

Epstein files

DP World boss leaves company after Epstein emails

Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem transformed Dubai-based group into one of the world's largest logistics operators



Jeffrey Epstein and Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem shared messages about sexual experiences as well as lists for escort and massage services in various cities © House Oversight Committee/Reuters

Elizabeth Bratton in London

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The head of Dubai-based logistics group DP World has left his post after revelations over his ties with sex offender Jeffrey Epstein piled pressure on the state-backed company to take action.

Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem's exit as the group's chair and chief executive followed the publication of messages between him and Epstein, including about sexual experiences, which were included in the US Department of Justice's release of documents related to the disgraced financier.

Sulayem is one of the most high-powered executives to have left their position since the DoJ released more than 3mn additional emails and documents related to Epstein two weeks ago.

In a statement on Friday that did not mention Sulayem, the Dubai government announced that Essa Kazim had been named as chair of DP World's board and Yuvraj Narayan its chief executive officer.

Two of the group's largest international partners, Canada's La Caisse pension fund and the UK's development finance arm British International Investment, said this week that they would halt future deals with DP World. BII added that the freeze would remain in place "until the required actions have been taken by the company".

On Friday BII said that "we welcome today's decision by DP World" and "look forward to resuming our partnership".

La Caisse said DP World had taken "the appropriate measures", adding: "It has always been important to distinguish the company, DP World, from the individual, Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem. We will move quickly to work with DP World's new leadership to continue our partnership on port projects."

DP World, which is ultimately overseen by Dubai's ruling family, had repeatedly declined to comment since the FT first reported this month on Sulayem's interactions with the paedophile financier and sex trafficker.

The DoJ files detailed the two men's messages about sexual experiences and Sulayem's role helping to arrange training for a "masseur" from Epstein's "private spa".

The men appear to have traded images while discussing people they had relations with as well as sharing lists for escort and massage services in various cities.

Sulayem's relationship with Epstein continued long after the American financier served jail time for soliciting sex from a minor in 2008.

But people close to the company said losing business partners from one of their flagship state-backed international ventures had probably forced the ruling family to act.

Neil Quilliam, an associate fellow on Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Programme, said a departure of this nature was "highly unusual".

"The UAE has a very high risk tolerance," Quilliam said. "But I think when it comes to DP World, because commercially it's so important to the country and forms part of its major state apparatus . . . it's had to take this action instantly to manage its reputation."

Sulayem was one of the most senior business figures in Dubai, helping transform DP World over four decades from an operator at the emirate's Jebel Ali port into one of the world's largest logistics companies.

The company's rise in many ways mirrored Dubai's own boom from a minor Gulf state into a centre of global commerce.

The group owns six ports in Canada, as well as the fast-growing London Gateway logistics hub and infrastructure projects stretching from Asia to Latin America.

DP World has made significant efforts to boost its brand globally, sponsoring golf's European tour alongside various ventures in cricket and Formula 1.

As owner of P&O Ferries, it sparked outrage in the UK in 2022 when the business sacked 800 staff and replaced them with cheaper agency workers.

DP World said Kazim, the new chair, would bring "extensive experience in financial and economic affairs". He currently serves as chair of Borse Dubai and governor of the Dubai International Financial Centre.

Narayan, the new chief executive, was previously chief financial officer and Sulayem's deputy.

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