the words that politicians use," Khan said. "What anyone wears is no business of the state or of politicians. Individuals have the freedom to choose."

Stop-and-search powers in England and Wales are governed by strict legal thresholds, and campaigners have long criticised their disproportionate use against ethnic minorities. Legal experts have repeatedly warned that using clothing or religious expression as grounds for police suspicion would be unlawful.

Cunningham, a former Crown Prosecution Service prosecutor, was elected to Westminster City Council in 2022 as a Conservative before defecting to Reform UK in June 2025, citing dissatisfaction with Conservative policies on immigration and taxation. She has previously said she has faced Islamophobic abuse but would only report it if it involved a direct threat.

Born in London to Egyptian parents who migrated to Britain in the 1960s, Cunningham has previously expressed support for banning the niqab in the capital and has promised an "all-out war on crime" if elected mayor, including issuing "new marching orders" to the Metropolitan Police to "tackle crime that matters."

Her remarks come amid renewed political debate over face coverings. Reform UK leader Nigel Farage has previously said Britain should debate restrictions on face coverings, though the party has not adopted a formal policy on the niqab.

Reform UK's head of policy, Zia Yusuf, briefly resigned from the party in June last year after describing Reform MP Sarah Pochin's question to the Prime Minister about banning the niqab as "dumb." He returned to the party 48 hours later, saying the comment was made in "error" and adding, "If there were a vote and I was in Parliament, I would probably vote to ban it (the burka)."

In October, then Shadow Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick said there was "a strong argument" for preventing women from wearing the niqab and that he would "probably" support a ban. Responding at the time, a Downing Street spokesperson said, "Everyone has the legal right to freedom of religion, and this includes the right to wear religious attire except where limitations are proscribed by law for specific limited purposes."

Photo: Reform UK candidate for the 2028 London mayoral election Laila Cunningham speaks during a party rally in London on January 9, 2026, at the ICC Auditorium.

(Credit: Thomas Krych/AA)

Reform councillor's remarks on Muslim school prayer condemned

Elham Asaad Buaras

A senior Reform UK councillor has faced cross-party condemnation after suggesting that teaching primary school children to pray in the Muslim faith could lead to radicalisation and crime. The comments were made by Councillor Carl Abbott, Reform's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care at Leicestershire County Council, during a counter-terrorism training session held on January 5.

In a recorded video of the meeting, Cllr Abbott stated he was "worried" about "seeing children in primary schools being taught to pray the Muslim way."

He contrasted this with his own Christian schooling, adding, "It bothers me if the government is allowing this to be taught in school; does it not start the radicalisation of these children?

Will we see a further increase in crimes, etc, as these children grow up?"

He later insisted he was "not being prejudiced" but was "expressing the concerns of his constituents."

The comments provoked an immediate rebuke during the session from Labour's Charnwood Borough Council leader, Cllr Jewel Miah, who said Abbott was "letting his prejudices show." Speaking afterwards, Cllr Miah told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) the comments were "unacceptable," adding, "We should be talking about how we should be making the lives of our constituents better, not peddling comments made from higher up of the Reform party."

The criticism was echoed across the political spectrum. Conservative opposition leader Cllr Deborah Taylor stated it was "inappropriate to suggest that teaching children to pray in accordance with Muslim practice fosters extremism," calling the remarks "divisive, deeply concerning, and entirely incompatible with the standards expected of public office."

Green Party councillor Naomi Bottomley said, "Linking Muslim prayer or the teaching of Islam to crime or extremism is deeply Islamophobic and dangerous... There is no place in public life for rhetoric that stigmatises entire communities."

A spokesperson for Reform UK defended Cllr Abbott, stating: "Councillor Abbott is absolutely correct: Britain is and remains a Christian country.

He speaks on behalf of millions who are rightly alarmed by the rapid, unchecked transformation of our culture and values." Cllr Abbott has been contacted by the LDRS for further comment. The incident has sparked a wider debate about community cohesion and the language used by elected officials in one of England's most diverse counties.

Inaugural British Muslim Health Awards celebrate excellence and service



Home Affairs Correspondent

The inaugural British Muslim Health Awards made a striking debut on December 13 at the Quaid-e-Azam Grand Ballroom in Birmingham, celebrating the achievements of Muslim professionals across the UK health and care sector.

Organised by the British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA), the awards shone a spotlight on the dedication, compassion, and leadership of Muslim healthcare workers, recognising excellence across more than 25 categories covering medicine, pharmacy, nursing, optometry, and public health. The evening brought together professionals from across disciplines for a formal dinner, keynote speeches, and a ceremony praised for its inclusive spirit.

Among the standout winners was Dr Fatima Hussain, named Doctor of the Year for her pioneering work in fertility medicine. In an interview following the ceremony, Dr Hussain reflected on the recognition.

"I felt humbled to stand alongside so many exceptional healthcare professionals whose daily commitment sustains the NHS and serves communities across the UK," she told *The Muslim News*. "This recognition felt less like a personal accolade and more like an acknowledgement of collective service."

Dr Hussain, a Consultant in Obstetrics and Gynaecology with over two decades of experience, dedicated the award to her mother, who had passed away just weeks earlier.

"Medicine, for me, has always been more than a career. It is a vocation grounded in responsibility, compassion, and service," she explained. "As a Muslim doctor, faith reinforces these values. The Islamic principle that saving one life is akin to saving all of humanity is lived daily in clinical practice." She also highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive care and addressing health inequalities, noting, "A particularly important aspect of my work has been safeguarding vulnerable women through culturally sensitive services. Healthcare is also about justice—ensuring the most marginalised are seen, heard, and protected."

Other notable winners included Aiysha Saleemi, recognised as Health Manager of the Year for leading the CVD Academy, and Dr Sakinat Tope Baiyewu, who received the Public Health Award for her work tackling health inequalities in minority communities.

Dr Baiyewu, who leads the Caribbean African Health Network's Black Health Improvement Programme, emphasised the need for tailored interventions. "Many health interventions aren't tailored to ethnic minority groups," she said. "That's why we use Black mannequins to demonstrate breast self-examinations."

The ceremony also paid tribute to the late Dr Muhammad Shafi Kausar, posthumously awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award for his pioneering work in Glasgow. His son, Imran Kausar, reflected: "He had an impact not just with Muslims, but with the wider community as well."

Commenting on the event, BIMA President Dr Sahira Dar said, "The British Muslim Health Awards were established to honour the compassion, integrity, and excellence of Muslim health and care professionals across the UK. The depth of Muslim talent in healthcare is phenomenal."

Muslims play a vital role in the UK healthcare system, comprising around 19 per cent of doctors despite making up just six per cent of the population. Dr Hussain added, "The British Muslim Health Awards represent an important milestone in celebrating contributions that have too often gone unseen. They provide visibility, validation, and role models for future generations."

Photo: Winners at the inaugural British Islamic Medical Association Awards 2025.

(Credit: BIMA)

WINNNERS: INAUGURAL BRITISH MUSLIM HEALTH AWARDS

Doctor: Dr Fatima Husain

Nurse: Prof Parveen Ali

Midwife: Hauwa Hamza

Dentist: Dr Khalid Master

Pharmacist: Yousaf Ahmad

Optometrist: Hammad Mansoor

Allied Health Pro: Heena Mahmood

Mental Health Pro: Dr Shaheen Shora

Public Health Practitioner: Sakinat Tope Baiyewu

Care Worker: Coumilah Manjoo

Rising Star: Amira Nimerawi

Chaplain: Maysoon Shafiq

Educator: Mohamed Rashad

Student: Sumayyah Khalid

Researcher: Prof Mona Bafadhel

Humanitarian: Dr Nooralhaq Nasimi

Digital Health: Dr Haroon Shah

Life Sciences: Prof Asif Ahmed

Health Manager: Aiysha Saleemi

Ally: Dr Swee Chai Ang (FRCS)

Health Advocate: Sardar Aftab Khan

Mosque: Masjid Ash Shifa

Faith Inclusion Initiative: Kanwal Munir

Lifetime Achievement: Dr Muhammad Kausar (in Memoriam) Prof Sharif Al Ghazzal

President's Medal: Dr Ghassan Abu-sittah Dr Omar Abdul Mananl Latifa Patel Salma Yasmeen Dr Shehla Imtiaz-Umer Dr Imrana Siddiqui

Imam forced off road and punched in alleged Melbourne racist attack, three arrested

Elham Asaad Buaras

Three people have been arrested after an imam was forced off the road and assaulted in what police say was a racially motivated attack in Melbourne's south-east.

The alleged assault took place at about 7.40 pm on January 10, when a 47-year-old Ismet Purdić and his wife were travelling along the South Gippsland Highway. Police say the couple were racially abused by the occupants of another vehicle before being forced into a service station.

According to investigators, three people in a small black hatchback hurled objects at the couple's car, drove aggressively to intimidate them, and later got out of their vehicle. The imam was allegedly punched in the face, while his wife was threatened. Members of the public intervened before the alleged attackers fled the scene.

The Bosnia-Herzegovina Islamic Society in Noble Park, described the impact of the incident on Purdić and his wife as "profound".



In a statement, the organisation said the imam had expressed relief that his children were not present during the incident but emphasised the psychological toll it had taken on the family.

"Imam Purdić has served the community for more than 12 years as a religious leader, educator and interfaith advocate," the statement said, highlighting his work with the Interfaith Network Dandenong to promote dialogue and coexistence.

In a Facebook post following the attack, Purdić thanked supporters for their messages of concern. "Me and my wife are doing fine and so are the kids," he wrote. "Thank you all."

The alleged attack was condemned by the Australian National Imams Council, which described it as "cowardly" and said the imam was recovering after being punched in the face.

"The psychological trauma suffered by the victims is severe," the council said. "No family in Australia should fear being attacked simply for their faith, appearance or identity."

Victoria's premier, Jacinta Allan, also condemned the incident, saying she had spoken directly with the imam and his wife.

"There is no place for Islamophobia, no place for this sort of hate anywhere in Victoria," she said on Monday, January 12. "I want to say very clearly to the Muslim community, and particularly Muslim women, that I will support your right every single day to live freely in this state, free from hate, and to move around safely and with dignity."

Police arrested three suspects in Dandenong South on Sunday, January 11.

A 23-year-old man from Cranbourne North and a 22-year-old man from Cranbourne East have been charged with criminal damage and common law assault. The Cranbourne North man was remanded in custody and appeared at Dandenong Magistrates' Court while the Cranbourne East man was bailed to appear at the same court on May 22.

An 18-year-old woman from Dandenong South was released pending summons.

Victoria Police said there was "absolutely no place for prejudice-motivated, religious-based or hate-based behaviour in our society".

The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) said it was deeply alarmed by the incident, warning it formed part of a wider pattern of rising Islamophobic attacks across the country. "This is not an isolated event," AFIC said in a statement, citing an increase in reports of abuse, intimidation, vandalism and violence targeting Muslim individuals, families, schools and community organisations.

AFIC president Dr Rateb Jneid said the attack was "horrifying, but sadly not surprising".

"We are witnessing a deeply disturbing rise in anti-Muslim hate," he said. "Unless it is addressed urgently and comprehensively, more people will be harmed."

The organisation renewed calls for a national anti-Islamophobia strategy, stronger political leadership in condemning anti-Muslim violence, and for law enforcement agencies to treat Islamophobic attacks with the same seriousness as other hate crimes.

"An attack on an imam and his wife is not just an assault on two individuals," Dr Jneid said. "It is an attack on the dignity and safety of an entire community."

Photo: Ismet Purdić and his wife were travelling along a highway when the couple were racially abused by the occupants of another vehicle
(Credit: Bosnia-Herzegovina Islamic Society)

Controversial Bill to ban headscarves for underage girls voted down in France

Elham Asaad Buaras

The French National Assembly's law committee has on January 14 rejected a controversial proposal to ban headscarves for minors in public spaces. Though introduced by the conservative Republicans Party (LR), the bill failed to gain traction, facing heavy opposition from across the political spectrum and internal scepticism from President Macron's majority

The single-article bill, championed by LR leader Laurent Wauquiez, sought to prohibit "any parent from imposing on their underage daughter, or allowing her, to wear in public space any garment intended to conceal her hair." Its rapporteur, Patrick Hetzel, framed it as a necessary measure against gender inequality and the influence of "political Islam," arguing that "the veiling of minors reflects a relationship of inferiority between men and women."

However, the bill faced immediate and multifaceted opposition. The most damning legal critique came from Florent Boudié, the committee's chairman from Macron's Renaissance party, who asserted the bill was based on a "flawed interpretation of secularism." He predicted the Constitutional Council would strike it down, noting that the legal basis for banning face-coverings, public order", did not apply to a general headscarf ban. Practical objections followed swiftly. Agnès Firmin Le Bodo of the centrist Horizons party questioned how authorities could possibly prove whether a parent was "forcing or merely authorising" their daughter to wear a headscarf. Even the far-right National Rally, while supporting the principle, criticised the wording as legally vague, with spokesman Laurent Jacobelli warning it could extend to "a hood, a cap, or even a balaclava."

The left launched a vehement attack, with MP Gabrielle Cathala of France Unbowed branding the text "unconstitutional, Islamophobic and pointless." The presidential coalition itself was split, with former PM Gabriel Attal supporting a ban only for girls under 15, a position Renaissance MP Prisca Thévenot said she would amend into the text.

Despite its defeat, the bill is scheduled for debate in the full National Assembly on January 22. Its passage now hinges on last-minute amendments, though the profound divisions exposed suggest a rocky path ahead. The debate reignites one of France's most enduring and divisive issues, echoing the landmark 2004 law that banned conspicuous religious symbols in state schools.

Edinburgh Central Mosque vandalised with Islamophobic graffiti

Home Affairs Correspondent

Edinburgh Central Mosque was vandalised with Islamophobic graffiti on January 16 prompting a police investigation into what is being treated as a potential hate crime.

The assailants were seen spray-painting racist messages in red paint on the exterior of the mosque, located in the Potterrow area of the city.

The graffiti, which read "leave Scotland" and "get out of Scotland", was sprayed on the rear wall of the building near the car park. Members of the local Muslim community reported seeing two young men vandalising the mosque between 9:45pm and 10pm. Students from the Islamic Society at the University of Edinburgh, whose campus is situated directly opposite the mosque, alerted mosque officials after witnessing the incident.

Police Scotland confirmed they received a report of vandalism on Saturday afternoon and have launched enquiries to establish the full circumstances. A spokesperson for Police Scotland said, "Around 12:25pm on Saturday 17 January, 2026, we received a report of vandalism to a building in the Potterow area of Edinburgh, It's believed the incident happened around 9:30pm on Friday. Officers are carrying out enquiries to establish the full circumstances."

The mosque, which has a capacity of up to 1,250 worshippers, said it is cooperating fully with the investigation.

In a statement responding to the attack, Edinburgh Central Mosque said it was "deeply saddened and concerned by this act. Incidents of this nature cause distress not only to the Muslim community, but to all who value peace, dignity, and mutual respect."

"We pray for the safety and wellbeing of our community, and for all those affected by acts of hatred and intimidation. This act does not reflect the Edinburgh we know and love," the statement added.

"Our city is defined by diversity, compassion, and strong community bonds, and we remain confident that these shared values will prevail over division and hostility."

The statement concluded, "We will continue to be a place of worship, welcome, and service to the wider community, grounded in dignity, compassion, and kindness."

As of January 18, one of the racist messages had been covered with white paint, while the other, reading "leave Scotland", remained visible.

The incident comes amid a wider rise in Islamophobic hate crimes across Scotland and the rest of the UK, with mosques increasingly being targeted.

In October 2025, Glasgow Central Mosque was defaced with far-right graffiti reading "Scots First", an attack the mosque said left the community "deeply upset".

More recently, two men were charged in connection with a series of alleged offences after worshippers at the Kirkcaldy Islamic Centre were threatened on Boxing Day 2025.

In September last year, an attacker hurled a metal pole through a window at Masjid Yusuf in East Renfrewshire while children were attending a class inside the building.

In August, a Scottish neo-Nazi teenager was jailed for ten years after being convicted over a terror plot to burn down the Inverclyde Muslim Centre while worshippers were inside praying.

Muslim family in Stockport targeted in disturbing pig's head hate crime

Elham Asaad Buaras

A Muslim family in Cheadle, Stockport, has been left traumatised after a pig's head was deliberately placed on the gates of their home, in what police are treating as a suspected hate crime.

Camran Butt, 41, said he and his wife were shocked when they discovered the grisly scene while taking their two young children to school on the morning of January 9.

"My children were joking about seeing a fox, and I thought they were messing around. Then I saw it on the ground and immediately thought, 'What on earth has happened here?'" said Butt. To protect his children from the full horror, he initially told them it was a dead pigeon.

CCTV footage later revealed two people approaching the property and attaching the pig's head to the front gate. Butt said the perpetrators appeared to act with a level of planning, not like casual vandals. "It was very professional – this wasn't just kids throwing eggs or graffiti," he said.

The family live in a mixed community with Jewish, Hindu, and other Muslim residents. Butt explained that they are not outwardly practising Muslims and are not easily identifiable by appearance. "This attack has completely come out of nowhere," he said. "I haven't been in the public eye, and we haven't posted anything online that could explain this."

The incident has left the family feeling vulnerable. "My wife is really shaken. She feels exposed and worried about what might happen next," Butt added. He also expressed gratitude to neighbours, who have reached out in support and offered to stay alert to protect the family.

Greater Manchester Police confirmed the investigation into the incident. "We are investigating a suspected hate crime following reports of an incident on Bruntwood Lane, Cheadle, in the early hours of Friday, 9 January 2026," a spokesperson said.

Chief Inspector Lisa Devitt, of Stockport district, condemned the act. "This was an appalling and deliberate attack on a family home. No one should be subjected to behaviour like this. We are treating this as a hate crime and are doing everything possible to identify those responsible."

Stockport has seen similar incidents in the past. In December 2022, a pig's head was thrown onto the roof of Heaton's Muslims' Community Trust building in Mersey, Stockport, highlighting a disturbing pattern of targeted attacks.

Brown shines in NBA MVP race, Sheeraz set for super-middleweight clash with Pacheco and Senegal's AFCON walk-off drama

Basketball

NBA, Boston, USA (Jan 22): **Jaylen Brown** has moved firmly into the NBA MVP conversation, emerging as the driving force behind a Boston Celtics side defying expectations and sitting near the top of the Eastern Conference. With Jayson Tatum yet to hit full stride, Brown has carried the Celtics on both ends of the floor, increasing his scoring load without sacrificing efficiency while routinely taking on the toughest defensive assignments. His impact has been central to Boston holding the No. 2 seed midway through the season, despite significant roster turnover last summer. League-wide, the MVP race remains fluid. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander has positioned himself as the frontrunner after another dominant campaign for Oklahoma City, while Cade Cunningham's all-round excellence has lifted Detroit to the top of the East. Anthony Edwards and Luka Dončić round out the leading contenders, each producing career-defining offensive numbers. Brown's rise, however, has been one of the season's most compelling storylines. His blend of scoring, defence and leadership has not only kept Boston competitive but reshaped perceptions of his standing among the league's elite, placing him far closer to the game's top individual honour than many had anticipated.

NBA, Dallas, USA (Jan 22): **Kyrie Irving's** long-awaited return from a torn ACL could be pushed back until next season, with the Dallas Mavericks weighing caution amid a faltering campaign. While Irving has made clear his desire to play before the end of the season, he has yet to be cleared to practise and league sources told ESPN that discussions are under way about delaying his comeback. Dallas sit eight games below .500, 12th in the Western Conference, and remain without Anthony Davis, who is sidelined with a hand injury. The Mavericks' struggles have prompted broader questions about direction, particularly with highly rated rookie Cooper Flagg emerging as a central figure in the franchise's future.



This season also represents the final year Dallas control their own first-round draft pick until 2031, sharpening the incentive to prioritise recovery, development and draft positioning.

Irving, who qualifies as a star under the NBA's Player Participation Policy, is understood to be keen to return, and no final decision has been taken. However, with postseason hopes fading and the long-term health of their roster at stake, the Mavericks may opt to give the veteran guard the remainder of the season to recover fully before resetting for next year.

Boxing

Location TBC (First quarter of 2026): British boxer **Hamzah Sheeraz** (22-0-1, 18 KOs) has chosen to challenge Mexican-American Diego Pacheco (25-0, 18 KOs) in a super-middleweight (168 lbs) fight, following the cancellation of WBC purse bids for Sheeraz vs Christian Mbilli. The WBO extended the negotiation period until January 30, If both teams—Queensberry for Sheeraz and Matchroom for Pacheco—agree terms, a world title fight announcement could come soon.

Both fighters are unbeaten in their mid-20s with 18 knockout victories each. Pacheco, 24, is ranked WBO #2, behind Canelo Álvarez, while Sheeraz, 26, is WBO #3. Sheeraz's rise through the middleweight ranks was halted by a 2025 draw with WBC champion Carlos Adames, prompting his move up to super-middleweight, where he destroyed Edgar Berlanga in five rounds in July 2025. Pacheco claimed the WBC Silver super-middleweight title in December 2025 by unanimous decision over Kevin Lele Sadjo. Both fighters, after a six-month hiatus for Sheeraz, are expected to be ready for the clash in the first quarter of 2026.

Cricket

Presidents Trophy, Karachi, Pakistan (Jan 17): History was rewritten as Pakistan TV (PTV) pulled off the lowest successful run defence in first-class cricket, defending just 40 runs against Sui Northern Gas to win by two runs. The previous record had stood since 1794, when Oldfield defended 41 runs at Lord's. PTV's hero was left-arm spinner **Ali Usman**, who's sensational 6 for 9 dismantled Sui Northern's batting line-up, bowling them out for 37. The match had initially seemed one-sided: PTV were bowled out for 166 in their first innings and 111 in their second, leaving Sui Northern a seemingly trivial target. Yet disciplined bowling and relentless belief turned the game into a historic triumph for PTV, cementing their place in cricketing history.

Football

Africa Cup of Nations, Rabat, Morocco (Jan 22): **Senegal** coach **Pape Thiaw** has defended his team's controversial walk-off during the Africa Cup of Nations final on January 18, as football authorities move towards possible sanctions following scenes of chaos in Rabat. Thiaw said the decision was an emotional response to perceived injustice, insisting it was never intended to undermine the game, as FIFA and the Moroccan Football Federation opened investigations into the incident.

The walk-off came deep into stoppage time against hosts Morocco, moments after a late Senegal goal was ruled out and a penalty was awarded to the hosts. Senegal's players and staff left the pitch in protest before captain Sadio Mané persuaded them to return, allowing **Brahim Díaz** to take the spot-kick, which he missed. The match was halted for around 15 minutes amid clashes on the sidelines and crowd disorder, with stewards struggling to regain control.

Despite the turmoil, Senegal regrouped in extra time and secured a 1-0 victory through Pape Gueye to lift their second continental title, extending Morocco's wait for AFCON glory to half a century.

Mixed Martial Arts

UFC, Dagestan (Jan 20): Training footage of UFC pound-for-pound number one **Islam Makhachev** has gone viral after the Russian champion demonstrated a brutal-looking submission he refers to as the "oxygen cylinder". The lightweight title-holder, unbeaten since 2015 and on a 16-fight winning streak, was filmed applying the hold on a teammate during training. The manoeuvre appears to combine a crucifix position with smothering pressure, using body weight and hand placement to restrict breathing and force a tap-out.

Makhachev downplayed the move's novelty, saying he has used it before, while a teammate explained that the pressure comes from both the hips and covering the opponent's mouth. The footage has sparked debate online over its legality, with UFC rules permitting facial smothering but offering less clarity on fully obstructing an opponent's airway.

Makhachev became a two-weight champion after dominating Jack Della Maddalena at UFC 322 and is currently preparing for his next title defence, continuing to refine his grappling ahead of a return to the Octagon.

Squash

Rich Venus Karachi Open, Karachi, Pakistan (Jan 6 – 11): **Egypt's** world junior champions Amina Orfi and **Mohamed Zakaria** captured the women's and men's titles respectively. World number three Orfi defeated **Malaysia's** Sivasangari Subramaniam in straight games, winning 11-8, 11-2, 11-7 in a 38-minute final to secure her fourth title of the season.

In the men's final, 18-year-old Zakaria edged compatriot **Aly Abou Eleinen** in a dramatic five-game contest lasting nearly 100 minutes. Zakaria prevailed 11-9, 9-11, 12-14, 11-7, 11-7 to claim the biggest title of his career.

The match featured lengthy rallies, multiple player reviews and late drama before the referee upheld the final decision in Zakaria's favour. Eleinen, 26, suffered cramping in the deciding game but pushed the teenager throughout a high-quality final. Zakaria said he was proud of his physical performance and described the victory as a milestone, while both players reflected on growing up together in Alexandria and fulfilling a shared dream of contesting a major final.

Photo: Senegal coach Pape Thiaw holds the AFCON trophy after a 1-0 extra-time win over Morocco in Rabat on January 18. Thiaw defended his team's stoppage-time walk-off as an emotional response to perceived injustice, amid ongoing FIFA and Moroccan Football Federation investigations. (Credit: Samah Zidan/AA)

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Australian cricketer Khawaja says Islamophobia 'still very rife' as he announces retirement

Harun Nasrullah

Australian cricketer Usman Khawaja has said Islamophobia remains "still very rife" within society and criticised his sport for being "still very white" as he announced his retirement from international cricket.

The 39 year old, Australia's first Muslim Test cricketer, made the remarks on January 2 during a press conference at the Sydney Cricket Ground, confirming his decision to retire at the conclusion of the fifth Ashes Test in Sydney, his hometown and the final match of a 15 year international career.

Born in Pakistan, Khawaja has scored more than 6,000 Test runs in 87 appearances and has been one of the most prominent Muslim figures in elite international cricket. Speaking at the SCG, he said retirement had given him the freedom to speak candidly about experiences he felt had shaped his career.

He told reporters he felt "off the leash now" as he reflected on what he described as unequal treatment and lingering prejudice within the game.

Khawaja said, "I've always felt a little bit different, even to now. Different in the way I've been treated, different in how things have happened."

While some of his concerns related to earlier periods of his career, Khawaja highlighted the reaction to a back injury he suffered during the opening Test of the Ashes series against England, suggesting it revealed underlying biases.

He said, "When I did my back, I had back spasms, it was something I couldn't control. The way the media and the past players came out and attacked me….I copped it for about five days straight. Everyone was piling in."

Khawaja said criticism intensified once racial stereotypes entered public commentary, stereotypes he said he had encountered throughout his life.

He said, "Once the racial stereotypes came in, of me being lazy, it was things I've dealt with my whole life. Pakistani, West Indian, coloured players…we're selfish, we only care about ourselves, we don't care about the team, we don't train hard enough.

"I just thought the media and old players and everyone else had moved past them, but we obviously haven't moved past them. All these things came back and made me realise we're not



quite there."

The opening batter contrasted his experience with the treatment of other players, arguing that similar situations were often framed very differently depending on who was involved.

He said, "I can give you countless number of guys who have played golf the day before and been injured and you guys (media) haven't said a thing.

"I can give you even more guys who have had 15 schooners (beer) the night before, then got injured, and no one's said a word. That's alright, they're just being Aussie larrikins, just being lads."

He added, "When I get injured, everyone went at my credibility and who I am as a person. Normally when someone gets injured, you feel sorry for them as a person. 'Poor Josh Hazlewood' or 'poor Nathan Lyon'. We feel sorry for them and we don't attack what happened to them."

Khawaja acknowledged that Australian society and cricket had become more inclusive over time but said structural issues remained.

He said, "We're a lot better and inclusive society than we've been before but there's still a way to go because Australian cricket is still very white in a lot of respects."

Anticipating criticism for raising issues of race and faith, Khawaja said he was aware of how his comments might be received but rejected accusations that he was exaggerating or seeking attention.

He said, "I know I'm here talking about topics and people will say, 'Uzzie's here, he's playing the race card again'. I know people are trying to nail me. But don't gaslight me."

Addressing religious discrimination directly, Khawaja added, "Where we are at today, Islamophobia is still very rife. I speak about it.

"I didn't want to talk about this, but I just want the journey for the next Usman Khawaja to be different."

He said his aim was to ensure future generations of cricketers — regardless of background — were judged solely on merit.

He said, "I'm hoping the journey for the next Usman Khawaja is a bit easier and we get to a line, however many generations in, where that Usman Khawaja is the same as John Smith.

"That's what I've been trying to champion to the whole time."

Khawaja described his advocacy as rooted in speaking for those who often feel unable to do so. He said, "I call myself the people's champ.

"Not because I think everyone loves me, but because I speak about things for the people that other people don't want to speak about."

Khawaja will retire as one of Australia's most accomplished batters of the modern era and a trailblazer for Muslim representation in international cricket, having consistently used his platform to challenge prejudice and call for greater inclusion within the sport.

Photo: Usman Khawaja (Credit: Cricket Australia)

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