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Features



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# The Daily Telegraph

# I'm a prisoner of war

Maduro insists he is an innocent man as Venezuela's former president and his wife appear in New York court

By Daniel Bates in New York and Benedict Smith

NICOLÁS MADURO has declared that he is a prisoner of war as he pleaded not guilty to narco-terrorism and weapons charges in a New York court.

The former Venezuelan president, who was seized from his home in a daring US military raid on Saturday, said he was "innocent" and a "decent man".

Mr Maduro has been charged with narco-terrorism and – along with his wife, Cilia Flores – cocaine importation conspiracy and possession of machine guns.

Yesterday, the couple were taken from a detention centre in Brooklyn to Manhattan's Daniel Patrick Moynihan Courthouse in a bomb-proof armoured vehicle, surrounded by police and federal agents.

Appearing in front of Alvin Hellerstein, a 92-year-old federal judge appointed to the bench by Bill Clinton almost three decades ago, Mr Maduro claimed he was a prisoner of war.

Asked to identify himself, Mr Maduro told the court through a translator: "I am Nicolás Maduro Moros. I am president of the Republic of Venezuela. I am here, kidnapped, since Saturday January the 3rd... I consider myself a prisoner of war. I was captured at my home in Caracas."

Mr Hellerstein cut him off, ordering Mr Maduro to confirm his name only.

Asked to enter his plea, Mr Maduro said: "I am innocent. I am not guilty of anything mentioned here." Under the narco-terrorism charge, he is accused of allowing Venezuelan drug traffickers to produce and transport tons of cocaine to the US "with impunity".

He is not seeking to be released on bail and his next hearing is scheduled for March 17.

Mr Maduro, 63, walked into courtroom 26A wearing a black T-shirt and tan prison-issued trousers. His hands were shackled behind him and his legs were shackled. Ms Flores was wearing similar clothes and sat on the same bench. While entering the court, Mr Maduro nodded to several people and said "Happy New Year", in English.

Ms Flores had bruises on her face,



Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores were escorted to the court by DEA agents after landing in Manhattan

one large one on her forehead, red cheeks and what appeared to be a welt over her right eye. Mark Donnelly, her lawyer, asked that she be given an X-ray because she had sustained "significant injuries" during her arrest.

There was a "fracture or severe injuries to her ribs", Mr Donnelly said.

It is unclear how she sustained the injuries, and whether this took place when she was seized by the US's Delta Force soldiers. The couple were captured

by US special forces in the early hours of Saturday as they attempted to flee into a panic room in their military compound.

Mr Maduro is being represented by Barry Pollack, the veteran defence lawyer who helped to negotiate a plea deal that led to Julian Assange's release from prison in June 2024. Mr Assange, the publisher of WikiLeaks, had been charged under the Espionage Act for publishing classified information.

Ms Flores, who also pleaded not guilty, is accused of ordering the murder of rivals who threatened their lucrative drug trafficking operation.

The 69-year-old yesterday insisted she was still first lady of Venezuela.

Delcy Rodriguez, Venezuela's vice-president, was sworn in as Mr Maduro's successor shortly after he left the Manhattan court.

Mr Maduro was involved in a confrontation at the court with a man who claimed to have once been imprisoned

by the Maduro regime. As he exited, Mr Maduro waved at supporters but became belligerent when Pedro Rojas shouted at him that he was an "illegitimate" president and that he would "pay".

Raising his finger into the air, Mr Maduro shouted back: "I'm a man of God" and a "kidnapped president".

Speaking afterwards, Mr Rojas, 33, said he had been imprisoned in Venezuela for a number of months in 2019. He now

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## NHS app to fast-track prostate diagnoses

By Laura Donnelly HEALTH EDITOR

MEN with prostate cancer symptoms will be able to get fast-tracked appointments to speed up diagnosis.

Wes Streeting, the Health Secretary, said the "revolutionary" reforms would save men from months in limbo waiting for the all-clear or to find out their next steps.

Under the plans, patients will be able to see specialists from across the country via video consultation using the NHS app. The "online hospital" will be targeted at conditions with the longest waiting times for diagnosis and treatment, including prostate care, eye problems and gynaecology.

The Health Secretary said the reforms would mean access to health-care was as easy as booking a taxi or ordering a takeaway. Mr Streeting told *The Telegraph*: "For too many men, a raised prostate specific antigen [PSA] level result or enlarged prostate means

weeks of anxiety – uncertainty about what it means, unable to get answers, left in limbo. These symptoms don't always mean cancer. Often the cause is benign – a UTI [urinary tract infection], hormonal changes, an infection, or something else entirely treatable."

"That's why we're taking action... With NHS Online, your GP refers you, tests happen locally, and a consultant reviews everything through the NHS app, often within days. No sitting in waiting rooms. No taking time off work."

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer for men in the UK, with 55,000 diagnoses and 12,000 deaths annually.

Urological cancers, such as prostate cancer, have the longest delays for diagnosis of all cancers, while the number facing long waits for treatment has doubled in five years.

Officials have selected nine conditions to be prioritised for NHS Online service, which will start next year. Men with raised PSA or prostate enlarge-

ment will be able to opt for remote appointments, as will women with severe menopause symptoms and menstrual problems that can indicate endometriosis or fibroids.

They also include common eye problems such as cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration, as well as inflammatory bowel disease and anaemia.

Mr Streeting insisted the service would not replace traditional care, saying that patients would "always have the choice of face-to-face appointments".

*The Telegraph* is campaigning for the introduction of targeted screening to help diagnose high-risk cases, including black men and those with a family history of the disease. But the UK National Screening Committee, which advises the Government, last month recommended that tests should only be offered to men with particular gene variants.

Mr Streeting has promised to "thrash out" the arguments at a public consultation to ensure the right decision is made.

## Reeves blocks cash for 'struggling' pubs

By Ben Riley-Smith and Dominic Penna

RACHEL REEVES is blocking new financial support for pubs despite Sir Keir Starmer admitting many "will struggle" with new business rate changes.

In her November Budget, the Chancellor announced Covid-era business rates relief would end in April, having previously been scaled back from 75 per cent to 40 per cent. Some village pubs also face paying business rates for the first time under a revaluation plan announced after the Budget.

A growing backlash has resulted in Labour MPs being barred from dozens of pubs and restaurants across Britain, with Ms Reeves banned from her local in Pudsey, West Yorkshire.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister appeared to open the door to extra support for the sector. He told LBC: "We're talking to the sector, particularly hospitality and pubs, about what further sup-

port we can put in, whether that's licensing freedoms or other measures." But *The Telegraph* understands the Treasury is insisting it will not change the tax policy itself.

Tom Kerridge, the TV chef and pub owner, also said yesterday that Peter Kyle, the Business Secretary, was being "incredibly supportive" on the issue but that he had yet to convince the Treasury.

During his first public event of 2026, which focused on government support with the cost of living, Sir Keir told GB News: "Obviously, there were reductions [in business rates] in place because of Covid, which were going to come to an end. There are then transitional provisions to help. The overall rating level is going down but I do acknowledge, for pubs and others, that the revaluation means that they will struggle in relation to the business rates applicable to them. That's why we're working with them."

However, Treasury insiders yesterday played down the prospect of a

change in the tax rate itself, insisting that new licensing freedoms would not affect pub owners' tax bills.

Before the Chancellor's Budget in November, the Government had indicated that a tax discount for pubs, restaurants and hotels of up to 20p was being considered. However, a reduction of just 5p was announced instead.

The policy has overlapped with what is in effect the first re-evaluation of the size of hospitality businesses for six years, which will lead to increase tax bills.

The Treasury is confident that its "transition" measures, such as capping bill increases next year at 15 per cent, are sufficient to help pubs ride out the reforms. A spokesman said: "We're protecting pubs, restaurants and cafés with the Budget's £4.3bn support package. Without this support, pubs would face a 45 per cent increase in the total bills they pay next year. Because of the support we've put in place, we've got that down to just 4 per cent."

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## NEWS

### Scots granted a World Cup bank holiday

Scotland will get a World Cup bank holiday to mark the country's first game in the tournament for almost 30 years. John Swinney, the First Minister, has proposed designating Monday June 15 a day off so fans can celebrate the team's opening game against Haiti. The match kicks off at 2am UK time on Sunday June 14, and a holiday would allow fans to enjoy the match without the worry of a morning alarm. It will be Scotland's first football World Cup since 1998.

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## NEWS

### I was expecting you, fake admiral told police

A man fined £500 for posing illegally as a Royal Navy admiral at a Remembrance Sunday event told police: "I've been expecting you." Jonathan Carley, 65, caused a backlash after wearing the uniform and medals of a high-ranking officer during a wreath-laying service in Llandudno, North Wales, on Nov 9. Gwyn Jones, the district judge, fined him £500. "It's a sad reflection upon you that you chose to do such a thing on a very difficult day for so many," he said.

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## WORLD

### Iran tries to buy off protesters with cash

Iran will pay £5 a month to its 80 million citizens to quell widespread protests. Authorities launched the "economic relief" plan, pledging to transfer 10 million rial (£5.50) in voucher form to nearly the entire population over the course of four months. The payment is equivalent to the average daily salary of a worker in Iran. The emergency measures came after Iran's supreme leader made a rare offer to talk to protesters, acknowledging their grievances.

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## BUSINESS

### Defence stocks send FTSE to record high

Fears that Donald Trump could try to seize Greenland have propelled the FTSE 100 to a record high after defence stocks surged. BAE Systems closed 5pc higher in London and shares in Babcock International were up 4.6pc. The performance helped the FTSE 100 close above 10,000 for the first time, at 10,004.57. The president has long coveted the territory and his action in Venezuela has increased speculation he may seek to control it through military means.

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