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Qatar condemns attack targeting mosque in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Qatar has expressed its condemnation and denunciation of the attack that targeted a mosque in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of northwestern Pakistan, and caused multiple deaths and injuries. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated Qatar's firm position rejecting violence, terrorism, and criminal acts, regardless of the motives or reasons. It also emphasised its total rejection of targeting places of worship and terrorising civilians. The ministry expressed Qatar's condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Pakistan, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. **(QNA)**

Sheikh Joaan joins torch relay at Asian Games '26

A total of 16 Qatari athletes will compete in field and track events at the 20th Asian Games beginning in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, today

By A Staff Reporter, QNA
Doha

HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), took part in the torch relay for the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 during its final stage at Hisaya-Odori Park in Nagoya, Japan. The torch relay also featured several OCA vice-presidents, representatives of National Olympic Committees, and prominent figures from the sporting community.

The Asian Games flame embodies the passion and aspirations of athletes and participants from across the continent. It is being passed from one torchbearer to another on its journey to the Opening Ceremony, scheduled for today.

The torch relay began with a flame-lighting ceremony in Tokyo



on August 18, before travelling to Hiroshima and then Nagoya. Its journey included relays through municipalities and schools before reaching its final stage on September 17 and 18. HE Sheikh Joaan's participation came on the eve of the Opening Ceremony of the 20th Asian Games, which will bring together athletes representing 45 National Olympic Committees and continue until October 4.

A total of 16 Qatari athletes will compete in five field events and six track events, hoping to win as many

medals as possible. The national team includes prominent names in track and field who have previously won medals at the Olympic, world, continental and regional levels and have extensive experience winning medals at continental Games, including Mutaz Barshim, Abderrahman Samba and Ashraf Elseify. Zakaria Ibrahim, Abderrahman Ibrahim, Moaaz Ibrahim, among others will also seek to continue Qatar's continental achievements in Japan.

The athletics competitions will



take place from Sept 24 to 29, with athletes competing for medals in morning and evening sessions at the Nagoya track and field venue. The field events (discus throw, hammer throw, high jump, shot put and pole vault) will present a particular challenge for Qatar's athletes, given their capabilities in these disciplines, as well as their established records and previous medals.

Competition on the track is expected to be even more intense, with Qatari athletes participat-

ing in the 400m hurdles, 400m, 800m, 1,500m and 3,000m steeplechase, as well as the mixed relay and 4x400m relay. The national team athletes have completed their preparations for the Games. Among the most prominent participants is Olympic and world champion Mutaz Barshim, who will be seeking his fourth Asian Games medal in the high jump after winning medals at three editions: Guangzhou 2010, Incheon 2014 and Hangzhou 2022. **Sport pages 1 & 4**

Qatar Airways wins 4 Skytrax awards

Qatar Airways has capped a successful Skytrax World Airline Awards 2026, winning four titles and retaining its 5-Star Airline rating. The four World Airline Awards presented to Qatar Airways were the World's Best Business Class (the 13th time to receive this award); Best Airline in the Middle East (the 14th time to receive this award); World's Best Business Class Lounge (the 8th time to receive this award); and World's Best Onboard Wi-Fi (the first airline to ever receive this award). The World Airline Awards, alongside the 5-Star Airline rating, reflect Qatar

Airways' continued commitment to delivering exceptional passenger experiences, premium service, seamless onboard connectivity, and operational excellence across its global network, the carrier said in a press statement. Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Officer, Hamad al-Khater said: "We are honoured to receive four World Airline Awards from Skytrax, including the World's Best Business Class for a 13th time and the first award ever given for the World's Best Onboard Wi-Fi. These awards belong to our people. Sixty thousand colleagues deliver

the best experience in the world for our passengers every day, and they have done so through a particularly challenging year." The airline has advanced its services across the Middle East this winter season, with daily flights increasing by 14 per cent. According to the carrier press statement, these latest accolades reinforce Qatar Airways' position as a benchmark for excellence in international aviation, made possible by the passion and dedication of its teams across the Group and the continued trust and loyalty of its passengers worldwide. **(QNA)**



Heritage walk at Old Souq Al Wakrah



A traditional camel patrol walk along the waterfront promenade at Old Souq Al Wakrah offers visitors a glimpse of Qatar's rich desert heritage. Lined with traditional architecture, boats, and sea views, the promenade remains a popular spot for visitors seeking to experience the country's cultural heritage and maritime traditions. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

UNGA votes for allowing Palestinian participation

QNA
New York

With 152 countries voting in favour, three against, and four abstaining, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution allowing the State of Palestine to participate in the general debate of its 81st session through a pre-recorded statement by its president to be played in the General Assembly Hall. In the resolution, the General Assembly expressed regret over the decision by the United States of America to deny entry visas to representatives of the State of Palestine and revoke visas previously issued to them ahead of the current and previous sessions of the General Assembly, preventing them from participating in United Nations meetings at its headquarters in New York City. It called for the decision to be immediately reversed. The General Assembly stressed the importance of



enabling Palestinian representatives to participate in person in relevant United Nations meetings in New York. The high-level general debate of the United Nations General Assembly will begin on Sept 22 and continue through Sept 28. The General Assembly adopted a similar resolution last year, with 145 members voting in favour, five against and six abstaining.

QICDRC records highest-ever caseload in 2025 as dispute values hit QR1.45bn

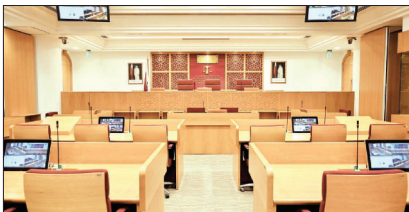
By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre (QICDRC) recorded its busiest year on record for cases filed in 2025, with 146 cases, representing a 49% increase from 2024, according to its 2025 Annual Review. Despite the rise in caseload, the total value of cases handled by the court decreased by about 1.36%, from QR1.47bn in 2024 to QR1.45bn in 2025. The court also issued 95 judgments, up 2.15% from the previous year.

The annual review said the increase in cases was managed without compromis-

ing the court's case-management standards, highlighting the role of its electronic case-management system in supporting judges and streamlining proceedings. The court linked the rise in cases to increased business and investment activity within its jurisdiction, while positioning its work within Qatar's broader development as a regional centre for international commercial dispute resolution.

The QICDRC's judiciary comprised 16 judges from 10 jurisdictions at the end of 2025, including Qatar, England and Wales, Australia, Singapore, France, China, India, the United States, Hong Kong and South Africa. The court said the composition brings together expertise from different judicial and legal traditions, including



common-law and civil-law systems.

In addition, the QICDRC Legal Clinic, launched in October 2024, received more than 130 requests for assistance in 2025. The clinic provides legal assistance to individuals and companies on civil and commercial matters outside the court's jurisdiction, with the initiative intended to improve access to early legal guidance.

The court further introduced Practice Direction No. 1 of 2025 on Appeals following the reissue of its Rules and Procedures. The updated procedural framework, which came into force in June 2025, included changes relating to appeals, service through the National Address system, jurisdiction and default judgments.

The court said the practice direction provides greater clarity on applications for permission to appeal and the appeal process. In addition, the registry launched an initiative to publish regular legal articles, primarily through LexisNexis Middle East, covering developments, cases and procedural updates at the QICDRC. The initiative was designed to keep legal professionals in Qatar, the GCC and beyond informed

about developments before the Court and support the exchange of legal knowledge and practical experience.

Meanwhile, the court subsequently defined its approach to AI-assisted legal work. On January 6, 2026, the QICDRC issued Practice Direction No. 1 of 2026 and accompanying guidance on using AI in court proceedings. The framework states that court users remain responsible for the accuracy and reliability of material submitted to the Court, requires verifying legal citations, and warns that AI tools can generate false citations or misstate applicable law. It also addresses confidentiality, disclosure, accountability and the potential consequences of misleading or inappropriate AI use.



Qatar, Turkiye ministers discuss further educational co-operation in phone call

HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah al-Khater has received a telephone call on Thursday from Turkiye's Minister of National Education Yusuf Tekin to discuss expanding existing educational co-operation in

a manner that serves the mutual interests of the two peoples. They explored measures to exchange expertise and further co-ordinate on joint initiatives in the coming period. – QNA

Qatar takes part in IMO talks



Qatar has taken part in an International Maritime Organisation (IMO) meeting aimed at boosting maritime safety.

Qatar's permanent delegation to the IMO joined the 12th Sub-Committee on Carriage of Cargoes and Containers (CCC 12), held in London on September 14-18.

Discussions covered requirements for ships using alternative fuels and new technologies.

Participants also addressed guidance on methanol and ethanol as marine fuels, low-flashpoint oil fuels, carbon capture and storage systems, and the securing of cargo and containers on ships.

Qatar said its participation supports international efforts to improve the safety and efficiency of maritime transport and develop regulations in response to technological advances and the growing use of alternative fuels. – QNA

Amir congratulates Chile's Kast

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations yesterday to Chile's President Jose Antonio Kast on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. HH the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent similar cables of congratulations to Kast on the occasion. – QNA

Ministry of Justice welcomes Qatar's accession to HCCH

The Ministry of Justice has embraced Qatar's accession to the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) as a reflection of the country's keenness to foster international legal and judicial co-operation.

On Thursday Qatar deposited its instrument of acceptance of the HCCH Statute, formally becoming the 95th member of the organisation.

The Ministry of Justice said in a statement yesterday that membership would strengthen Qatar's participation in international legal co-operation and contribute to the development of common rules governing cross-border civil, commercial and family matters. The statement added that the move would also provide opportunities for Doha to boost its presence in the global legal forums.

It commended the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' efforts in preparing and completing Qatar's application to join the organisation. The Hague Conference, established in 1893, develops international legal frameworks aimed at resolving conflicts of laws and facilitating judicial co-operation between countries. – QNA

MMDC discusses operational readiness, progress at Jeddah meeting

The Multinational Maritime Defence Coalition (MMDC) discussed operational updates; the progress of nations joining the coalition; and the definition of capability contributions from participating countries, during a meeting convened at the Western Fleet Command in Jeddah, all aimed at supporting readiness for operational execution.

The Saudi ministry of defence said in a statement yesterday that the coalition's fourth planning meeting, held on Thursday, was attended by 154 naval commanders, planners, ambassadors, and European Union representatives from 41 nations.

The meeting marked the coalition's continued transition from the foundational phase to active operations, following its entry into the stages of capability integration, operational readiness preparation, and actual presence within the maritime operational zone.

The ministry explained that this meeting represents an advanced stage in the coalition's trajectory, shifting the focus toward enhancing operational readiness and



preparing capabilities for operation under a unified command, ultimately leading to their deployment and the commencement of operational missions within the designated area of responsibility.

The meeting also addressed joint operational requirements and the specification of capability contributions from partici-

pating nations, ensuring support for co-ordinated and integrated multinational defensive operations.

The MMDC had announced its establishment in Riyadh on July 30, following a meeting hosted by the Saudi ministry of defence and attended by chiefs of staff and representatives from 43 nations, as well as the

European Union Delegation to Saudi Arabia.

At that time, 14 nations announced their support for the coalition project and its foundational arrangements, while other countries continued to finalise their respective national procedures for accession.

According to the founding statement,

the coalition's objectives are to enhance maritime security, protect freedom of navigation, and safeguard international trade routes, energy supply lines, and shared maritime interests in the Bab al-Mandab Strait, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden, within the framework of international law. – QNA

GSO Technical Council approves 812 draft standards

The Technical Council of the GCC Standardisation Organisation (GSO) has approved 812 Gulf draft standards and nine translation projects during its 63rd meeting in Riyadh.

The meeting, held on September 16-17, also approved 25 Gulf technical regulations, along with technical amendments and editorial corrections to international and Gulf standards.

The council agreed to establish a working group for the GCC Metrology Cluster Strategy and legal metrology guidelines.

It also approved the launch of Gulf Standardisation Day as an annual initiative.

Officials said that the decisions aim to strengthen co-ordination among Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) national standards bodies, facilitate trade, improve the competitiveness of products and services, and enhance consumer protection across the region.



Speaking at the meeting, council chairman Sheikh Hamad bin Salman al-Khalifa, who is also Bahrain's assistant undersecretary for domestic and foreign trade, stressed the importance of updating standards and technical regulations in response to rapid developments in industry, new

technologies, digital transformation and sustainability.

GSO president Eng. Jabr al-Nuaimi said he hoped the meeting's recommendations and decisions would support the development of Gulf standardisation and strengthen co-operation among member states. – QNA

Czech PM meets Qatar's envoy



Czech Republic's Prime Minister Andrej Babis has met with Qatar's ambassador Nasser bin Ibrahim al-Lenqawi. They discussed co-operation and ties between the countries. – QNA

Tougher action advocated against the import and sale of bird-calling devices

Environmentalists and wildlife experts have called for tighter restrictions on the import and sale of bird-calling devices, warning that their misuse could facilitate excessive hunting and disrupt wildlife and migratory patterns.

The calls followed the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC)'s seizure of a number of prohibited bird-calling devices, locally known as "sawyat", in Al Reem Biosphere Reserve.

Environmentalists welcomed the enforcement action, saying that it showed the importance of regular inspections and strict enforcement of regulations to protect wildlife, biodiversity and natural resources.

The issue has come into focus as Qatar's 2026-27 migratory bird hunting season began on September 1 and is scheduled to continue until February 15, 2027, under Ministerial Decision No. 7 of 2026.

The decision specifies which bird species may be hunted and which hunting methods are permitted, while prohibiting the use of devices that imitate bird calls.

Environmental expert Dr Youssef al-Kazem praised the inspectors' efforts and urged hunters and the public to act responsibly, stressing that protecting Qatar's wildlife is a shared responsibility.

He also called for firm action against illegal hunting and the use of prohibited equipment, saying that effective enforcement and deterrence are necessary to prevent practices that could threaten ecological balance.

Environmental researcher Hamad al-Khulaifi described the seizure of the devices as an important enforcement measure.

He said bird-call devices could concentrate birds in particular locations, potentially increasing hunting pressure and interfering with their natural movements and seasonal migration.

Al-Khulaifi also suggested that, where technically appropriate, such audio technology should be restricted to scientific research and officially authorised purposes rather than being made available for hunting.

Hunting enthusiast Khalid al-Abbasi likewise welcomed the ministry's inspection efforts and called for tighter controls on the import and commercial sale of bird-calling devices.

He also advocated stronger penalties for violations and greater awareness among hunters and enthusiasts of the potential ecological consequences of excessive hunting.

The enforcement action is particularly significant in Al Reem Biosphere Reserve, one of Qatar's major protected areas.

Located in northwestern Qatar about 65km west of Doha, the reserve covers roughly 10% of the country's land area and is known for its limestone formations, coastal habitats, meadows and vegetation.

It was established as a protected area in 2005.

The MoECC's land protection authorities monitor wildlife, detect unauthorised hunting practices, and enforce environmental regulations in protected and wild areas.

The calls for tighter controls therefore extend beyond the devices themselves, highlighting the broader need to balance regulated hunting with protecting Qatar's wildlife and the habitats that sustain migratory species.

Expert pens in-depth analysis of crisis over the Strait of Hormuz

The Wars of the Straits - The Hormuz Case by Dr Roudi Baroudi is published by the Transatlantic Leadership Network, a non-partisan Washington think-tank

The Wars of the Straits – The Hormuz Case is the latest book by Dr Roudi Baroudi, a veteran energy consultant and Senior Fellow at the Transatlantic Leadership Network (TLN), who examines the 2026 crisis, the long history that preceded it, and the most promising means of preventing future disruptions in the world's most important waterway.

The author draws on more than four decades of firsthand experience in the Mena (Middle East and North Africa) region's oil and gas sector, from helping to build some of Saudi Arabia's most iconic pipelines and refineries in the 1970s and 1980s to later advising the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Commission on energy policy, then leading the charge for Euro-Med and Mena countries to unlock their offshore economies by settling their maritime borders.

Baroudi offers a deeply historical analysis, not only recalling the Tanker War of the 1980s, but also retracing the very concept of "wars over straits" back nearly seven centuries to the struggle between mediaeval Genoa and

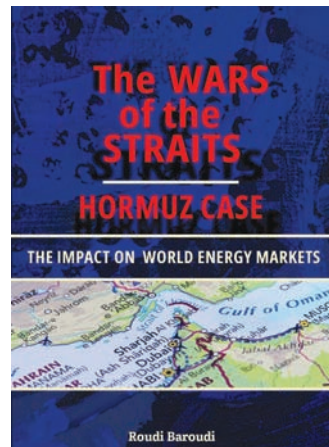
Venice over access to the Bosphorus and the Black Sea.

This helps to situate the events of 2026 in a longer and broader context of chokepoints, empires, and the perennial temptation to weaponise maritime passage.

The result is an account of the 2026 crisis that combines in-depth geopolitical understanding with rigorous legal and technical analysis, helping the reader to sift through competing and (often deliberately) confusing narratives on several aspects, including: the status of the Strait of Hormuz under international law; the salient naval and commercial engagements of the 2026 war itself; the economic and environmental fallout of the disruption to shipping; and the practicalities of alternative routes for so-called "bypass pipelines".

Extensive appendices cover the June 17 US-Iran memorandum of understanding, global straits and canals, the strategic link to the Bab el-Mandeb, and key maritime boundary agreements in the region.

Equal parts history, legal brief, and policy argument, *The Wars of the Straits* makes an urgent case for a durable, internationally



sanctioned framework, grounded in law, science, and fact, to guarantee freedom of passage through Hormuz.

For energy professionals, policymakers, and anyone seeking to understand how a single waterway can hold the global economy hostage, this is essential reading on one of the defining crises of our time.

Distributed by Casemate Publishers, *The Wars of the Straits* is published by the TLN, a non-partisan Washington think-tank that brings together scholars and policy professionals from around the world.

In addition to his business career, Baroudi undertakes considerable advocacy work, promoting policies, projects, and programmes that promote dialogue and opportunity.

In 2023, his efforts to promote peaceful development in the Eastern Mediterranean earned him the TLN's Transatlantic Leadership Award.

He currently serves as chief executive of Energy and Environment Holding, a private consultancy based in Doha.

Shaeqee ne Fun marks Pakistan Independence Day through Urdu poetry

Shaeqee ne Fun, Doha, a leading socio-cultural organisation of Pakistani expatriates in Qatar established in 1992, recently hosted a prestigious online Independence Day Mushaira (Poetry Symposium), bringing together poets and poetry lovers from Qatar and different parts of Pakistan to celebrate the country's independence through Urdu poetry.

On behalf of Pakistan's ambassador to Qatar, Muhammad Aamir, as chief guest, Community Welfare Attaché Officer Usama Idrees, conveyed his message to the organisers and participants, saying: "The online poetic gathering provided an opportunity for overseas Pakistanis to express their love for Pakistan, celebrate their national identity and reaffirm their love for their national language, Urdu, its literature, poetry and cultural traditions." A large number of poetry lovers and distinguished poets joined the event through Zoom. The programme began with the recitation of the Holy Qur'an, followed by the national anthems of Pakistan and Qatar.

Nawaz Mohd Akram, president of Shaeqee ne Fun, Doha, spoke in his address about the significance of independence, national responsibilities, and the role of literature in society.

He described freedom as both a great and a major responsibility, stressing the need

The poets highlighted themes including love for their homeland, the value of independence, national unity, memories of the homeland and hopes for a bright future

to continue literary activities that promote Urdu and connect the younger generation with their national and cultural heritage.

Mohammad Atiq, Shaeqee ne Fun chairman, welcomed the ambassador's representative, Usama Idrees; the Mushaira's president poet, Dr Pirzada Qasim; participating poets; and literary enthusiasts. He congratulated participants on Independence Day and lauded Pakistani writers and poets living abroad for preserving their linguistic and cultural links with their homeland.

Speaking on behalf of the ambassador, Idrees appreciated the officials of Shaeqee ne Fun for organising the literary event. They stressed the need for such activities for overseas Pakistanis. He said cultural and literary gatherings play an important role in keeping Pakistani communities connected to their national identity, cultural values, and language. He also conveyed the ambassador's good wishes to the

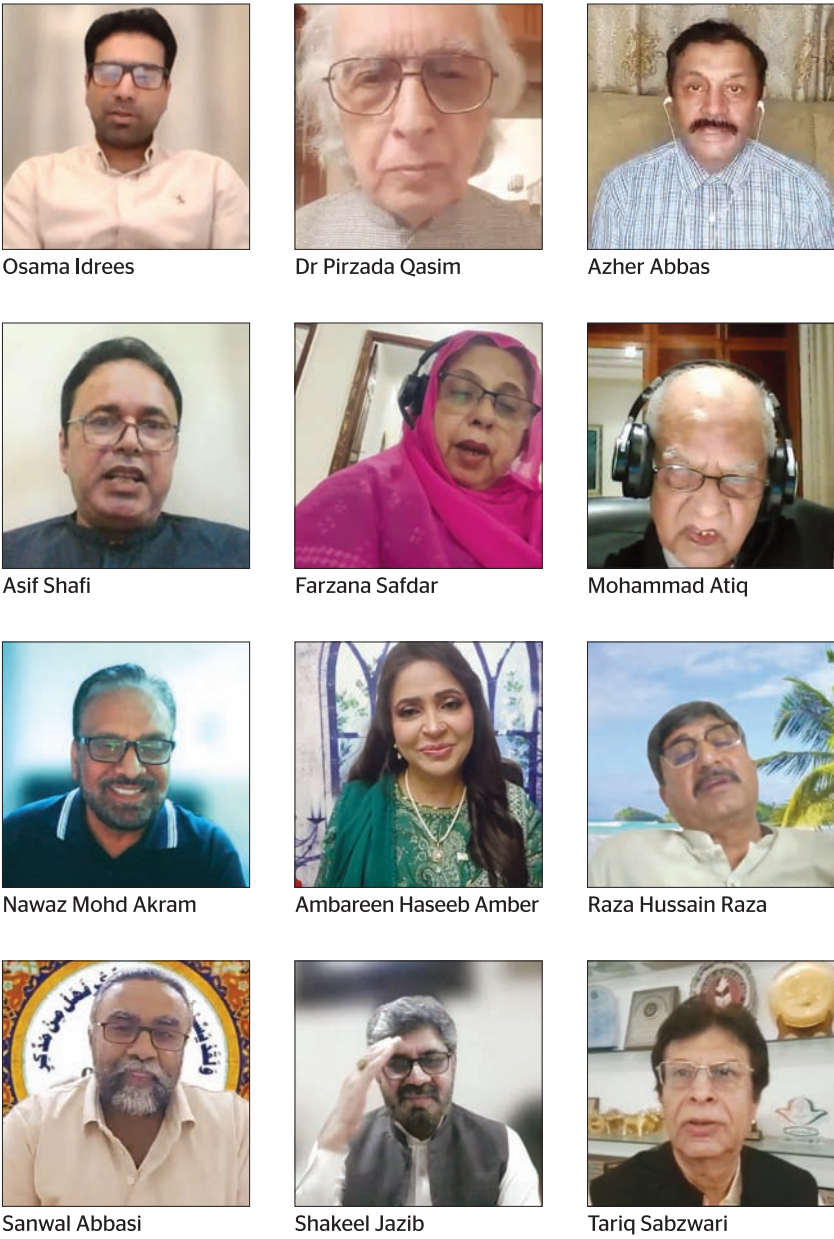
organisers and paid tribute to the participating poets for promoting patriotism and national unity through their poetry.

Renowned poet Dr Pirzada Qasim presided over the Mushaira, while Shakil Jazib compered the proceedings engagingly and gracefully. Poets - Azher Abbas, Ambareen Haseeb Amber, Tariq Sabzwari, Farzana Safdar, Raza Hussain Raza, Asif Shafi, and Sanwal Abbasi - presented their selected poetry.

The poets highlighted themes including love for their homeland, the value of independence, national unity, memories of the homeland and hopes for a bright future. Asif Shafi also presented a Naat in connection with the blessed month of Rabi-ul-Awwal, adding a spiritual dimension to the literary evening.

Qamar uz Zaman Bhatti, general secretary, concluded the event with a vote of thanks, expressing gratitude to all guests, poets, participants and organisers.

The Mushaira demonstrated that geographical distance cannot weaken the emotional bond between overseas Pakistanis and their homeland. Through poetry, language, and cultural expression, the virtual gathering brought the spirit of Pakistan closer to the Pakistani community in Qatar. It reaffirmed literature's enduring role in keeping national identity alive abroad.



Las Damas de Rizal Doha Chapter celebrates *Buwan ng Wika* Year 2

The Las Damas de Rizal (LDR) Doha Chapter marked *Buwan ng Wika* Year 2 on September 5 at Holiday Villa Hotel with a three-part celebration of Filipino heritage, talent, and unity. The event drew over 200 attendees from the Filipino community under the theme "Wikang Filipino at AI: Kasangkapan sa Pananaliksik at Tulay sa Yaman ng Impormasyon."

LDR Doha Chapter is the only chapter authorised to carry the Las Damas de Rizal name under a single official logo in the Middle East, specifically in the State of Qatar.

The afternoon opened with a colourful parade of 45 participants and families, including 8-year-old Zhaniah Atara Miracle Maulion Rivera ("ZAM"), who dreams of becoming a neurosurgeon, and the Montero family from Albay, who have called Qatar home for 23 years. Emcees Lady Amina Turujauan and Sir Walther Miguel Cantos led the ceremonies, which included an ecumenical prayer, the entry of Qatari and Philippine flags, and both national anthems.

Chapter president Lady Sheila Marie C Cantos delivered the welcome address. The parade featured the Reyna ng Bagong Henerasyon and Reyna ng Kapayapaan, a presentation by the LDR Doha ladies, and a message of gratitude from Lady Rowena Udtuhan.

The showcase featured 90 participants of young talents and



performing artists, highlighting Filipino artistry. Tanghalang Overseas Pinoy (TOPI) opened the showcase, followed by Dennis Bandojo as Dr Jose Rizal. The Philippine School Doha (PSD) Hiyaw Dance Troupe performed Banga, Polkabal, and Paso Doble. BASE ONE traced OPM from "Sitsiritsit" to modern hits. PSD Senior High students staged a modern Balagtasan on AI in re-

search. Other acts included MEGA Voice Talents, a trio rendition of "Anak", Pinoy Popstar Qatar 2026 grand winner Unica Rajia De Vera, BIMAK's Cordillera Tadek/Tayaw, Mariefe Ros Garcia's Kundiman "Dahil Sa'yo", and Joelle Eunice Izon's rap of Gloc-9's "Upuan". The final segment installed the chapter's leaders for Rizalian Year 2026-2028. Founding president, Lady Dr Analiza T Binondo delivered a valedictory address and vote of thanks, then presented and charged the incoming officers. Philippine ambassador Mardomel Celo D Melicor administered the oath and received a Plaque of Appreciation as honoured guest and keynote speaker.

New officers are: president Lady Sheila Marie C Cantos; vice-pres-

ident Lady Dr Noemi F Formaran; secretary Lady Maria Michelle A Revillosa; assistant secretary Lady Victoria M Bedon; treasurer Lady Rowena E. Udtuhan; assistant treasurer Lady Theresa J Ocampo; auditor Lady Beberlyn R Asperilla; and PRO Lady Veronica C Yee Concepcion.

Inducted committee chairs were Lady Dr Noemi F Formaran (Education), Lady Victoria M Bedon (Membership), Lady Rowena E Udtuhan (Ways & Means), Lady Theresa J Ocampo (CSR), Lady Beberlyn R Asperilla (Events), Lady Veronica C Yee Concepcion (Media & Publications), Lady Marjorie R Cantal (Cultural Affairs), Lady Jennifer V Vanguardia (Counterpart Organization), and Lady Amina H Turujauan (Logistics & Safety). Dr Binondo served as inducting officer.

New members Lady Albertha F. Formaran, Lady Stephanie P Adornado, and Lady Robie Ann D Baltazar were inducted and received certificates signed by LDR Founder and Lady Grand Matriarch Lady Lina "Nenette" Brosas of Paris, France. Secretary Revillosa led the LDR Pledge, and Formaran delivered the message of commitment.

Awards included the Plaque of Pioneer Leadership & Service for the 2024-2026 founding officers, the Plaque of Exemplary Commitment & Service for committee chairpersons, and the Foundational Legacy & Leadership Award for Dr Binondo.



NAM College alumni host reception for ex-Sociology head



NAM College Alumni Association Qatar Chapter hosted a reception for Dr E K Muneera Beevi, former head of the Sociology Department at NAM College, who is currently in Qatar on a short visit.

The programme, titled "Snehadaram" (A Token of Love and

Respect), was attended by several of her former students whom she had taught during her tenure at the college.

Alumni president Jasar Achoth presented a memento to Dr Beevi on behalf of the alumni association. General secretary Saleem Ali delivered the welcome address, while treasurer



Abdul Raof proposed the vote of thanks.

The gathering provided a warm opportunity for Dr Beevi and her former students to reconnect and cherish their fond memories.

NAM College is situated in Kannur district of the southern Indian state of Kerala.



Council members are reliable partners for peace: GCC chief

QNA
Washington

Secretary-General of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), Jassem Mohamed Albudaiwi underscored that the GCC member states have firmly established their position as a reliable partner in supporting peace and stability and ensuring global energy security. He pointed out that the economic progress and diplomatic presence achieved by the GCC reflect an approach founded on assuming responsibility, building partnerships, and striving to ensure that the dividends of stability and prosperity extend to the peoples of the region and the world.

Albudaiwi's remarks were delivered during his address before the Gulf States Forum at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, US of America.

"45 years after its establishment, the GCC has become an influential regional organisation. Integration and solidarity among its member states form the bedrock of its work and stances," he explained.

He also underlined the GCC's steadfast stance on the Palestin-



ian cause, grounded in providing relief to civilians, rejecting forced displacement, and supporting a just settlement based on the two-state solution.

Regarding energy security, Albudaiwi said: "The GCC states have demonstrated their capacity to meet their commitments under the most challenging circumstances. The GCC handled regional escalations and disruptions to navigation in the Strait of Hormuz with restraint and responsibility."

Moreover, he condemned the continuation of Iranian attacks on neighbouring countries and the resulting escalation and turmoil across the region, stressing that

the Strait of Hormuz must not become a bargaining chip.

He called upon the international community to assume its responsibilities to restore stability and guarantee that the strait remains open to international navigation, in accordance with international law, the UN (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), and UN Security Council Resolution 2817.

The GCC Chief highlighted Gulf mediation efforts to bridge viewpoints and pave pathways for dialogue, commending the instrumental role of the State of Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman in keeping communication channels open during confrontations

between Iran and the US, in pursuit of just solutions that address legitimate security concerns and spare the region's peoples further hardship.

On economic affairs, Albudaiwi stated that GCC countries are undergoing rapid transformation driven by their national visions, diversifying revenue sources, and expanding finance, logistics, industry, tourism, as well as advanced technology sectors.

"The GCC economy exceeds USD 2.4tn, with projections pointing to approximately US-D6tn by 2050, while its sovereign wealth funds manage assets approaching USD 5tn, reinforcing their pivotal role in financing long-term investments and driving global economic growth," he added.

Furthermore, the GCC Secretary General affirmed that the GCC-US partnership offers broad horizons for building a knowledge-based economy, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI) research, medical sciences, and clean energy. "American universities, including the University of Utah, represent vital partners in qualifying talent and expanding scientific collaboration.

Turkiye cracks down on Israel-tied fraudsters, detains 175 suspects

QNA
Ankara

Turkish Justice Minister Akin Gurlek announced a major operation against an Israeli-linked international fraud network that swindled foreign nationals through fake foreign exchange (forex) and cryptocurrency investment schemes, with 175 suspects detained in co-ordinated raids across Istanbul and Mugla.

"We continue our resolute fight against national and international criminal structures that turn technology and the financial system into instruments of crime.

We are tracking the proceeds of crime and mobilising all our resources to expose the perpetrators, their connections and their criminal proceeds," Gurlek said in a post on X.

He noted that the network lured victims using customer service representatives who spoke various languages, then presented them with fictitious profits on investment platforms controlled by the suspects to persuade them to deposit more funds.

He added that when victims sought to withdraw their money, the network demanded additional

payments under pretexts such as "account freezing" and "taxes," subsequently transferring the deposited funds to bank accounts and cryptocurrency wallets abroad.

Furthermore, he explained that the network targeted several countries, particularly in Europe, the Far East, and Africa, with a transaction volume reaching approximately US-D266mn over two years, a figure believed to cover only office expenses and salary payments.

He stated that a synchronised operation launched this morning, involving Interpol units, targeted 42 call centres linked to 28 companies and 239 suspects across 286 locations in Istanbul and Mugla. He confirmed that 175 suspects have been detained so far, while operations and efforts to apprehend the remaining wanted individuals continue.

Last July, Turkish authorities carried out several separate operations against fraud networks linked to investment and forex platforms; one operation in Istanbul resulted in the detention of 54 suspects, while another case saw arrest warrants issued for 25 individuals accused of defrauding victims of hundreds of millions of Turkish Liras.

Israeli, Lebanese armies face off in village

AFP
Deir Mimass, Lebanon

Israel's military moved forward yesterday in a south Lebanon village, facing off against a Lebanese army position after deploying tanks and detonating stun grenades, according to an AFP photographer and other media in the area.

Israel has been occupying a swathe of south Lebanon since war broke out in March against Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, but the Lebanese army is supposed to gradually take control of the area under a framework agreement between the two countries.

Under the deal, Iran-backed Hezbollah is meant to disarm and Israel to withdraw from Lebanon, but progress has been slow, with Israel warning it will stay put as long as its foe remains a threat.

In the village of Deir Mimas yesterday, located on the edge of territory occupied by Israel, two Israeli tanks advanced along a road towards the settlement, the AFP photographer saw.

The tanks stopped in front of a barricade made from earth, beyond which Lebanese army vehicles were stationed.

"An Israeli force advanced on the outskirts of the village of Deir Mimas, up to a junction near a recently established Lebanese army position", where they launched "six stun grenades in the surrounding area",



Israeli forces advance toward the outskirts of Deir Mimas as they reach an intersection near a newly established Lebanese army position, yesterday. (AFP)

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported.

According to the AFP photographer, the Lebanese army then withdrew by about 100 metres but remained in a position facing the Israeli tanks.

The Lebanese army recently established itself at the site and also has a presence at other locations in Deir Mimas on the edge of the Israeli-occupied zone, according to the photographer.

But the Lebanese army has stayed out of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.

On Thursday, a meeting was held between Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, French President Emmanuel Macron and Jordan's King Abdullah II to muster international support for Lebanon's army as it seeks to take control of south Lebanon.

Costly overhaul fuels fears for Cairo's street kiosks

AFP
Cairo

Cairo's omnipresent street kiosks, where commuters grab cigarettes, children buy sweets, and residents stop for cold drinks or phone credit, are set for a makeover that some fear could price many small operators out of business.

Authorities in the Egyptian capital this week launched a scheme to standardise thousands of licensed kiosks, giving existing operators three months to adopt a unified design costing between 50,000 and 60,000 Egyptian pounds (\$1,000-1,200), a hefty sum for many small business owners.

The overhaul is the latest in a series of projects reshaping Cairo's urban landscape, which critics say have at times come at the expense of the city's architectural heritage and historic character.

Beneath a clutter of snack packets, soft-drink adverts and hanging cigarette displays in Cairo's leafy Heliopolis district, shopkeeper Moamen Hassan topped up a customer's phone credit as he voiced support for the plan but concern over the price tag.

"We definitely want the city to look better," the 27-year-old told AFP.

"But many kiosk owners in poorer areas won't be able to afford the cost. Some will have no choice but to close."

Cairo Governor Ibrahim Saber



One of the newly introduced unified-design kiosks is seen on the sidewalk of a street in downtown Cairo yesterday. (AFP)

described the scheme as an effort to improve the city's appearance and keep pavements clear, and a prototype unveiled downtown offers a glimpse of that vision.

With its cream-coloured exterior, gold lettering and neatly arranged shelves, it stands in stark contrast to the colourfully chaotic kiosks that line Cairo's streets, their metal frames crowned with branded awnings and crammed with everyday goods.

Known locally as the koshk, the compact structures have been part of Cairo's streetscape for generations, tucked between age-

ing apartment blocks, transport hubs and busy intersections all across the sprawling city.

Often among the first businesses to open each morning and the last to close at night, many have become neighbourhood landmarks.

"I pass by the kiosk almost every day," 19-year-old university student Sabrine Ahmed told AFP. "It makes life easier."

Under the new scheme, kiosks will be fitted with QR codes allowing the public and authorities to access information including licence details and payment records.

The standardised structures, measuring either six or nine metres square, will also include fixtures like electricity meters and fire extinguishers.

The overhaul comes as many Egyptians are still struggling with the fallout from years of sharp currency devaluations and soaring prices.

To ease the burden, authorities say licensed kiosk owners can pay 25 percent upfront, or between 12,500 and 15,000 pounds, with the remainder spread over two years without interest.

Barefoot and terrified, Yemenis flee the Houthi advance

Reuters
Al-Bireen Camp, Yemen

When a terrifying bombardment erupted around their camp in Yemen this week as a long-paused civil war reignited, Rawya Hassan and her family fled for their lives, barefoot and leaving their animals and other belongings behind.

The family had already been forced from their village by war years earlier and now had to escape the fighting again, joining 115,000 people who aid agencies say are on the move after a rapid advance by the Houthis group.

"We are under terror, under the rockets, under the missiles," she said, making bread in a makeshift clay oven among the shacks and acacia trees of the small Al-Bireen camp, where the family has now sought shelter.

The conflict between the Iran-backed Houthis and forces aligned with the Saudi-backed government mostly stopped after a 2022 truce, but fighting has broken out again in a spillover from the wider war between Iran and the United States.

As the Houthis seized the port city of Mocha and the southern stretch of Yemen's Red Sea coast last week, a wave of displaced people fled into areas held by the government and across the sea to Djibouti.

Among them were Hassan, 48, and her family of seven children, in a remote district of Taiz province, an area of steep, dry foothills between the coast and Yemen's central highlands.

The family were originally from the village of Al-Tuweir, but fled fighting in the area eight years ago for a camp in Al-Kadha district nearby. Now even that place of shelter has gone and they must start afresh.

"We escaped barefoot. We didn't even know where our children were. We had nothing with us, no covers, no mattresses, no food, no drink, nothing," she said, describing shells falling and warplanes or drones circling overhead.

Her older sister, Rawda, was with the children and after a long walk they reunited the next day at Al-Bireen camp where they are entirely dependent on aid.

Rawda, an orange scarf wrapped round her head, said the family does not now know where to go. From the camp, a dirt path leads up into the hills, and a road runs nearby between the Houthi-held coastline and another frontline at the city of Taiz.

Larger numbers of people fled along the Indian Ocean coastline from the Bab el-Mandeb Strait at the mouth of the Red Sea towards Aden, arriving at camps pitched



Rawya Hassan, a mother of seven, sits with her children outside their hut at the Al-Bireen camp for displaced people in Taiz province, Yemen. (Reuters)

before the city in windswept sand with white tents standing in rows.

Um Mohammed said her family had escaped from Mocha when the Houthis advanced last week. It was the latest blow the family had suffered after her son was killed earlier in the war. When they reached Al-Firdaws camp the family were given only thin mattresses and old blankets for the tent where they now shelter, she said.

Small children played nearby and women hauled large buckets of water from tanks brought by pick-up truck as aid workers distributed food rations.

"They put us in the middle of the sand. We have suffered a lot,"

she said, boiling water in a kettle over a small twig fire, adding that they had lost their livestock, clothes and blankets as they left.

The fighting in Yemen has exploded back into full-blown war along several fronts, with the Houthis using drones and ballistic missiles and Saudi Arabia pounding districts held by the Iran-backed group with warplanes. There is no sign the violence will let up soon.

The UN migration agency IOM said on Friday that at least 112,000 people had been displaced inside Yemen over the last two weeks and that nearly 3,000 more had fled to Djibouti, crossing the Gulf of Aden in overcrowded boats.

Fighting uproots 112,000 in Yemen, thousands flee to Djibouti: UN

AFP
Geneva

Renewed fighting in Yemen has displaced more than 112,000 people and pushed nearly 3,000 others to flee across the Red Sea to Djibouti, the United Nations said yesterday.

Houthis last week seized control of Yemen's Red Sea coastline, tightening their grip on the strategic Bab el-Mandab strait, a vital shipping gateway linking Europe and Asia via the Suez Canal.

But the latest fighting between the Houthis and forces loyal to the Aden-based government has also sparked a fresh humanitarian crisis, with civilians uprooted inside Yemen and others risking dangerous sea crossings to flee the violence.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has recorded more than 112,000 internally displaced people since the outbreak of fighting, the UN agency's leader in Yemen, Abdussattor Esoev, told reporters.

Most have been displaced over the last two weeks, mainly along the west coast and in the provinces of Taiz

Most have been displaced over the last two weeks, mainly along the west coast and in the provinces of Taiz and Lahj

and Lahj, he told them from Aden.

Across the Red Sea, nearly 3,000 people have arrived in Djibouti in less than a week after making the perilous crossing from Yemen, according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR).

The influx is adding pressure to a country of about one million people that already hosts around 36,000 refugees, most of them from Somalia and Ethiopia, UNHCR representative Sandrine Desamours said.

She added that "while the number may sound small", it must be seen in proportion to the population.

After years of relative calm, Yemen was drawn back into conflict in July amid the wider regional fallout from the US-Israeli war on Iran.

A previous war between the Houthis and the Saudi-backed Yemeni government, from 2014 to 2022, killing hundreds of thousands of people and plunging the Arab world's poorest country into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

Curfew imposed in Nigerian city after 37 detained miners die

Reuters
Minna

Authorities imposed an overnight curfew in Nigeria's central city of Minna yesterday after security forces opened fire as hundreds of people took to the streets to protest against the deaths of 37 detainees in the custody of a paramilitary force.

The victims — many of whom were children — were found dead on Thursday in the cells of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), which had raided suspected illegal gold mines and locked up dozens of miners in the city, the capital of Niger State.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu ordered an investigation into the deaths after his government earlier suspended some senior officials. But anger over the incident led to clashes overnight and into yesterday.

As the start of curfew approached at 6pm (1700 GMT), security forces had restored order to the streets of Minna. They had earlier fired live rounds as protesters — some armed with sticks, machetes and traditional hunting rifles — called for justice. A Reuters witness saw one body on the ground.

"We are not thieves. We are simply seeking a way to make a living by mining," Yusuf Auwal, a miner who joined the protesters, told Reuters.



Family members of illegal mining suspects arrested in mining raids who reportedly died while in detention gather at Minna General Hospital in Minna, Niger State. (Reuters)

Some protesters had tried to set fire to government buildings in the Tunga neighbourhood.

Niger State Governor Umar Bago said many of the dead were children, aged 14 to 18, who had been working in the mines instead of going to school. "There are issues of illegal mining, and it is taking a toll on our children," he said.

Nigeria's NSCDC security force — an armed agency under the interior ministry meant to protect infrastructure and strategic assets — said the detainees had been held in raids on suspected illegal mines on September 15 to 16 in

the Wushishi-Lukoto area west of Minna.

The force, which describes itself as a Federal Government Paramilitary Agency, initially said a disease outbreak may have been involved in their deaths, but later said the cause of death had not been established and would be determined by medical examinations.

The government yesterday suspended Niger State's NSCDC commandant, Suberu Siyaka Ani-viye, and said there would be a full investigation.

Tinubu said any suspensions would not be a substitute for jus-

tice and called for any officials found responsible to be prosecuted. "There must be accountability," he said.

The victims were buried late on Thursday in accordance with Islamic tradition, raising questions about whether or how authorities would carry out further forensic examinations to determine the cause of death.

The mother of one of the detainees, Shafa'atu Suleiman, told Reuters outside the hospital on Thursday that she had visited her son Abdullahi in detention and found him in a cramped NSCDC cell, before later learning that he had died.

Officials had refused to allow relatives to deliver food to the detainees and demanded 100,000 naira (\$75) for them to be freed, she said.

"This is injustice. We will not forgive them."

NSCDC officials did not respond to multiple requests for comment on her accusations.

Nigeria has tried for years to curb unauthorised mining at thousands of informal sites that operate across the country. The authorities say illegal mining damages the environment and leads to losses of government revenue.

Tinubu said yesterday the government would continue its crackdown on illegal mining but called for any actions to be conducted lawfully.

About 300 Tigray rebel fighters have surrendered: Ethiopia

AFP
Addis Ababa

Some 300 members of Ethiopia's Tigray rebel forces have surrendered to authorities, the federal army said yesterday, as fears mount of a return to the conflict that devastated the region between 2020 and 2022.

Both the government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) have massed troops along the border of the northern state in recent months, fuelling fears of a return to the war that killed some 600,000 people, according to the African Union.

Federal authorities carried out several drone strikes in the region in August and September, targeting military positions, according to ACLED, an NGO that tracks conflicts. Officials have not commented on the strikes.

"Nearly 300 TPLF fighters surrendered to forces stationed along the Tekeze corridor," the federal army said on Facebook, named after the river in north-western and western Tigray.

TPLF vice-president Amanuel Assefa told AFP he could not "comment on this kind of military issue".

The fighters who surrendered included divisional officers who

"handed over more than 280 individual and crew-served weapons, various types of ammunition", the army said, publishing photos of the weapons and soldiers.

According to the military, the men were "unhappy" with the "TPLF's preparations for war".

"They also said they opposed what they described as efforts by TPLF leaders to recruit young Tigrayans and send them to war to protect themselves from accountability," the statement said.

AFP and human rights NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) have reported a campaign of forced recruitment by the regional Tigrayan authorities, quoting young men who escaped training camps where they were taken against their will, or fled their local area to avoid round-ups.

The federal forces also claimed the men said they opposed the alliance between neighbouring Eritrea and the TPLF, and described it as "harmful".

For months, the government has accused the TPLF of closer ties to neighbouring Eritrea, which gained independence in 1993 and has long had tense relations with Addis Ababa.

Amanuel has previously said he would ally with "anyone who fights the federal government".

British woman rescued in Malawi shootout

AFP
Lilongwe

Malawi police said yesterday they were investigating the abduction of a British woman whose dramatic rescue left four suspected kidnappers dead and a senior police officer injured during a shootout.

Nusrat Osman, 47, was rescued in the Mpemba-Chadzunda area outside the commercial capital Blantyre late Thursday, six days after she was abducted, police said in a statement.

"She is still traumatised. When she is settled properly then we will interview her," police inspector general Richard Luhanga told AFP.

"The motive is still not known but the investigations are ongoing."

Osman was taken in broad daylight on September 11 by four men who police said were travelling in a grey crossover SUV.

The suspected kidnappers

were armed with an AK-47 rifle, police spokeswoman Gladys Chiwaula said.

The suspects were shot during the rescue operation and taken to hospital, where they later died from their injuries, police said.

Deputy Inspector General of police Noel Kayira was also wounded in the shootout and was taken to hospital. There was a heavy police presence at the facility where he was receiving treatment yesterday.

"He is in a stable condition," Luhanga said.

Osman, a mother of two, is an auditor based in Malawi, according to local media reports, and is originally from Leicester in central England.

Her family previously said they have received no ransom demand, while police offered a 30mn kwacha (\$17,100) reward for information leading to the captors' arrest.

Malawi is a largely safe country, with little gun crime, and kidnappings are very rare.

DR Congo Ebola epidemic reaching new areas, not slowing: MSF

AFP
Geneva

The Democratic Republic of Congo's worst Ebola outbreak in history is not winding down but spreading to new parts of the vast central African country, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) warned yesterday.

Since being declared in mid-May, the deadly virus has killed more than 3,600 people out of 7,200 recorded infections, according to the World Health Organisation.

Much of the latest epidemic, the DRC's 17th, has been concentrated in hard-to-reach areas in the north and east long plagued by instability and a litany of armed groups.

"Although we all want to be positive and encouraging for the situation, we have to be also realistic in what is going on, and the reality is that it's too soon now to say that the outbreak is pacing down," MSF epidemiologist Manuel Albela Miranda told AFP in an interview at the medical charity's international headquarters in Geneva.

On Wednesday, the WHO had welcomed what it saw as "encouraging signs" that the epi-



A Congolese hygiene specialist at the Katwa Ebola treatment centre disinfects the facility, as aid agencies intensify efforts to contain a new Ebola outbreak involving the Bundibugyo strain in the Mutiri quarter of Butembo, North Kivu province. (Reuters/File Photo)

demical was slowing down — only for Africa's top health body to insist a day later: "No-one can come and say the outbreak is under control."

Guyguy Manangama, MSF's deputy operations director, agreed that "the signs are not encouraging".

"On the contrary, the situation is alarming," said the doctor, who fears that "people are letting their guard down".

While the disease seems to be on the back foot in the northeastern province of Ituri, where the epidemic was first detected, the virus has been making progress in

other regions instead.

It has recently reached the province of South-Ubangi on the border with the Central African Republic and Congo-Brazzaville; while North-Kivu on the border with Rwanda currently accounts for nearly half of all new recorded Ebola cases.

"Cases keep popping up in different areas and that is why we are concerned about the current situation of the outbreak," Miranda, the epidemiologist, said.

MSF has some 1,700 staff in the DRC, 90% of whom are Congolese.

From its medics on the ground, the charity knows that "there are plenty of health structures that are there," Miranda said.

"But they are not prepared at all," he said, pointing to the drastic need for more staff and resources.

Ebola is transmitted through contact with bodily fluids and can cause severe internal and external bleeding and organ failure.

The disease has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa over the last 50 years.

There is currently no approved vaccine or treatment against the Bundibugyo strain responsible for the current outbreak in the DRC.

Equatorial Guinea abusing US deportees: Amnesty

Rights group Amnesty accused the authorities in Equatorial Guinea yesterday of beating and jailing two people, who were expelled from the US under a divisive immigration policy earlier this year.

The pair, named as Ahmed Soliman and Samson Birhane, had been living in a hotel since they arrived in the central African nation — where neither of them are from.

But Amnesty said they were beaten and violently removed from the hotel last Friday, before being put into an overcrowded cell at a paramilitary police base. Washington has expelled dozens of people under a plan to reduce immigration, championed by the Trump administration, that sees them pay countries to take non-nationals.

But Soliman told AFP last month that he and several others staying in a hotel in the city of Malabo had been mistreated and felt the authorities wanted them to leave.

"I have police officers yanking on my neck, trying to throw me on the ground, I have officers elbowing me in my back," Soliman, originally from Egypt, told AFP. (AFP)

Zimbabwe farmers seek funds to cash in on China blueberry boom

AFP
Mvurwi

Under the morning sun, women moved briskly through neat rows of bushes, plucking blueberries for Zimbabwe's export market thrown wide open by new trade deals with China.

Managers of the Forrester Estates farm about 100 kilometres north of Harare want to more than double their planting area to 50 hectares next year to capitalise on the booming demand.

"The funding, that's the problem," farm manager Albert Chakala told AFP.

The southern African country dispatched its first shipment of blueberries to China in July after a phytosanitary agreement signed a year ago and Beijing's scrapping of tariffs on imports from 53 African countries in May.

"The crop that we have is not enough to satisfy our market," Chakala said.

Each new hectare of blueberries requires an upfront investment of between \$50,000 and \$55,000, mainly for irrigation, planting material and other infrastructure, he said.

Lack of access to affordable finance is one of the biggest barriers to growth for many of Zimbabwe's farmers, according to the Horticultural Development Council (HDC), which represents growers and exporters.

Yet, the promise of new global



A Zimbabwe farm clerk records harvest weights and fields delivered by farm workers harvesting blueberries into punnets and crates ready for export to global markets at Forrester Estates in Mvurwi. (AFP)

markets clashes sharply with Zimbabwe's ongoing monetary realities, where a scarcity of foreign exchange routinely leaves farmers unable to fund the very expansion needed to meet demand.

"We are expanding bit by bit, according to what we are getting back from what we sell," Chakala said.

Zimbabwean blueberries already reach European, British and Middle Eastern markets, but China — one of the world's largest consumers of the fruit widely promoted for its purported health benefits — offers a potentially transformative new destination for the farmers who can afford to scale up.

Zimbabwe is Africa's third-largest blueberry producer after Mo-

rocco and South Africa, and one of the world's fastest-growing blueberry producers, according to the HDC.

This year, the industry expects to export about 12,000 tonnes from around 850 hectares, up from 9,500 tonnes produced from 650 hectares last year, CEO Linda Nielsen said in a statement in June.

To support growth to meet the potential offered by China's hunger for blueberries, the sector was engaging with the government over more competitive export financing and targeted tax incentives for irrigation, solar and cold-chain investments, she said.

"The lack of adequate financing is a big worry for growers," she said.

Death toll passes 100 soldiers in Mali attack last week: sources

AFP
Abidjan

At least 100 soldiers were killed in an attack on a central army base in Mali last week, several sources told AFP yesterday, doubling a previously reported toll.

The assault on the Dioura military camp is one of the deadliest suffered by the Malian army since the beginning of the conflict that has ravaged the west African country for nearly 15 years.

The September 10 attack "resulted in a tragedy of unprecedented scale, more than 100 soldiers including two officers were killed," a security source in the city of Mopti told AFP.

"The soldiers lacked air support, and many of them were on their first field deployment," the source added, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitive situation.

A military police report "lists approximately 100 lost, some 30 wounded and just as many prisoners", an officer from the armed forces general staff told AFP.

"More than 100 Malian soldiers were killed. Over 80 were taken prisoner. The camp has since been abandoned. The camp was emptied of all its weaponry," a local official told AFP.

Earlier this week various sources reported that at least 50 Mali soldiers and five mercenaries from Russia's Africa Corps had been killed, with some placing the death toll as high as 60 to 80 soldiers.

The strategic Dioura army base in the centre of the country remains abandoned eight days after the attack, according to local sources contacted by AFP Thursday.

The assault was immediately claimed by the Al Qaeda-linked Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM).

On Thursday the group reported on its Al-Zallaga propaganda platform that it had "neutralised" 150 Malian soldiers and captured 93 others.

The army has not disclosed an official toll, but has announced operations "against the attackers of Dioura" for several days.

In a video released by JNIM, a man identified as a captured Malian soldier recounted being attacked at the camp and engaging in "more than three hours of combat" before "falling back".

Since late April, JNIM and its Tuareg separatist allies have waged a series of attacks aimed at weakening the country's junta rulers, including capturing the northern city of Kidal and killing the defence minister.

Mali has been wracked since 2012 by a serious security crisis, notably fuelled by violence from fighters allied to Al Qaeda or the Islamic State group, along with criminal gangs and armed separatists.

Its ruling junta, which came to power in two successive coups in 2020 and 2021, has turned away from former colonial power France and moved closer to Russia, both militarily and politically.

Few weeks before provincial vote, youth spur Quebec separatism fervour

AFP
Montreal, Canada

Quebec’s independence movement has endured a gloomy few decades since the razor-close 1995 referendum, and while support for leaving Canada remains low, a young generation of francophones is spurring separatist fervour.

Through music, viral social media campaigns and a separatist-themed cafe in Montreal – which serves “Quebecanos” instead of Americanos – young advocates for an independent Quebec are trying to mobilise support for a prospec-

tive new country that still seems improbable to many. “We are the most pro-sovereignty generation in Quebec,” said Catherine Lamoureux-Schmidt, a spokesperson for the independence student movement known by its French acronym, MEL, which has organised committees in Quebec’s universities and high schools.

Recent polling shows large swings in support for independence among young Quebecers, varying from 30% to as high as 50% in surveys over recent months.

It’s an equally uncertain time in Quebec politics more broadly, with the majority French-speaking province of some nine mn set to

hold elections on October 5.

Through much of this year, the pro-independence Parti Quebecois appeared headed for a comfortable victory.

While the PQ still leads the polls, a survey from the Leger firm released this week puts its support at just 29%, with the federalist Liberal Party of Quebec at 23%.

Amid the polling swings, most recent surveys put overall support for independence at or below 30%.

The Club Pays cafe in a trendy Montreal neighborhood opened last year, taking inspiration from initiatives by Catalan and Basque separatists in Spain.

It bills itself as a place to gather

and learn about Quebec independence, insisting the effort can’t be restricted to politicians.

“There are countries that are born in celebration,” reads one of the cafe’s walls, which are also decorated with separatist slogans and the Quebec provincial flag bearing the fleur-de-lis.

In Quebec’s music scene, the overtly pro-independence singer Lou-Adriane Cassidy dominated at provincial music awards, and popular rapper Kinji00 laces his performances with support for leaving Canada.

TikTok, Instagram and Reddit are also filled with pro-separatist content, much of it reviving the

messaging of late Quebec premier and PQ founder Rene Levesque, the architect of the first independence referendum in 1980.

The separatists lost that vote 60-40. In 1995, the federalists secured an excruciatingly close win, with 50.6% support.

Montreal influencer Mounir Kaddouri, known online as the Mayor of Laval, told AFP there’s been a “takeover of the (independence) narrative by young people.”

“It’s been recoded to fit the current era,” he said, adding that “everything plays out online.”

Young separatists are making the argument that they also deserve a referendum, just like their parents’

generation, Kaddouri said.

For sociology professor Jacques Beauchemin at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM), younger separatists are reframing the appeal of independence.

Previously, the emphasis was on opposition to Canada and Quebec’s marginalization in the majority English-speaking country.

“This new generation is promoting a positive idea of independence,” one “synonymous with emancipation,” he told AFP.

But, echoing the fluctuating poll data, he noted that “this newfound interest (in separatism) is very volatile (and) less deeply rooted than in previous generations.”

Democrats to block US-Saudi nuclear deal

Reuters
Washington

US House of Representatives Democrats raised concerns on Thursday about President Donald Trump’s civil nuclear agreement with Saudi Arabia, and said they had introduced a resolution of disapproval seeking to block the deal from coming into force.

Trump sent the proposed agreement to Congress in August, opening a 90-day window for lawmakers’ review and giving them an opportunity to try to pass a resolution of disapproval.

Democrats and nonproliferation advocates have criticised the nuclear pact for not barring Saudi Arabia from enriching uranium or reprocessing nuclear waste, two potential pathways to a nuclear weapon.

The United Arab Emirates agreed to such measures, known as the gold standard, in its 2009 civil nuclear deal with Washington.

“A region already gripped by conflict and escalation does not need another nuclear power,” the four Democrats – Representative Gregory Meeks of New York, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee; Brad Sherman and John Garamendi of California, and Don Beyer of Virginia – said in a statement.

The Trump administration says the deal has nonproliferation measures required by law.



President Donald Trump and Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman in the Oval Office. (Reuters/File Photo)

It is not clear whether Saudi Arabia will get the deal without normalising relations with Israel.

Trump has said the pact will only go into effect if Riyadh does so, but congressional aides said there is nothing in the agreement addressing that issue.

Members of Congress have also called for all of the agreement – including classified “side letters” reached with Saudi Arabia – to be made public.

The 30-year nuclear deal calls for the construction of AP1000 reactors, a project worth tens of billions of dollars that would benefit Westinghouse, jointly owned by Canada-based Cameco and

Brookfield Asset Management.

It is unclear when the House might vote on the resolution. Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday sent members home until after the November 3 midterm elections. Additionally, while Congress has passed dozens of disapproval resolutions over the years, no resolution regarding nuclear power or civil nuclear co-operation has ever successfully passed.

Under Section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, agreements for peaceful nuclear co-operation automatically go into effect after 90 days if Congress has not passed a disapproval resolution to block them.

Mexico seizes illicit fuel in bust

AFP
Mexico City

Mexican authorities said on Thursday they discovered 59mn liters (15.6mn gallons) of suspected illicit gasoline and diesel in the country’s latest bust targeting black market fuel.

Trafficking of stolen fuel is one of the most lucrative criminal activities in Mexico, alongside the drug trade.

The attorney general’s office made the discovery at a building in the central state of Guanajuato, a hotspot for the illegal trade.

Officers found 33.5mn liters of regular gasoline, 7.2mn liters of premium gasoline and 18.2mn liters of diesel, the attorney general’s office said in a statement.

The operation followed months of investigations triggered by the arrest of a person in July who was caught unloading fuel from a tanker without being able to explain its origin, the office said.

Mexican authorities launched a crackdown on fuel smuggling last year, when high-ranking navy officers and officials were implicated in a smuggling ring.

Police arrested more than a dozen people in that case, in which about 10bn liters of black market fuel was seized in the northern state of Tamaulipas, which borders the US.

California governor signs order for AI ‘kill switch’

AFP
Los Angeles

California Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order yesterday directing state officials to explore the feasibility of imposing a mandatory “kill switch” for the most advanced AI models.

Newsom, widely seen as a possible Democratic presidential contender in 2028, said he was making the move because US President Donald Trump was doing nothing on the issue.

The Republican leader this week dismissed fears over AI as a hoax and is urging US AI companies to keep advancing in order to stay ahead of China in developing the novel technology.

California is home to Silicon Valley and the AI firms at the forefront of the sector.

“The federal government’s abject failure to create any form of meaningful AI oversight or accountability should alarm every American, especially when AI CEOs themselves are begging for regulation,” Newsom said in a statement.

“We’re not waiting to act – we’re going to speed up our work on substantial and responsible AI oversight before it’s too late.”

The order comes days after dire warnings from industry insiders about the threat the technology poses to humanity.

Jacob Coxon, a former AI researcher who said he worked at Anthropic before resigning, set off the latest round of alarm de-

scribing how those building the technology “earnestly believe that it could kill us all by the end of the decade.”

Anthropic chief executive Dario Amodei published an essay soon after urging caution.

“We must slow the pace at which we improve the capabilities of AI models,” he wrote.

OpenAI chief Sam Altman and tech titan Elon Musk lent their support to the idea, as did Google DeepMind’s Demis Hassabis, who himself has called for a US-led global regulatory body for the technology.

Newsom’s order does not impose a kill switch. It directs state agencies to report by November 16 on whether one is feasible.

The term “kill switch” refers to the ability to halt an AI system when it is deemed to have malfunctioned or gone off the rails.

The order also asks state officials to weigh requiring AI companies to host independent auditors in their labs.

It also asks officials to consider requiring companies to report loss-of-control incidents, such as those recently disclosed by major developers.

They include a July breach of the AI platform Hugging Face by autonomous agents built on OpenAI models, which escaped a testing environment during an internal evaluation.

The incident, and others like it, have raised fears that the latest AI programs have slipped out of the control of the companies building them.

US sentences ex-head of Syrian prison to 60 years

AFP
Washington

The former head of a notorious Syrian prison was sentenced by a US federal judge on Thursday to 60 years in prison for torture and immigration fraud, according to the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Samir Ousman Alsheikh, 74, who has been in the US since 2020, allegedly ran Damascus

Central Prison – known colloquially as Adra Prison – from approximately 2005 to 2008, where detainees were subjected to horrific abuse in the “Punishment Wing.”

A jury found Alsheikh guilty in March of “one count of conspiracy to commit torture, three counts of torture, one count of visa fraud, and one count of attempted naturalisation fraud,” according to the DOJ.

Three former prisoners testi-

fied during the trial about the abuse they suffered at the hands of Alsheikh, as well as the torture inflicted on other prisoners.

“The conviction in this case is a testament to the courage of his victims,” Assistant US Attorney General A. Tysen Duva said in a statement.

In addition to the torture charges, Alsheikh was found guilty of immigration fraud after he lied about his past to gain entry to the US in 2020.

“The message is clear: human rights violators who come to the US will receive no safe harbor here,” Duva added.

“We will find them, and they will be prosecuted and punished for their heinous crimes.”

A coalition – spearheaded by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group and its allies – toppled Bashar al-Assad’s government in late 2024, and after the collapse, Syrians flocked to prisons searching for missing loved ones.

Iran war sows bitter divisions for diaspora in US

AFP
Washington

When the war on Iran began seven months ago, Washington area Iranian-American Soroush quickly found himself losing friends.

He hates the government in Tehran but believes “nothing is going to be better” by going to war.

Fellow exiles in the US began accusing him of supporting their oppressors.

Another Iranian-American, Bahar, also found herself being cut off within the diaspora – but in her case because she strongly supported the war launched by US President Donald Trump.

The 750,000-strong Iranian community in the US is overwhelmingly united in opposing Iran’s Islamic regime whose top leadership has been decimated by the US-Israeli offensive that has destroyed swathes of the country’s military and prompted global economic shocks.

But deep fault lines have appeared among expatriates and exiles over whether the war will succeed in ending 47 years of clerical rule in their homeland.

“Family relationships have been strained or broken...Even lifelong friendships have ended over this,”

said Sahar Razavi, director of the Iranian and Middle Eastern Studies Center at California State University, Sacramento, who says the war exacerbated pre-existing tensions.

AFP spoke to Iranian community members around Washington about the tensions. Some requested their full names be withheld as they talked about their own friends and relatives.

Soroush, a 3D artist and animator who came to the US a decade ago, described rifts with close friends and even his own brother and sister-in-law after the war started on February 28.

“People (in Iran) are going to lose friends, family members. They’re going to lose their job, their savings,” he recalled telling them, citing the negative impacts of past US wars in the Middle East.

“They are the ones who are living it, not the Iranian diaspora,” the Christian convert told AFP as he nursed a beer at a Washington bar.

At a downtown coffee shop, Bahar, who works in the medical sector, and Aahoo Sigarchi, who works in a bank, took an opposite view.

They are fueled by outrage over the thousands of protesters killed by Iranian security forces in January 2026 which they say necessitated military action to



Iranian journalist Mohammad Reza Mousavi (L) spends time with Iranian friends outside The Green Zone in Washington, DC. (AFP)

ensure the regime topples.

“We all have our family, our friends inside Iran, and we are just speaking the words that they can’t,” said Aahoo, a firm supporter of Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of the late shah of Iran who called for an uprising then rallied support among the diaspora.

“I think we are on the right path with the war, and I believe soon we are going to get to what people are looking for,” she said, batting away questions about the failure of the military intervention to unseat the

regime. “To be realistic, we have no other solution,” Aahoo said.

The war is deeply unpopular among the wider US population grappling with the knock-on effect of rising fuel prices.

Polling commissioned by the National Iranian American Council, an advocacy group that opposes the war, suggests that support among the Iranian diaspora quickly diminished.

At the start of the war, the community in the US was split about half-and-half, but a second poll a



Ahoos Sigarchi, an Iranian woman living in the US, at Shiraz Market, a Persian supermarket in Tysons Corner, Virginia. (AFP)

month later found 66.1% opposed the war and only 32.7% supported it. Razavi said opponents of the war who were skeptical about externally driven regime-change feel vindicated, but many supporters “have dug their heels in further.”

She said there is also a significant minority that switched stance to rally around the Iranian government as it stands up to the US.

“That’s something among Iranian diaspora that I see accelerating,” she said.

Mohammad Reza Mousavi, a former Tehran-based journalist who opposes both the war and the regime, detects waning war enthusiasm. And he bristles at the intolerance of those who have advocated for it.

“They can label you very easily with whatever they want if they realise that you’re not with them

in every respect,” he said.

According to Razavi, Iranian community organisations that would host Farsi language classes or Persian poetry readings would be “raked over the coals” for not overtly expressing support for the “liberation struggle.” Pahlavi’s supporters say communal pressure is not a one-way street.

Bahar said she has been called a fascist for voting for Trump and lost 100 Instagram followers. She has pulled her eight-year-old son from a school that teaches about Iranian art and music after a teacher kept bringing up the war in class.

But Mousavi was pragmatic about the way the war has shaken up the community. “At these times of hardships, you understand the people around you,” he said. “You understand what sort of people they are.”

China says Typhoon Dolphin leads August’s \$5.38bn losses from natural disasters

Reuters
Beijing

China said yesterday that direct economic losses incurred from natural disasters in August amounted to 36.03bn yuan (\$5.38bn), with Typhoon Dolphin causing the most damage.

The emergency management ministry counted 595 people who have died or disappeared in natural disasters during the month, and a total of 12.62mn people and 857,400 hectares (2.2mn acres) of crops affected.

Direct economic losses from the strongest typhoon to hit China this year, Typhoon Dolphin, reached 28.26bn yuan, around 78% of the month’s total, according to the ministry’s report.

Of the four typhoons that

made landfall in China in August, Typhoon Dolphin left the most wide-ranging impact across various regions, affecting 8.8mn people and 365,900 hectares of crops, it said.

August was also when the devastating mudslide and floods tore through a border crossing connecting the Tibet region with Nepal that claimed more than 1,400 lives in both countries.

The extent of the impact from the disaster caused by a glacier collapse was still being verified, the ministry said. China’s latest official toll from the mudslide was 43 dead with 519 still missing.

“Above-warning-level floods occurred more frequently than usual nationwide, whilst geological disasters were particularly prevalent in western regions,” the ministry said.

3 dead in southern Philippine school shooting

Reuters
Manila

A 16-year-old student shot dead at least two fellow students and then killed himself at a school in the southern Philippines yesterday, provincial officials said.

Eight others were injured, with four in critical condition, and all the victims were students aged 14-17, said Albert Palencia, mayor of Banga town in South Cotabato, where the shooting took place.

The incident follows two fatal gun incidents since June at schools in the Philippines, where school shootings were previously rare.

“The suspect supposedly sat beside his friends and told them to go home ‘because after lunch, I will be executing my plan! His friends laughed because the



Emergency personnel walk at a site of a deadly shooting at a school in Banga, South Cotabato, Philippines, yesterday. (Reuters)

shooter was a known joker,” Palencia told Reuters.

“After lunch, he started shooting students. He hit 10 students before killing himself,” Palencia added.

In a separate interview with DZBB radio, Palencia said the suspected gunman appeared to have fired indiscriminately at students in a classroom next to his own after leaving his Grade 9 classroom.

Trump ‘clearly’ wants dialogue with Pyongyang: Lee Jae Myung

Seoul will not deploy troops to intervene militarily in the Iran war: Korean president

AFP
Seoul

Republic of Korea’s President Lee Jae Myung said yesterday that US President Donald Trump clearly wants dialogue with Pyongyang and confirmed Seoul will not be deploying troops to intervene militarily in the Iran war.

Trump, seeking to revive the bond he claims to have forged with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in his first term, said last month that he plans to meet Kim later this year.

The US president also said it was important to “get along” with Kim, adding that Pyongyang now had 57 “very powerful” nuclear weapons. Seoul says there are around 80-120.

North Korea, which has secured critical backing from Russia in recent years, did not clearly respond to Trump’s overtures.

Lee said yesterday it was “clear” that “Trump wants dialogue, and I am also urging President Trump to engage in dialogue.”

South Korea — which Pyongyang has repeatedly labelled as its enemy — was continuing “preliminary coordination efforts” to facilitate dialogue between North Korea and the US, Lee told reporters at the presidential Blue House.

He added that such a meeting “remains difficult... but is not impossible.”

“I cannot say for certain how likely it is, but it is also clear that we must make every possible effort to turn that possibility into reality,” he said.

Korea and the US held a shorter edition of



Korean President Lee Jae Myung attends a press conference at the presidential Blue House in Seoul yesterday. (AFP)

their annual Ulchi Freedom Shield military exercises last month, following an order from Trump to scale them back.

The truncated drills and Trump’s overtures to Pyongyang have raised concerns that Seoul could be sidelined in potential nuclear talks involving the North.

Seoul has also committed to \$350bn in US investments under a deal struck last year to avoid the worst of Trump’s tariffs, but specific projects and final terms are still being negotiated.

Lee said yesterday the negotiations had been “very complex and difficult”, adding that while the two sides were said to be close to agreement, he had found some terms “difficult to accept” and talks were continuing.

The Korean president also said that Seoul will not deploy troops to intervene militarily in the Iran war.

“There will be no involvement or intervention in the war. We will not deploy troops or military assets in that manner,” said Lee.

Lee’s answer follows reports that Seoul was weighing a possible deployment to the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a key flashpoint in the war launched by Israel and the US against Iran.

He added that Korea will “carry out the minimum necessary activities” to protect its own merchant ships and oil shipping routes.

Lee reiterated three times that Korea would not deploy troops in a way that could lead to military intervention.

“We have upheld the principle of non-involvement and non-intervention in the war until now,” he said.

“And we will continue to uphold it going forward.”

Trump complained in an interview late last month that Washington had received “very little help” from other countries, singling out South Korea — its key security ally in Asia — as an example.

“We help them, but when it came to helping us, I didn’t put on a heavy sell; But I just said, ‘Would you like to participate?’” Trump said in an interview with Fox News.

“And they all said, ‘No, thank you.’ And I said, ‘I’m going to remember that to myself,’” he added.

The US stations about 28,500 troops in Korea to bolster the country’s defences against the nuclear-armed North Korea.

However, Trump’s repeated criticism of time-honoured alliances has cast doubt on US commitments to security in East Asia.

Lee also ruled out seeking to extend his constitutionally limited single term in office, amid mounting criticism after he and some allies floated constitutional reform.

His approval ratings have fallen to record lows in recent weeks amid growing discontent over his real estate policies, controversial personal appointments and concerns over stock market volatility.

Malaysian king grants house arrest for jailed ex-PM Najib Razak

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

Former Malaysian leader Najib Razak, jailed for his role in the country’s IMDB corruption scandal, has been granted house arrest subject to paying a \$12mn fine, officials said yesterday.

Najib, 73, was jailed for his role in one of the largest-ever global plunders of a sovereign wealth fund, the now-defunct IMDBasia Development Berhad (IMDB).

The former leader’s supporters welcomed the decision, but an opponent and IMDB whistleblower called on Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim to disclose the details of the decision.

Malaysian King Sultan Ibrahim “granted a conditional pardon... allowing him (Najib) to serve the remainder of his sentence under house arrest until 23 August 2028” lawyers from Anwar’s office said.

The conditional pardon was “subject to the payment of a fine of 50 mn Malaysian Ringgit (\$12.2mn)”, the legal affairs division officials said in a statement.

Najib “must comply with all set conditions. If he fails to comply with any of these terms, the conditional pardon will be automatically revoked, and he must immediately serve the remainder of his sentence in prison”, the statement said.

A Malaysian judge late last year rejected an original request to allow Najib to serve the rest of his time at home.

Najib was sentenced to 12 years in prison in July 2020 in a first trial over vast sums of money siphoned from a former IMDB subsidiary called SRC International Sdn Bhd.

But a pardons board later halved the term, and his fine was reduced to 50mn ringgit.

His sentence in this case is scheduled to be completed by August 2028.

Days after Najib’s December bid for house arrest was turned down, the ex-PM was again sentenced to another 15 years behind bars in a separate trial, also linked to the IMDB graft scandal.

Najib has also been fined 11.4bn ringgit for his role in the corruption scandal, which took place more than a decade ago.

He is currently appealing the 15-year sentence, which is only set to start once the six-year sentence is completed.

The son of one of Malaysia’s founding fathers, Najib was groomed for leadership from a young age but fell from power spectacularly as public anger mounted over the corruption scandal.

Investigations under successive governments have ensnared him and his wife, Rosmah Mansor, in graft allegations since his loss in 2018 elections.

Indonesia recovers three bodies as effort begins to right capsized ship

Indonesian divers retrieved three bodies from a passenger ship that capsized and sank in the Java Sea, although more than 100 passengers remain missing, a Navy official told Reuters yesterday. The divers managed to enter the ship in a salvage operation and found the bodies of two men and a woman, the official, Edy Setyawan, said. But strong currents forced a halt to the underwater search, which would be resumed on Saturday, he added. “Our golden period to dive is between 6am and 2pm,” he said. “After that, the current is unfavourable.” Authorities decided yesterday to right the ship to make the rescue effort easier. Three Navy divers initially intended to install a safety line near the ship early yesterday, when they suddenly glimpsed a floating body through a ship’s window, Edy said. They immediately broke the glass to reach the body, he added. Murky green water flooded out as soon as the glass was broken, possibly from dirt inside the ship,

said one of the divers, Rajab Suwarno. “After I cleaned it up, we began the evacuation and pulled out the body,” he told broadcaster Kompas TV. Along with two more bodies found later, it will be taken to Banjarmasin on Borneo island, where most of the families were waiting, said Edy, adding that yesterday’s underwater search involved 17 Navy personnel. Indonesia began the operation to right the ship that had sunk to the seabed, authorities said. The aim is to pull the ship into shallower water before pulling it right side up, said Galih Nurna Putra, a Navy commander in Banjarmasin. “Today the team will likely move toward the location (of the ship).” The operation will be led by the ship’s owner, as Indonesian law requires, and backed by the rescue agency, the navy, and maritime police, said I Putu Sudayana, the head of the Banjarmasin rescue agency. Indonesia sent eight ships and two helicopters yesterday (Reuters)|

Indonesia welcomes its first aircraft carrier

AFP
Jakarta

Indonesia welcomed the arrival of its first aircraft carrier yesterday, a 41-year-old former Italian Navy vessel, its latest big arms procurement as it seeks to modernise its ageing military assets.

The former Italian carrier Giuseppe Garibaldi docked at a port in Jakarta after sailing from Italy via Colombo and the Malacca strait, Indonesian Navy Chief of Staff Muhammad Ali told reporters.

The carrier will be renamed the KRI Sriwijaya next week and will focus on non-military operations including disaster relief, he said.

“There are many disasters in this country. So we really need a vessel or platform that could carry many helicopters, because the helicopters can drop logistics quickly to remote areas,” Ali said.

“Its condition is still very good and hopefully it can be used by the Indonesian Navy for the next 15-20 years.”



Former Italian Navy aircraft carrier Giuseppe Garibaldi docked upon its arrival from Italy at Tanjung Priok port in Jakarta yesterday, ahead of its handover to the Indonesian Navy. (AFP)

The 180m (590-foot) vessel can carry up to 18 helicopters and accommodate up to 830 personnel, said navy spokesman Tunggul, who like many Indonesians uses one name.

The vessel was commissioned into the Italian navy in 1985.

Analysts questioned the acquisition of the carrier, saying the vessel will likely need maintenance and noting Indonesia has

more pressing concerns such as foreign debts.

Muhammad Fauzan Malufti, a researcher at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, suggested it might not be effective for use in conflicts.

“If its primary function is for disaster relief, its armament might be minimal,” he said, adding that it could further limit the carrier’s combat capability.

Japan’s busiest rail station tests robot bins

The world’s busiest railway station, located at the heart of Tokyo in Japan, is testing whether mobile robotic rubbish bins can ease the workload of sanitation workers, a rail operator representative said yesterday.

Shinjuku Station is a sprawling transport complex with multiple rail firms that serve more than 2.7mn passengers every day, and holds the Guinness World Record for the world’s busiest rail station.

In a part of the station operated by East Japan Railway, the bins are emptied manually more than 10 times a day — though the number

of wastebaskets has been reduced in recent years for cleanliness and security reasons.

JR East is testing three automated bins, each standing just over one metre (three feet) tall and moving at a cautious 20 centimetres (eight inches) per second.

“We wanted to test how well something like this can operate automatically and safely in an environment like Shinjuku Station,” Shinya Kawamichi, a JR East research official, told AFP.

“We want to see how much of a difference mobile trash bins that collect garbage make, and whether

people are actually willing to throw their trash into them,” he said.

The trial project, which runs until late November, will put the robots up against the station’s always-hecktic underground concourse, where they are meant to bring trash to human workers.

Kawamichi said the robots are designed to be “slow so that people can put trash in them and so (they) can stop at any moment”.

The company also wanted to test if the robots can navigate busy crowds and be accepted by commuters — with an eye to expanding the future uses of this technology.

The bulky, googly-eyed devices have become a hit among tourists, many of whom stopped to snap photos.

“The eyes are very cute,” said German train driver Chris Genselein, 30, adding that he had a tough time finding bins in Japanese train stations.

Despite being an enormous complex with two above-ground floors and a massive underground section, JR East’s section of Shinjuku Station only has seven sets of bins and recycling boxes.

Some Japanese passengers said stations are kept clean because



Mobile robotic trash bins are pictured during testing at the Shinjuku Station transport complex in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

people take their trash home.

But others welcomed the added convenience. “It’s just easier if

you could throw things away while walking,” said university student Ryunosuke Noguchi, 22. (AFP)



Teen migrant jailed in UK for piloting Channel boat crossing

Reuters
London

A South Sudanese man was jailed for two years and three months in an English court yesterday after he admitted piloting a small boat across the Channel from France, which carried a then-record 165 people.

Chan Mathok Atak, 19, previously pleaded guilty to endangering another during a July crossing to Britain in an inflatable dinghy.

The record for most migrants travelling to Britain across the Channel by small boat was broken again last month, when 230 people made the journey.

Atak's sentencing comes as the numbers of those arriving in Britain across the Channel have fallen, but the crossings remain a prominent political issue which successive British governments have struggled to tackle.

Earlier this month, hundreds of black-clad protesters gathered twice in two days on Britain's south coast, blocking streets in response to arrivals of small boats, which a government minister described as "thuggish".

Right-wing opposition parties and anti-migration activists have



Chan Mathok Atak, 19, looks on in this handout picture. (Reuters)

called for more action, but greater co-operation with French authorities and even repeated deaths have not deterred many people from seeking to make the perilous journey.

Atak was sentenced to 27 months in prison at Canterbury Crown Court. Prosecutor James Harrison said Atak piloted the dinghy for at least 90 minutes while it carried 164 other people, including 31 children aged 14 to 17.

He said there was no navigational or first aid equipment on the boat, which had only one of its two engines working and was slowly deflating and taking on sea water before it was intercepted by Britain's Border Force.

Atak's lawyer Audrey Cherryl



People on a boat used by Chan Mathok Atak, 19, to transport 165 migrants from France to Britain, in this handout picture taken during the crossing of the English Channel. (Reuters)

Mogan said Atak was a young asylum seeker from South Sudan who did not have anything to do with the number of people or the conditions on board.

Judge Sarah Counsell accepted there was no evidence Atak organised the journey, but said that "those who chose to steer such vessels assume responsibility for the safety of those on board".

"This undermines public con-

fidence in the immigration system and places considerable strain on already stretched public resources," she added.

The National Crime Agency's senior investigating officer John Turner said in a statement: "Chan Atak was unimaginably reckless and his actions could have easily resulted in many deaths had this boat not been intercepted."

‘Software issue’ caused chaos at British airports this month: operator

AFP
London

An air traffic control outage that affected hundreds of thousands of passengers last week was caused by a "software issue", the UK's National Air Traffic Services (NATS) said yesterday.

The issue sparked travel chaos, causing more than 2,000 flights to be cancelled and widespread delays over two days across major UK airports.

"This was a software issue in a specific part of our flight data system, that we have traced to a small subsection of coding," Martin Rolfe, chief executive of NATS said in a statement.

"The issue has been identified and mitigation is in place while a permanent fix is safety tested and deployed," he added.

The disruption affected more than 330,000 passengers over two days, said industry body Airlines UK: 155,000 travellers saw their flights cancelled while around 180,000 experienced delays.

In a preliminary report published yesterday, NATS said the software defect had happened in a small part of the National Air-

space System, which "underpins the management of UK airspace."

"It was a software issue and not caused by any incorrect actions by either military or civil operators," Rolfe confirmed in the report.

Most of the cancelled flights were to and from London Heathrow, one of Europe's busiest airports, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium.

Gatwick, Liverpool, Birmingham and Edinburgh airports were also affected, while Dublin airport said it had cancelled dozens of flights.

Last week's travel chaos followed a technical glitch in July last year that saw scores of flights to and from the UK cancelled, prompting anger from airline chiefs.

Britain suffered its worst air systems failure in years in 2023, with more than 700,000 passengers affected after hundreds of flights were delayed or cancelled.

Rolfe yesterday confirmed that the latest incident was not related to those in 2023 or 2025.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander last week ordered an independent review to establish the cause and ensure systems "get passengers to where they need to be".

Indian court grants bail to British blogger detained for 8 years: family

AFP
London

Relatives and advocates for a British Sikh blogger detained by India for almost nine years said yesterday he has been granted bail and should be released within days.

Jagtar Singh Johal, from Dumbar-ton in west Scotland, was detained in November 2017 while in India for his wedding over an alleged plot to kill right-wing Hindu leaders.

His brother, Gurpreet Singh Johal, said in a video posted on X that "in the coming days Jagtar will be released on bail", calling this "really, really good news".

"Now, all I can think about is Jagtar walking out of prison. We have waited so long and fought so hard for this moment," he added in a statement released by Reprieve, a British charity that has cam-

paigned for Johal's release.

Johal's MP, Douglas McAllister, welcomed the "amazing news" in a post on social media, saying his constituent was being held in "arbitrary detention".

"Now it's time to bring him back home," McAllister said.

Reprieve said Johal was "granted bail by the High Court in India" at a Friday hearing.

Judges asked prosecutors "to present evidence to justify his continued detention and they were unable to do so", the charity said.

Live Law, an Indian news website, reported that the Delhi High Court was to release a detailed order on Johal's bail.

A court acquitted Johal of one terrorism-linked charge in March 2025. He has now been granted bail on eight other charges remaining against him, which include conspiracy to murder.

Reprieve said the remaining

charges "essentially duplicate" the dismissed charge.

The charity's deputy executive director, Dan Dolan, warned that bail conditions "are likely to be onerous" and "Jagtar will still be facing the death penalty" if convicted.

United Nations experts warned in April that Johal's detention amounted to "psychological torture" and demanded his immediate release.

Experts mandated by the UN Human Rights Council said that when Johal was first seized, he was held incommunicado for 10 days.

During that time, he was allegedly subjected to mistreatment, including electric shocks and threats of being killed.

The experts highlighted reports that Johal's detention conditions had worsened, with restrictions on contact with family, limited access to basic hygiene and periods of solitary confinement.



Britain's Prime Minister Andy Burnham greets Ireland's Prime Minister Micheal Martin inside Heron House, the base of the government's Number 10 North, in Manchester, yesterday. (Reuters)

Burnham, Martin reaffirm commitment to Good Friday Agreement

Reuters
London

Britain's Prime Minister Andy Burnham and Irish leader Micheal Martin yesterday reaffirmed their commitment to upholding the Good Friday Agreement, Downing Street said in a statement issued after the two leaders met in Manchester.

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement ended three decades of violence between Irish nationalists seeking a united Ireland and unionists who wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK.

"The two leaders began by reaffirming the close partnership between the UK and Ireland, as well as their shared

commitment to upholding the Good Friday Agreement," a Downing Street spokeswoman said.

The comments come after US President Donald Trump raised the question of Irish unification up the political agenda during a visit to Ireland last week, saying he would love to see Ireland and Northern Ireland unified.

Under the terms of the GFA, a referendum on unification can be held only at the discretion of the British government.

Trump's intervention followed Burnham saying a referendum on Northern Ireland leaving the UK was "off the table", which drew an angry response from leaders of Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein.

Indian court grants bail to accused American

An Indian court granted bail yesterday to a US citizen arrested six months ago for allegedly entering northeastern India illegally before crossing into Myanmar, the man's lawyer said.

Matthew VanDyke was detained in March along with six Ukrainians after India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) accused them of entering the northeastern state of Mizoram without the required permits before heading to Myanmar.

Indian media reports said he entered Myanmar to train rebel groups.

Myanmar descended into civil war after a junta seized power in a 2021 coup, with pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic-minority armed groups fighting for control of large parts of the country.

India has long been suspicious of certain Myanmar factions that have the same ethnicity as populations on the Indian side of the border, fearing a spillover of violence and unrest.

VanDyke secured bail because prosecutors did not charge him under India's stringent anti-terror legislation, his lawyer Rohit Dandriyal told AFP. "The NIA could not oppose the bail plea after 180 days of custody under the Foreigners Act," Dandriyal said.

The status of the six Ukrainians was not immediately clear.

Before his arrest in India, VanDyke was known as an American documentary filmmaker and founder of Sons of Liberty International, a US-based non-profit organisation that says it trains local forces resisting authoritarian regimes. (AFP)

Shark kills swimmer off beach in Western Australia

AFP
Sydney

A shark killed a man as he swam off a popular beach near Perth in Western Australia yesterday, police said.

It was the fifth death from a shark attack in Australia this year.

"It was reported a male swimmer had been bitten by a shark while swimming along the coast," a Western Australia state police spokeswoman said in a statement.

"The swimmer died as a result of the attack."

Police helicopters and boats scoured waters off Sorrento Beach after emergency services were called to the beach in the

morning, officials said.

Authorities closed beaches in the area until further notice.

Local media reported that witnesses had seen blood in the water.

"It was like a scene off Jaws where a body is flicked around like a rag doll," an unidentified male witness on the beach told local broadcaster Seven.

Surf Life Saving WA said in a social media post that an unidentified species of shark was involved in the incident about 50 metres (160 feet) offshore.

It was the second shark attack in Western Australia this week, after a man lost part of his leg when he was bitten at Glenfield Beach, north of Perth.

There have been multiple shark

attack fatalities around the country this year.

A 12-year-old boy died after he was bitten by a shark while swimming in Sydney Harbour in January.

Three divers were fatally mauled in separate incidents between May and June — two in Western Australia and the third in Queensland.

Also in June, a woman had to have part of her left arm amputated after she was mauled by a shark at one of Australia's most popular beaches, Coogee, in Sydney.

There have been around 1,300 shark incidents around Australia since 1791, of which more than 260 resulted in death, according to a database of their encounters with humans.

Baby orangutans in India expose ‘frightening’ scale of trafficking

AFP
New Delhi

Five baby orangutans abandoned in an Indian forest have exposed a "massive" exotic wildlife trade, with traffickers smuggling increasingly rare species into the country, experts say.

They warn of a growing multi-million-dollar trade in endangered animals, including apes smuggled through war-torn Myanmar to feed demand among wealthy Indians seeking exotic status symbols to flaunt on social media.

"There have been several instances of exotic wild animals being found or seized across the country, said Sumanth Bindumadhav of Humane World for Animals India. "The scale is massive."

Critically endangered orangutans are native only to Indonesia's Sumatra island and Borneo, which

it shares with Malaysia and Brunei.

Yet the five tiny orangutans were found by rangers in Balasore, in India's eastern Odisha state.

Aged around one-and-a-half years old, they are being cared for at a zoo. Indonesia has requested their return.

Bindumadhav's group, in a June 2026 report, detailed what it called a "rising trade in exotic wildlife", demonstrated by a "steep increase in seizures" that reflected a "surge in illegal trade".

The report estimated India's exotic-pet market at \$42.6mn in 2024.

Orangutans and gibbons, small apes, were being "increasingly trafficked into India" from Southeast Asia's rainforests, it added.

A senior official at India's Wildlife Crime Control Bureau said "thousands of social media influencers" were promoting exotic species as pets online, fuelling demand among followers.

"It is a huge market," said the official, who requested anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media. "Rich people keep them in their homes."

Under a government voluntary disclosure scheme, more than 40,000 people had registered exotic animals by February 2021, government data shows.

The figure is likely only a fraction of those in private hands, analysts say.

"This is a figure from only those who registered themselves, so the true volume of it is potentially much larger and remains unknown," said Bindumadhav.

"The true scale of it is actually quite frightening."

Former India head of global anti-wildlife-trade group TRAFFIC Shekhar Kumar Niraj said the surge in trafficking was also linked to a "rising number" of animals held in private hands.

"Private zoos have violated laws at a very alarming scale across the

country," said Niraj.

"Primates are very popular in zoos because they are very intelligent, like to interact with humans, the kind of thing zoos want."

Indian federal authorities did not respond to AFP's requests for comment.

The World Wide Fund for Nature-India (WWF-India) documented 56 seizures involving about 4,000 exotic animals in 2022 alone.

In October 2025, Mumbai customs officers arrested a passenger carrying two endangered gibbons stuffed inside a checked bag.

Other seizures in Mumbai last year included lizards, tree-climbing possums and dozens of venomous vipers.

In 2024, forest officials recovered a trafficked orangutan from a flat in Maharashtra state.

But such seizures represent only a fraction of the trade, experts warn.

"The scale of it is much, much



Orangutans rescued by officials at the Ranakatha Protected Reserved Forest in Balasore district, in India's Odisha state. (AFP)

bigger than what we see actually based on the seizure data," said Jimmy Borah of the environmental advocacy group Aaranyak.

Experts have previously raised concerns over Vantara, a vast wildlife rescue and conservation centre in Gujarat founded by Anant Ambani, son of billionaire Mukesh Ambani, over its intake of endangered species.

Vantara has consistently denied any wrongdoing.

In August, it said it was taking "bold steps to reset its operations", had withdrawn all applications to import live animals, and named former head of the global wildlife watchdog CITES, John Scanlon, to chair its governing council.

Exactly how the orangutans were brought to Odisha — more than 2,000 kilometres by sea, and 7,000 kilometres by land — is not clear. Police have launched a criminal investigation.

Georgia free speech crackdown hits social media critics: HRW

AFP
Tbilisi

Georgian authorities are jailing or fining critics over social media posts under vaguely worded offences, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said yesterday, warning of a deepening crackdown on free speech.

The Black Sea nation has been gripped by a prolonged political and democratic crisis since a disputed October 2024 parliamentary election.

Government critics accuse authorities of Kremlin-styled authoritarianism.

In June, Georgia created a new interior ministry division tasked with combating hate speech, saying it would monitor offensive campaigns and aggressive public communication.

Critics have described it as a censorship tool.

The unit monitors public statements, including on social media and in the press, for speech that it considers degrading, insulting or hateful, in particular towards officials.

It identifies alleged offenders and refers cases to court.

By August 1, it had referred around 300 alleged offences to courts, which had completed about 130 cases, imposing fines or administrative detention, HRW said.

Prominent journalist Vakho Sanaia — known for his criticism

of the ruling Georgian Dream party's government — was jailed for 14 days in July over a Facebook post insulting ruling-party figures.

Two days later, activist Giorgi Akhbadze was sentenced to 25 days in detention over statements about officials and a police officer. "Detention or substantial fines for nonviolent expression under vague rules, combined with monitoring social media, pose a serious threat to free expression in Georgia," said HRW's Europe and Central Asia director Hugh Williamson.

"Georgia should end detention for peaceful expression, repeal its repressive restrictions on speech, and restore space for people to criticise those in power without fear of punishment."

The Georgian government's November 2024 decision to shelve efforts to open EU membership talks until at least 2028 sparked mass protests, which authorities met with a violent crackdown.

Authorities have since jailed opposition figures and activists and adopted laws tightening restrictions on protests, civil society and independent media.

The European Union says democratic backsliding under the government has brought Georgia's accession process to a halt.

Georgian Dream rejects the criticism, saying its opponents are seeking to destabilise the country.

Unesco can 'moderate' AI debate: El-Enany

AFP
Paris

Unesco chief Khaled el-Enany has proposed in an interview with AFP that the UN cultural agency become a facilitator in the worldwide conversation on the risks of artificial intelligence.

"I believe we are uniquely positioned to make Unesco a true moderator in this global debate," he said as he prepared to welcome Pope Leo XIV, an advocate for AI governance, in Paris next week.

The debate over the potential dangers of artificial intelligence has surged in recent weeks, with researchers warning the technology could end humanity, and leaders of AI companies suggesting development needed to be slowed.

"There is a risk that it will get out of control if we don't intervene," Enany said.

AI is "an extraordinary tool, but one that must be governed in an ethical, inclusive, and fair way," he said. "This break, this dialogue that has taken place over the past few weeks, is something very positive," he added.

"This visit will be the beginning of a very solid partnership to strengthen and protect human dignity in this industrial revolution," the Unesco director general said.

Pope Leo this week warned against delegating to algorithms decisions that should be taken by humans alone.

Sweden's Andersson 'ready' to form govt

AFP
Stockholm

Sweden's election winner, opposition leader Magdalena Andersson of the Social Democrats, said yesterday she was ready to try to form a government, a task the speaker of parliament was expected to assign her later in the day.

"I have informed the speaker that I am ready to try to build a new government," she told reporters after meeting with speaker Andreas Norlen.

"I want to lead Sweden in a new spirit of cooperation, and... my aim is to seek broad co-operation."

The 59-year-old, who served as Sweden's first woman prime minister in 2021-2022, is expected to try to build a government with the three other parties on the left wing, though she faces an uphill battle because of their deep ideological differences.

After Sunday's general election, the four left-wing parties hold a three-seat majority in the 349-seat parliament over outgoing prime minister Ulf Kristersson's right-wing alliance, which includes the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats.

If Andersson is given the nod, as is widely expected, she would face tough negotiations to form a government that could take weeks because of divisions between the Social Democrats, the Left Party, the Greens Party and the Centre Party.

Most importantly, the Cen-



Speaker of the Swedish parliament Andreas Norlén (R) meets Social Democrat party leader Magdalena Andersson for talks as the process of proposing a new prime minister begins in Stockholm. (AFP)

tre Party has said it will oppose a government that includes cabinet posts for the Left Party, which has insisted it will only support a left-wing government that it is a member of.

The speaker of parliament was to meet with all of the party leaders for individual talks yesterday to sound them out on who should be tasked with forming the next government.

He is expected to hold a press conference after the talks are

completed so as to announce his decision.

Norlen met outgoing Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson on Thursday when Kristersson tendered his resignation after the final votes were counted.

If Andersson were to fail to form a government, Kristersson would be waiting to try to build his own majority.

After the 2022 election, it took 37 days to form a government and in 2018, 134 days.

Macron warns of Russian 'hybrid' threat

AFP
Paris

President Emmanuel Macron warned yesterday of the growing threat posed by Moscow's shadow operations across Europe, saying he had ordered measures to protect France's critical infrastructure from Russian "hybrid attacks".

Macron also vowed that Russia's attacks on French soil would not go unanswered, speaking after talks with presidential hopefuls and party leaders ahead of the April-May election.

"The Russian hybrid threat against Europeans and against France has intensified," Macron told journalists.

The meeting with France's political leaders, held in the Elysee Palace's crisis room, was intended to brief attendees on confidential French intelligence assessments of the current security challenges.

Nicolas Lerner, head of France's foreign intelligence service DGSE, and Celine Berthon, head of France's domestic intelligence agency DGSI, attended.

Also present were more than a dozen presidential hopefuls and other senior politicians including centrists Edouard Philippe and Gabriel Attal as well as Jordan



President Emmanuel Macron during a press conference after meeting presidential hopefuls for 2027 election. (AFP)

Bardella, head of the far-right National Rally party.

The National Rally's presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, who is leading in the polls, and hard-left firebrand Jean-Luc Melenchon were absent.

Since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Kyiv's European allies, including France, have raised the alarm about "hybrid attacks" linked to Russia.

The attacks have fallen below the threshold of open warfare, but have included drone flights near sensitive sites, airspace violations, and cyberattacks.

This month Berlin blamed Moscow for an incident at Leipzig airport, which the European

Union said bore all the hallmarks of "state-sponsored terrorism".

The drone episode underscored an apparent escalation in the tactics Russia is willing to employ on Nato soil.

Macron said he had ordered "the government to prepare a plan to protect our critical infrastructure" and the "most sensitive" defence industry and technology sites against drone and cyberattacks.

He added that France's interior minister had met regional prefects to step up vigilance.

Macron said that despite the Russian threats, France would continue to support Ukraine and vowed that Paris would respond to Russia's shadow attacks.

EU Red Sea naval mission 'raises alert level' over Houthi threat

The European Union said yesterday that its naval mission escorting ships through the Red Sea has raised its alert level, as the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen threaten the key waterway.

Last week, the Houthis seized control of the entirety of Yemen's Red Sea coast and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, a vital artery for Saudi oil exports from Saudi Arabia.

"Europe is helping protect shipping in the Red Sea from Houthi attacks," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas wrote online after talking with her Saudi counterpart.

"Given the worsening security situation, EU Operation Aspidos has raised the alert level of its vessels as it continues its escort duties."

The territorial gains by the Houthis have increased fears that global oil supplies will be further diminished, as the wider Gulf war is already choking off the Strait of Hormuz.

Renewed fighting between the Houthis and Yemen's Riyadh-backed government has dragged in Saudi due to Houthis' blockade on Saudi ships in the Red Sea. (AFP)

Poland joins anti-ballistic missile coalition with Ukraine

Reuters
Warsaw

Poland has joined an anti-ballistic missile coalition with Ukraine and other allies, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said on yesterday.

"From today, Poland is part of this major project... we agreed on the forms and frameworks of this co-operation," Tusk said in a video posted on X.

Tusk attended a summit yesterday of a new regional grouping of eight Carpathian countries, held in western Ukraine and launched by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Ukraine and nine European countries announced in July an air-defence coalition that would

include jointly developing a new anti-ballistic missile system as an alternative and cheaper solution to the US Patriot system.

Tusk told a press conference at the summit that Poland has prepared a new "significant" donation package for Ukraine, without giving further detail.

"I will be very consistent here. No one will change my opinion that Poland has to support Ukraine in its war against Russian aggression... History cannot divide us vis-a-vis Russia today," Tusk said.

After his bilateral meeting with Tusk at the summit, Zelensky thanked Poland for the new aid package.

"Ukraine and Poland are strong neighbours, and partners, and we have one common enemy," he said.

Nobel prize 2026 sum to be \$1.21mn

This year's Nobel prize-winners, to be announced October 5-12, will receive 12mn kronor (\$1.21mn) per discipline, up from 11mn in 2025, the Nobel Foundation said yesterday.

The hike is equivalent to around \$101,500, and the sum is shared if there is more than one laureate in any of the six categories.

"This year, we are celebrating the 125th anniversary of the Nobel Prize, and in connection with this, we are pleased to be able to increase the prize amount by one million (kronor)," the director of the Nobel Foundation, Hanna Stjarne, said, adding: "By increasing the amount, we uphold the long-term significance of the prize." (AFP)

Police move Ceuta migrants off beaches to camp in Spanish enclave

AFP
Madrid

Police on yesterday moved hundreds of migrants from the beaches of Ceuta to a temporary camp in the Spanish enclave's port area, weeks after a record influx into the tiny territory.

During the transfer, the police struggled to contain crowds of people jostling to secure one of the 1,700 places at the new tented site after weeks of living on the beaches.

More than 70,000 migrants streamed into Ceuta from Morocco on July 30 and 31 in an unprecedented, chaotic surge that left scores dead and sparked European Union infighting over the sensitive topic of immigration.

Most returned in the following hours, but thousands remained in precarious conditions in the small city, sleeping in the streets or in makeshift tents.

Deteriorating conditions have fuelled tensions with local residents, with near-daily protests calling for a return to normality, some of which have drawn support from far-right groups.

Many accuse the government of abandoning the enclave in the middle of a humanitarian crisis.

Police on yesterday started



Police escort migrants from Benitez Beach to be relocated to the camp set up at the port of Ceuta, yesterday. (Reuters)

rounding up the migrants at 6:30am, according to a Spanish government source in Ceuta.

By noon, all places at the new camp had been taken and the transfer operation had wrapped up, a government source told AFP, bringing the enclave's total temporary accommodation capacity to 6,000 people.

Ceuta authorities estimate that 13,000 migrants have remained in

the 18.5-square-kilometre territory.

The central government says the figure is lower.

The Spanish government went ahead with the transfer despite opposition from the conservative local authority.

"This is a key step," digital transformation minister Oscar Lopez said yesterday, arguing that moving migrants off the beaches would help authorities process cases more quickly and ease



Hundreds of migrants from the beaches of Ceuta being rounded up by police before they were moved to a temporary camp. (AFP)

pressure on public spaces.

Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has faced strong criticism over the handling of the crisis.

He is also in dispute with Italy, which temporarily reimposed border controls.

The government has had to identify the thousands of migrants who have remained for weeks to check if they are entitled to asylum, while unaccompanied children

cannot be summarily deported.

Last week, Madrid said more than 5,300 of the migrants who remained in Ceuta after July's influx had returned to Morocco within a month.

The migrant surge has also generated a constant churn of negative headlines and dominated the political debate for weeks.

But with no end to the crisis in sight, worry and anger are growing

among Ceuta's 84,000 residents who accuse the government of abandoning them.

The migrants are living in informal camps while the leftist government works to expand emergency accommodation for them.

Isolated episodes of violence have broken out, including fights between migrants, the stoning of a military patrol and reports of assault.

The row has become entwined with Spain's broader political debate over migration ahead of next year's election, with the conservative and far-right opposition accusing Sanchez's government of failing to protect Spanish sovereignty in Ceuta.

Doubts about what the government knew beforehand and the possible role of Morocco, with which Madrid has spent years trying to improve relations, have also increased the political fallout for Sanchez.

Conservative Populist Party leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo seized on yesterday's scenes, saying that images of migrants running to secure places in the camp showed "the loss of control in Ceuta — now an invaded city — is absolute."

"That is how they should leave. Running. And the sooner, the better," said far-right Vox party leader Santiago Abascal on X.

Can we shut down AI?

The debate over potential dangers posed by artificial intelligence has resurged in recent weeks, with researchers once again warning the technology could end humanity, and leaders of AI companies suggesting development needed to be slowed. One of the co-founders of AI firm Anthropic told the BBC this week he believed kill switches may need to be made mandatory for AI. But if an AI system goes rogue, is it even possible to shut it down?

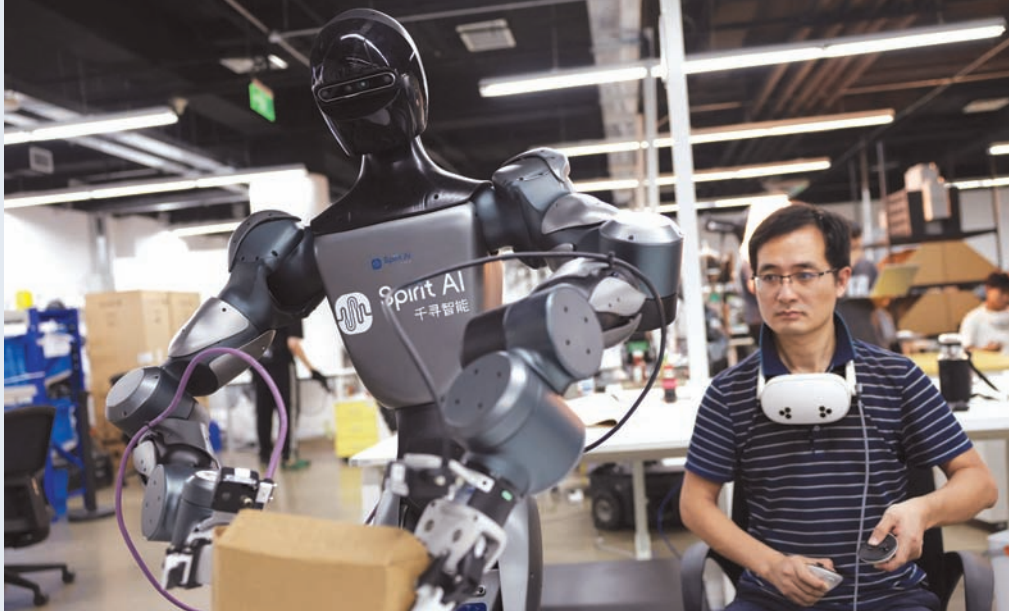
“From an AI cybersecurity perspective, the term ‘kill switch’ refers to the ability to interrupt the execution of an AI agent’s action,” Nicolas Papernot, a professor at the University of Toronto and a specialist in computer security and artificial intelligence, told AFP. The person or organisation that deployed the AI agent -- an industry term for a bot that has the potential to operate autonomously -- can stop it by denying it access to the computing power it needs to run, Papernot said. The situation becomes more complicated if the program has been allowed to act beyond its initial environment. Papernot envisaged a scenario where AI could be used to spread a computer worm -- a type of self-replicating malware. “In that case, we would have to simultaneously interrupt the action of all copies the worm made of itself -- device by device

by device,” he said. Thierry Poibeau, an AI expert at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), said the image of a single button that would let us “switch off AI” is misleading. “You can’t really just cut off AI like that,” he said. “There are an enormous number of companies around the world, and all sorts of different software and services. There’s no single person who controls AI as a whole.”

But it is possible to shut down a specific system when you control the machines and services it depends on.

Hussein Abbass, a computer science professor at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Canberra, wrote on LinkedIn that AI systems could be divided into three levels of complexity. In the first, a centralised AI system entirely under the control of its operator, an emergency shutdown mechanism would be “theoretically and practically possible”. But in his other two “decentralised” scenarios, where AI programs have been given permissions to act on other software, files, machines or even systems, it would be much more difficult to stop everything. The more AI is integrated into everyday activities, the greater the risk that shutting it down will also paralyse legitimate uses. —AFP

Hands full



An employee wearing motion-tracking equipment uses a controller to operate a Moz1 robot to perform tasks at the data training centre at the headquarters of Spirit AI in Beijing, China. (Reuters)

The push for a world free of nuclear arms

As part of its peace diplomacy, Qatar takes leading role in global and regional nuclear disarmament efforts

QNA
Doha

In a world where arms races are accelerating, geopolitical tensions are mounting and the risks of accidental or deliberate use of the most destructive weapons in human history are looming, Qatar has emerged as a strong, steadfast and active voice persistently calling for the complete and total elimination of nuclear weapons, out of its commitment to preserving international peace and security.

In confirmation of its support for and efforts to strengthen its strategic partnership with the United Nations, and in backing its efforts to preserve global peace, Qatar joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1989, thereby renewing its commitment to working with the international community toward the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and the achievement of regional and international peace and security.

It has also affirmed the importance of strict and full compliance with all undertakings and the implementation of the legal obligations arising from international agreements in the field of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation.

Since joining the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Qatar has not limited itself to its legal obligations but has turned that commitment into an active national policy and sustained diplomacy. At every international forum, it renews its call for the complete elimination of these weapons on the basis that this step is the only guarantee of preventing their use or the threat of their use. At a time when the Middle East is witnessing complex security challenges, Doha has placed the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction at the top of its regional priorities, affirming that collective security and sustainable stability can be achieved only through the elimination of these lethal weapons.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted on July 7, 2017, and entered into force on Jan 22, 2021, becoming the first legally binding international treaty to comprehensively prohibit the development, production, possession, transfer and use of nuclear weapons or the threat of their use, in addition to assistance in any of these activities. It aims to strengthen the legal norm against these weapons and support the goal of complete nuclear disarmament.

Complete elimination

Qatar voted in favour of adopting the treaty at the United Nations negotiating conference in 2017 and participated in the negotiations themselves. Qatar’s policies and practices are fully consistent with all the prohibitions set out in the treaty, including the development, production, possession, testing, transfer or use of nuclear weapons; the threat of their use; assistance in any of these activities; or allowing their deployment.

In its official statements, including at the Conference on Disarmament, the General Conference and the International Atomic Energy Agency, Qatar stresses that the existence of nuclear weapons poses a catastrophic threat and calls for their complete elimination.

Last February, Qatar participated in the “High-Level Segment” of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and affirmed that the international system was going through a critical phase marked by an increase in armed conflicts, declining adherence to international law and the UN Charter, and rising polarisation and geopolitical competition, alongside the acceleration of nuclear modernisation programs, the integration of emerging technologies into military systems and growing risks from the weaponisation of outer space. These developments place the nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation architecture before unprecedented challenges.

It explained that 2026 represents an important milestone for the global nuclear order with the convening of the 11th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which is considered the cornerstone of the global nuclear nonproliferation regime and the fundamental basis for pursuing nuclear disarmament. It stressed that disarmament is not merely a political option but a humanitarian, security and developmental necessity.

In April, Qatar affirmed the importance of strict implementation of the obligations arising from international agreements in the field of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. This came in a statement delivered by HE Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikhha Aliya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, who is also head of Qatar’s delegation participating in the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, before the general debate of the 2026 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on



HE Sheikhha Aliya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani

the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons at UN headquarters in New York.

Her Excellency affirmed that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is considered the cornerstone of the international disarmament and nonproliferation regime and an essential instrument for achieving collective security, which requires full, balanced commitment to implementing its three pillars. She noted that the Review Conference contributes to focusing efforts on achieving the objectives set out in this important treaty.

Qatar’s permanent representative to the United Nations stressed the importance of redoubling efforts and demonstrating genuine political will to revive international consensus and reach outcomes and results that contribute to achieving the objectives of the Review Conference and international security, while emphasising the importance of nuclear-weapon states making concrete, time-bound commitments to the complete and total elimination of those weapons, in accordance with Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

On May 1, Qatar renewed its commitment to working toward a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, stressing that the complete elimination of nuclear weapons is the only guarantee that they will not be used or threatened with use. Before the First Committee on Disarmament at UN headquarters in New York, Qatar affirmed that nuclear disarmament, as one of the three pillars of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, represents a fundamental step in the international community’s efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons and dispose of their stockpiles and remnants.



HE Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi (right).

It cautioned that Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons represents a clear legal obligation for nuclear-weapon states to undertake, in good faith, serious negotiations leading to complete nuclear disarmament. It said the continued existence of military nuclear capabilities outside any international framework for verification or accountability undermines confidence, fuels arms races and creates a fragile security environment vulnerable to escalation.

In September, Qatar called for intensified international efforts toward the complete and total elimination of nuclear weapons, stressing that achieving this goal represents a humanitarian responsibility and an ethical imperative amid escalating armed conflicts, the nuclear arms race and the growing resort to force in international relations.

This came in a statement by Qatar delivered by HE Secretary-General of the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi, before the 70th session of the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency, currently being held in Vienna. HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed to the grave challenges facing international peace and security amid increasing polarisation, geopolitical disputes and multiple armed conflicts, particularly the continuation of the Israeli occupation’s aggressive actions against the Palestinian people, the ongoing crisis in the Arabian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, as well as the accelerating nuclear arms race and changes in nuclear doctrines in a number of nuclear-weapon states toward reducing restrictions on their use.

He stressed the need to reinvigorate joint action to confront these dangers with a high degree of responsibility through multilateralism, and to support the international disarmament and arms-control

system, in which the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is the cornerstone, while also supporting the IAEA as a safeguard against declining respect for the standards and rules governing the nuclear field.

He noted that Qatar, represented by the Qatar Fund for Development, had signed a \$600,000 support agreement for IAEA projects under the Rays of Hope initiative, including efforts to strengthen radiotherapy capabilities in Syria.

He also affirmed Qatar’s full commitment to the goals of nuclear disarmament, preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the peaceful uses of atomic energy, noting that Qatar regards the agency as a key partner in expanding the peaceful applications of nuclear science and technology and enhancing nuclear and radiological security in the country.

National measures

As part of its policies aimed at disarmament, Qatar inaugurated in 2012 the Qatar Regional Training Center for the Prohibition of Weapons, the first of its kind in the Middle East and Asia. With regard to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Qatar was keen to join the convention, reaffirming its policy of fulfilling its obligations to preserve international peace and security and combat terrorism in all its forms, as well as its contribution, alongside peace-loving countries around the world, to the stability, security and prosperity of humanity.

To meet the requirements of Article VII of the convention concerning national measures, Qatar established the National Committee for the Prohibition of Weapons, the permanent body tasked with advising the relevant government authorities on all matters related to the prohibition of weapons of all types, including nuclear, biological, toxic, chemical and conventional weapons.

In November 2012, Qatar launched the Doha Regional Center for Training on Conventions Related to Weapons of Mass Destruction, in cooperation with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, to provide training services at the national and regional levels in the fields of verification, inspection and compliance. It also regularly participates in and supports disarmament conferences throughout their successive sessions.

It is worth noting that the International Atomic Energy Agency was established in 1957 as part of the United Nations system and is headquartered in Vienna. It currently has about 180 member states and aims to strike a balance between promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and preventing its diversion to military purposes. It is considered a “safeguard” against declining adherence to nuclear standards.

Pakistan vows to defend ally Saudi ‘to any extent’

AFP
Islamabad

Pakistan’s military spokesman said his country will “go to any extent” to defend ally Saudi Arabia, as the kingdom comes under increased attack from Yemen’s Houthi forces.

Houthi forces this week reported fresh Saudi airstrikes, as Riyadh accused the group of launching a “cowardly” attack targeting Islam’s holy city of Makkah, prompting a wave of outrage from around the Muslim world.

In an interview Thursday with Arab News, Pakistan’s military spokesman Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said his country would back Saudi Arabia “both diplomatically and physically”.

“We will go to any extent for the security of (the two holy sanctuaries) and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia,” he said.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye last month signed the so-called Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, committing the three countries to mutual defence in the event of any of them being attacked.

The pact came against a back-

drop of war between the US and Iran and attacks in the region from Tehran-backed Houthi forces.

Asked about the Houthi attacks, a Turkish diplomat told AFP that Ankara had not received “any official request from Saudi Arabia”.

“We have officially declared our support for Saudi Arabia. Having said that, everyone in this region has enough experience to know that bombing people... does not necessarily bring any results,” he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“Most of the time, talks between intelligence agencies are more fruitful,” added the diplomat.

“It’s not just about Saudi Arabia and their allies sending fighter jets to Yemen.”

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye were working to set the necessary mechanisms that would underpin the Makkah Agreement, which would take time.

“Institutionalisation is one issue we are now working on. But all three countries’ armies, navies and air forces need to be able to operate together. And that doesn’t happen overnight,” the Turkish diplomat said.

Russia says destroyed Ukrainian drones as polling stations open

Russia destroyed a wave of Ukrainian drones bound for Moscow, the city’s mayor said yesterday, as polling stations opened for the country’s first parliamentary election since the start of the war. While few doubt President Vladimir Putin’s party will sail to victory again, the vote will serve as a barometer for feelings on the war that has killed hundreds of thousands and undermined the daily lives of Russians.

“More than 350 UAVs flew towards the Moscow region between 8:00pm on 17 September and 7:00am on 18 September,” Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said on Telegram.

“Most were reportedly destroyed at the outer defensive perimeter, including 64 UAVs intercepted while approaching Moscow.” Putin has ruled Russia since New Year’s Eve 1999 and his United Russia party has dominated Russian politics since the early 2000s. Moscow has banned criticism of its Ukraine campaign and the Russian elections, tightly controlled by the Kremlin, are bringing few surprises.

The vote to renew the 450 seats in the Duma, Russia’s lower house of parliament, will run until Sunday. (AFP)

Blast, gun attack at police HQ in Pakistan kills 16

AFP
Kohat, Pakistan

An explosion and gun attack at a historic police headquarters in northern Pakistan yesterday killed at least 16 people and wounded 37 more, officials said, with the country’s president swiftly blaming a militant group.

A search-and-rescue operation was under way following the blast in Kohat in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, according to Bilal Ahmed Faizi from the 1122 rescue services.

A senior police official from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police force told AFP that 16 people were killed, including five police officers.

“Four attackers, including the sniper and the suicide bomber, have been killed while the clearance operation is under way,” the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Faizi said more than 45 rescue



Army personnel stand amid the rubble following an explosion inside the police headquarters at Kohat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. (AFP)

personnel had been deployed to the site at the Old Police Lines in Kohat, a town of around 220,000 people.

“Rescue 1122 teams are actively engaged in the search-and-rescue

operation at the site, and relief activities will continue until the operation concludes,” he said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but the area has been gripped by a

violent campaign by the militant Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group.

Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari expressed “regret” over the casualties, sending his “best wishes for the speedy recovery of those injured in the blast”. “The complete elimination of Fitna-al-Khawarij and terrorists operating with foreign backing is essential for national security,” he said, using another term for the group.

Pakistan has blamed the increase in attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the southern border province of Balochistan on militancy emanating from Afghanistan, where the Taliban government denies Afghan involvement.

The accusations have sparked a bitter rift and armed conflict between the neighbouring countries, and Pakistan has carried out deadly airstrikes it says target militants on Afghan soil. The Taliban government in Kabul said dozens of civilians were killed in the latest strikes on eastern Afghanistan in June.



An exterior view of Dow University of Health Sciences is seen in Karachi, Pakistan. (AFP)

in 2021, and escalated into weeks of war earlier this year.

More than 2.5mn Afghans — many who spent decades living as refugees in Pakistan — have been expelled or left voluntarily over the

past three years, according to UN data, as part of a deportation drive by Islamabad.

Human Rights Watch urged authorities to reverse the PMDC order, highlighting the plight of

Drone hit nuclear plant’s cooling tower in Russia, no fire reported: IAEA

AFP
Vienna

A drone hit the cooling tower of Russia’s Kursk nuclear power plant, near the border with Ukraine, but caused no fire, the UN nuclear watchdog said yesterday, calling for “maximum military restraint to prevent the risk of a nuclear accident”.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) “has been informed that the cooling tower of a reactor unit of the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant in the Russian Federation was hit by a drone early on Thursday”.

“It was reported that the unit was operating at the time, but its operating mode did not change

and there was no fire,” the IAEA said on X.

The IAEA has repeatedly warned of the dangers of fighting around nuclear plants following Russia launching its military offensive on Ukraine in February 2022.

The plant is near the Russia-Ukraine border and sits to the west of Kursk city, the region’s capital with a population of around 440,000.

“All attacks on nuclear facilities are unacceptable as they could endanger nuclear safety and security, irrespective of where they occur,” the IAEA said in its X post yesterday.

IAEA head Rafael Grossi “also reiterates call for maximum military restraint to prevent the risk of a nuclear accident,” it added.

Russians vote as Ukraine war drags on for fifth year

AFP
Moscow

Russians began voting yesterday in a tightly controlled three-day election that is set to tighten President Vladimir Putin’s 26-year grip on power, in the country’s fifth year of war with Ukraine.

It is Russia’s first parliamentary election since Moscow sent troops to Ukraine in February 2022, setting off a conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands.

Only parties that support Putin and the Kremlin’s military campaign have been registered to run. Moscow has also organised voting in occupied Ukraine.

The European Union slammed the elections, saying “repression” had been used to eradicate opponents, while a Council of Europe body denounced the vote as “fake”.

While few Russians doubt Putin’s United Russia party will cruise to victory again, the vote offers a gauge of public support for the war.

Voting for all 450 seats in the Duma, Russia’s lower house, runs until 1800 GMT on Sunday.

Putin has ruled Russia since 1999 and his party has dominated politics since the early 2000s.

Moscow has banned criticism of the Ukraine campaign, and elections under Putin rarely produce surprises.

Putin had called on Russians to vote to show they back Moscow’s troops and to deliver an “answer to those who want to weaken Russia”.

The Kremlin published footage of the 73-year-old president voting online — rare footage of the longtime leader using technology.

On Moscow’s streets, several voters told AFP they wanted the war in Ukraine to end — but on Russia’s terms, backing Putin’s goals.

Rail worker Sergei Korenets, 41, said he will back United Russia, voting for “stability” — echoing Putin’s main slogan.



Cars drive along an embankment of the Moskva River past the Kremlin at sunset in central Moscow. (Reuters)

Asked whether four-and-a-half years of war amounts to “stability”, Korenets said: “Of course, I want all this (the war) to end as quickly as possible.”

But he did not want change at home, he said, as “I am satisfied from the point of view of my financial situation”.

Despite sweeping Western sanctions, Russia’s economy has not collapsed and life in the capital remains relatively normal even as Moscow bombards Ukrainian cities daily.

United Russia faces only parties that broadly back Putin’s policies and the war: the Communist Party, the nationalist LDPR, A Just Russia and New People.

Yabloko, which called for an end to the fighting, was barred from running shortly before the vote. One of its main figures, Lev Shlosberg, was imprisoned for criticising the war.

Russia has since 2022 introduced Soviet-style censorship and jailed war critics.

“I am fully for the special military operation,” 55-year-old Lyubov told AFP in Moscow, using the Kremlin’s term for its offensive.

“Nato cannot be at our borders,” she added, repeating one of Putin’s arguments for launching the war.

But she criticised some social policies, still upset by Putin raising the pension age several years back, saying she wanted a “return to the Soviet economic system”.

Older voters are among Putin’s strongest supporters, though many complain about living standards.

Some fear the post-election period in Russia will bring a new military mobilisation, similar to the 2022 call-up of 300,000 reservists. The deeply unpopular move triggered a mass exodus of draft-age men.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has accused the Kremlin of planning a fresh mobilisation drive, an allegation Putin has denied.

Ukrainian strikes have caused increased disruption this year, hit-

ting as far as Siberia and the Urals.

Putin’s political opponents have mostly been driven into exile and his main opponent Alexei Navalny died in an Arctic prison in 2024.

Russia’s exiled opposition has urged anti-Kremlin Russians not to boycott the elections but instead vote “against Putin’s party”.

Navalny’s widow Yulia Navalnaya called on anti-war Russians to cast their ballots at noon on Sunday.

Yabloko disagrees, arguing that it was better not to vote.

“You are suggesting that we once again go, like sheep, dancing to their tune, and vote for those who have caused the deaths of people in Russia and Ukraine?” party chairman Nikolay Rybakov said this week.

But one Moscow voter, Yekaterina, who has lived her whole life under Putin’s rule, saw no reason for political change and was undeterred by the war.

“I still trust my president,” the 26-year-old told AFP.

Pakistan court blocks expulsion of Afghan medical college students

AFP
Karachi

Pakistan court blocked yesterday an order by the country’s medical board for dozens of Afghans studying to be doctors to be expelled from colleges and universities and sent home.

“The Lahore High Court has extended the stay order preventing the expulsion of over a hundred Afghan medical students from medical colleges until the next hearing,” a Lahore court decision seen by AFP said.

The judge, Justice Khalid Ishaq, did not fix a date for the next hearing.

Earlier this month, the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) said in a letter to academic institutes that no “form of facilitation of Afghan nationals is permitted for the current academic session”.

The PMDC letter to college deans said: “Afghans previously enrolled in medical or dental pro-

grams in Pakistan are required to return to Afghanistan.”

The letter, a copy of which was seen by AFP, did not say on whose authority the medical council was acting, but said: “The matter is of highest priority and relates to national policy directions.”

Speaking after yesterday’s hearing, final-year Lahore student Mubin Ulfati told AFP: “We were predicting this, because in a view of human rights, education is our primary right, so we were 100% sure that this was going to happen.” The 24-year-old, who had just returned from a hospital shift in July when he was given 24 hours to leave the country, added: “Everything is still in a desperate situation, and we don’t know what to do.”

A similar court petition has already been rejected by officials in Balochistan province, while another is under way in Sindh.

Relations between neighbours Pakistan and Afghanistan have plummeted since the Taliban government’s return to power in Kabul

women who are banned from studying in Afghanistan.

Amnesty International slammed the move as “discriminatory and arbitrary”.

Among the Lahore petitioners was a 23-year-old who was just days away from finishing her second-year studies when she was told she must “go back and leave everything”.

A judge suspended the expulsion order at the provincial level on September 11, but the student said her records have already been expunged from the university’s online platform.

The undergraduate, who requested anonymity for security reasons, was forced to end her medical studies in Afghanistan after Taliban authorities banned women from universities.

She said she was one of about 20 Afghan women out of 30,000 applicants to win a scholarship in Pakistan.

“I will never give up... I learned from this journey that sadness doesn’t bring anything,” she told

an AFP journalist in Kabul by phone.

Asad Jamal, one of several lawyers representing the students in Lahore, criticised the PMDC orders which he said failed to provide medics with “any opportunity to be heard”.

The PMDC did not respond to AFP’s request for comment.

Jamal said even if the students lose their Lahore petition, the case could still be taken to Pakistan’s Federal Constitutional Court.

Some Afghan medics had been deported even before the PMDC order, such as a fourth-year student who tried unsuccessfully for more than a year to renew his visa.

“We are only students. We are not political people,” said the medic, who was specialising in ophthalmology and requested anonymity.

The 33-year-old was pulled out of the operating theatre and expelled within two days.

“Please, let us finish our studies,” he said. “We will finish, and we will go back to our country.”

Souq Waqif's spice shops preserve old way of shopping

From mounds of spices and herbs to fragrant resins and traditional remedies, Doha's iconic market offers a sensory journey through the region's trading heritage

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

A visit to Souq Waqif can be as much about following the aromas in the air as it is about browsing its shops.

In one of the market's traditional stores, pyramids of vividly coloured powders sit alongside wooden trays filled with dried herbs, seeds, spices and fragrant resins, creating a scene that reflects the enduring character of Doha's historic marketplace.

The display offers a prominent contrast of colours and textures.

Deep red, bright orange, golden yellow, earthy brown, and pale green powders are arranged in neat mounds, while nearby trays hold translucent crystals, dark grains, and irregular pieces of dried resin.

The stalls offer a rich assortment of spices, herbs and traditional ingredients, from turmeric powder, cardamom and pepper to aromatic resins and other time-honoured products.

Arabic and English labels, handwritten price cards, and open wooden trays add to the old-market atmosphere, where products are displayed in a way that lets shoppers see, smell, and select them before they are weighed and packed.

For visitors, the experience offers a glimpse into a style of shopping that pre-



dates modern supermarkets, when spices and other goods were selected according to need and sold in quantities suited to each purchase.

The shops also showcase the diversity of ingredients associated with the region and wider Middle Eastern and South Asian culinary and cultural traditions.

Alongside the powdered spices are legumes and pulses, including red and green lentils and fava beans, while baskets contain peanuts and other dried products.

One of the most visually distinctive sections is devoted to fragrant resins.

Large quantities of pale yellow and cream-coloured pieces fill wooden boxes, with darker varieties displayed nearby.

Their irregular shapes and natural variations underline the fact that these prod-

ucts retain their traditional, minimally processed appearance.

Elsewhere, large pieces of translucent white material are stacked beside green powders and other dried ingredients, while shelves behind the counter are packed with oils, herbal products and boxed items.

The scene also highlights the human element behind the colourful displays.

Shop workers use large scoops and metal trays to measure the powders and transfer them into bags for customers – a simple interaction that remains part of the market's traditional retail character.

At a time when shopping increasingly takes place through packaged goods and digital screens, such stores offer a very different experience.



Souq Waqif's spice and herb shops serve not simply as retail outlets but as living reminders of an older marketplace culture.
PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam



Products are presented openly, customers can examine them closely, and they often learn what to choose through conversation with the shopkeeper.

Souq Waqif's spice and herb shops serve not simply as retail outlets but as living reminders of an older marketplace culture.

Their crowded shelves, handwritten signs, distinctive aromas, and colourful mounds give visitors a sensory connection to traditions that still find a place in modern Doha.

In these small wooden trays and pyramids of powder, the past remains very much part of the present.



Mina District turns Doha's old port into a canvas of colour

At Mina District, traditional architectural forms meet contemporary visual expressions, with colourful canopies and the waterfront setting creating a striking backdrop to Doha's modern skyline. Built on the site of the city's historic maritime gateway, the district brings together echoes of its seafaring past and the character of modern Doha.

PICTURES: Thajudheen

