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Vessel hit off UAE coast

The UKMTO maritime agency said yesterday it had received multiple reports of an unknown projectile striking a ship off the United Arab Emirates and causing a fire. The fire had been extinguished but there were not yet details on any casualties aboard the vessel, which was reportedly dozens of kilometres from the Iranian-blockaded Strait of Hormuz. **(AFP)**

Palestinian Authority hails Nobel for Pillay

The Palestinian foreign ministry welcomed the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to jurist Navi Pillay, saying the recognition honoured "all those who stand firm in defending international law and justice." "Throughout her distinguished career, she has pursued the truth and defended the rights of the oppressed in South Africa and around the world, including Palestine, with integrity, courage, and honour," the ministry said in a statement. South African Navi Pillay's career has seen her tackle allegations of genocide in Gaza, Rwanda and Myanmar, prompting a furious response from Israel. Pillay, a former judge on the International Criminal Court (ICC), said she dedicated her award to the "survivors of international crimes". **(QNA, agencies)**

Qatar's former GCC chief condemns Houthi attacks

Qatar's former Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) secretary-general, HE Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Attiyah, has strongly condemned attacks by Yemen's Houthi group against Saudi Arabia, describing them as a violation of the kingdom's security, stability and sovereignty. In a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), HE al-Attiyah, a Qatari Minister of State, said the reported targeting of the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah showed a "disregard for the sanctity of Islam's most sacred sites." He also condemned attacks targeting civilians in Saudi Arabia and said aggression against Saudi Arabia threatened not only the kingdom but also the security and stability of all GCC member states and their populations. HE al-Attiyah warned that attempts to destabilise the



region threatened decades of progress in regional security and stability, built on co-operation, co-ordination and solidarity among Gulf countries. He expressed confidence that the attacks would fail to undermine the stability established by Gulf states. HE Al-Attiyah also praised the Saudi leadership's response, saying its position reflected the kingdom's determination to confront the attacks. **(QNA)**

Houthi strikes on Riyadh airport killed three Saudis

The attacks on Riyadh airport on Thursday killed three people, Saudi authorities said yesterday, as Yemen's Houthi group stepped up missile strikes on the kingdom and tried to shut down its airspace in an escalating war triggered by the US-Iran conflict. The strikes, which also injured several people, damaged a Saudia Airlines plane and sent smoke billowing over the airport, led many airlines to cancel flights to the Saudi capital days before it is due to host a major meeting of global oil chiefs. Saudi air strikes hit Houthi targets in the Yemeni capital Sanaa overnight, Houthi officials and affiliated media said, part of an intensifying air war against the group aimed at reversing its recent territorial gains, threats to international shipping, and attacks on the kingdom. A Saudi-led coalition backing government forces in Yemen said it had destroyed three missile launch platforms used by the Houthis and warned it would respond firmly to attacks on civilians. The Houthis, who have encircled Yemeni government forces in Yemen's third-largest city of Taiz and are trying to defend positions on the Red Sea coast. The Saudi civil aviation authority said air traffic at Riyadh airport had returned to normal and flight tracking site flightradar24 showed a gradual resumption

Qatar denounces attacks on Saudi

Qatar has condemned, in the strongest terms, the attacks by Yemen's Houthi group targeting King Khalid International Airport in Saudi Arabia and a Saudi Airlines aircraft, leaving martyrs, injuries and material damage, considering them a grave violation of Saudi Arabia's sovereignty and a direct threat to regional security, civilian safety and civil aviation. The ministry reaffirms Qatar's full solidarity with Saudi Arabia, stressing its support for all legitimate measures taken by the kingdom to protect its sovereignty, security, territorial integrity and national interests. It also emphasises that Saudi Arabia's security is inseparable from Qatar's security and the collective security of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) member states. Qatar expresses its condolences to the martyr's families, as well as to the government and people of Saudi Arabia, and wishes those injured a speedy recovery.

of flights, including from some Middle Eastern airlines. Saudia Airlines said one of those killed on Thursday was an employee of theirs. **(Reuters)**

Qatar's recycling industry expands with 61 new units

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar's recycling industry is expanding significantly, with 61 new recycling facilities and plants under construction or in development as local companies invest in projects targeting electronic waste, plastics, metals, construction and demolition waste. The sector currently includes 29 operational factories, 19 facilities under construction, and 13 at the development stage, reflecting growing local interest in waste management, resource recovery, and circular-economy industries. Industry representatives said several new production lines are expected to become operational in the coming months, including facilities for recycling electronic and plastic waste, producing biodegradable bioplastics, and manufacturing cast iron. Other projects are planned to convert construction and demolition waste into reusable aggregates and other materials. The expansion of these industries is expected to strengthen Qatar's domestic recycling capacity while creating opportunities for local manufacturers to supply international markets.



Qatar already exports recycled products to destinations across Asia, Europe, the United States, and other markets. Ali Mohamed al-Ali al-Maadeed, founder and chief executive of a metal recycling factory, said Qatar had developed a specialised industrial base capable of producing recycled materials that meet international quality standards. The factory uses advanced technologies to process aluminium, copper, and iron, recovering high-quality materials from mixed metal scrap. Its production capacity is about 300 tonnes per month, with products prepared for export. The company exports to several international markets, including Thailand, Japan, Republic of Korea, China, Norway, the United Arab Emirates, and Bah-

rain. Al-Maadeed said the factory was preparing to expand its iron-recycling operations through a dedicated furnace designed to produce cast iron. The new production line is expected to begin operating in the first half of next year, adding to the facility's existing activities, which focus primarily on aluminium. Ali Saeed al-Houl al-Marri, chairman of a waste treatment company, announced plans to establish an electronic waste recycling plant alongside a new plastic recycling facility. The plastic recycling factory is already built and expected to begin operations within four months. It will collect, sort, and process different types of plastic waste, converting them into clean raw materials for manufacturing. **To Page 2**



A traditional dhow is lit up along the Doha Corniche, with the West Bay skyline in the background. The scene highlights Doha's maritime heritage alongside its modern cityscape. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

The Gulf is more united than ever: GCC chief al-Budaiwi

Arab News
Riyadh

Seven months after the start of Operation Epic Fury and the Iranian attacks that followed, Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Jassem Mohamed al-Budaiwi has a clear message for those questioning the unity of the six-member bloc: "The Gulf is more united than ever." "What we have been going through since Feb 28 with the barbaric attacks by Iran made us even more unified. We're even stronger," al-Budaiwi said in Manama, Bahrain, on 'Arab Views', a new flagship show hosted by Arab News Editor-in-Chief Faisal J Abbas. The attacks, al-Budaiwi said, had demonstrated the resilience of the Gulf states and shown the international community how they had stood together against thousands of missiles and drones. "We have seen our friends, our

brothers in the region standing by us, the international community standing by us," he said, pointing to a unanimous UN Security Council resolution that he said had attracted an unprecedented number of sponsors. "This tells you that the world is with us. The international community is with us. The Gulf Co-operation Council has co-operated among the six members in every single aspect." Al-Budaiwi's assessment comes amid questions over whether the crisis has exposed differences among Gulf capitals about how best to respond to Iran, particularly on military and security policy. Some of the criticism has come from international media, including a report by Euronews ahead of the GCC summit in Jeddah in April that cited a lack of co-ordination and the absence of some Gulf leaders as evidence of divisions. Al-Budaiwi said critics had a right to question the GCC's performance, but rejected as cynical



GCC Secretary-General Jassem Mohamed al-Budaiwi

the suggestion that the bloc had failed to co-ordinate its response. "Yes, they have the right to criticise. They have the right to be sceptical. Because they want to see more co-ordination," he said. "But to say that there is no co-ordination or co-operation, that is totally

wrong." He cited an extraordinary GCC summit, three extraordinary ministerial meetings and hundreds of meetings involving ministers, undersecretaries and council committees as evidence of the bloc's response. The April 28 summit in Jeddah had delegated the GCC Secretariat to advance co-operation in five areas — logistics, water connectivity, the electricity grid, strategic storage and the bloc's long-delayed railway project. The crisis had offered a particularly clear demonstration of Gulf solidarity, he said, because Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait had relied heavily on the Strait of Hormuz as a maritime passage while the conflict disrupted regional transport. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman had helped their neighbours by opening ports, facilitating the movement of trucks and providing access to airports and storage facilities. "The amount of help and assistance they got from the UAE,

Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman is amazing," al-Budaiwi said. "The ports were open for us. They deregulated for us. They accepted all the movements from our trucks. They opened the airports, they opened the storage. This is the greatest co-operation." He said co-ordination extended beyond logistics to media, military affairs, security, food security, electricity, energy and health, with co-operation increasing substantially after Feb 28. "There was a great deal of co-operation on the military side," he said, explaining that each Gulf country had pursued its own national response while co-ordinating with its neighbours. Some had sent personnel or ammunition to assist other members, while others had transferred entire missile systems, he said. Al-Budaiwi acknowledged that countries had their own responsibilities in confronting the Iranian threat, but said that did not pre-

clude collective assistance. "I am more proud to be from the Gulf now than ever because of what I have seen," he said. "I am a witness to what has happened and still happening as we speak." The GCC has condemned Houthi actions inside Yemen as well as attacks against Saudi Arabia. Riyadh, meanwhile, has kept open the possibility of diplomacy, provided the Houthis are willing to return to negotiations. Despite the conflict, al-Budaiwi said he remained optimistic that the Gulf states and Iran could eventually establish normal relations. Asked whether Tehran would be closer to its Gulf neighbours or remain an adversary a year from now, he said geography made coexistence unavoidable and that the GCC had repeatedly expressed its desire for better relations. "They are our neighbours, we are their neighbours, we are next to each other until the end of all days," he said.



MoEHE, British Council sign MoU to boost teachers’ skills

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the British Council to strengthen professional and technical training for teachers and school leaders to develop their skills.

The signing was attended by HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid al-Khater, and representatives of the British embassy in Qatar.

The MoU was signed by the director of the MoEHE’s Training and Development Centre, Iman Salman al-Mohannadi, and British Council director Dr Waseem Qutub.

It provides a framework for co-operation in designing and delivering specialised training programmes, exchanging expertise and professional practices, and organising workshops, conferences and professional events.

It also aims to enhance continuous learning and support joint initiatives and projects.

Al-Mohannadi said the agreement reflects a shared commitment to developing educational and leadership capabilities in line with professional standards, adding that investment in training is a strategic investment in people and their ability to adapt to educational develop-



ments and contribute effectively to the future.

Dr Qutub described the MoU as an important step in the educational partnership between the two sides, stressing the importance of investing in teachers and educational leaders to enhance

the quality and future of education.

He said the agreement would expand co-operation through training, knowledge exchange and sharing educational experiences between Qatar and the UK. – QNA



Qatar reaffirms commitment to combating graft and drug trafficking

Qatar has reaffirmed its commitment to combating drug trafficking, promoting integrity, preventing and fighting corruption, and strengthening transparency worldwide.

This came in a statement delivered by Third Secretary at Qatar’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations Amina Abdullah Salat, during the 81st Session of the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee – agenda item (110) on crime prevention and criminal justice and (111) on international drug control.

She highlighted Qatar’s partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), particularly the establishment of the UNODC Regional Centre for Combating Cybercrime in Doha to strengthen global efforts to prevent and combat cybercrime through innovative and integrated solutions.

Salat also noted Qatar’s signing of the UN Convention against Cybercrime in October 2025 and its ratification in February 2026, making it one of the first countries to ratify the convention.

She also underlined Qatar’s active participation in the 15th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, held in Abu Dhabi from September 26 to October 1, 2026.

She further stressed Qatar’s hosting of the 11th Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption in December 2025.

The conference concluded with the adoption of the Doha Declaration 2025, focused on strengthening international co-operation and technical assistance and harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) systems to prevent and combat corruption. – QNA



Shura Council concludes participation in IPU Assembly meetings in Arusha

The Shura Council concluded its participation yesterday in the 153rd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the 218th Governing Council, and related meetings in Arusha.

The Shura Council delegation was led by HE the Deputy Speaker Dr Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti, who is also vice-president of the IPU Executive Committee.

The delegation took part in the assembly’s meetings, which included discussions on the session’s theme of *Enhancing good governance and empowering communities through inclusivity, trust and opportunities for all*, as well as deliberations on parliamentary and international issues.

Particular attention was given to inclusive social development and the empowerment and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Shura Council, represented by Eng. Ahmed bin Hitmi al-Hitmi, participated in a conference of the Non-Aligned Movement Parliamentary Network.

At the close of the session, Australia’s House of Representatives Speaker Milton Dick was elected IPU president for the 2026-29 term, succeeding Dr Tulia Ackson.

The assembly concluded with the adoption of the “Arusha Declaration”, which underscored the importance of strengthen-

ing good governance, upholding transparency and accountability, expanding community participation in decision-making, and building trust between communities and public institutions.

It called for the empowerment of women, youth, and persons with disabilities; the responsible use of modern technologies and artificial intelligence; and stronger parliamentary co-operation to address shared challenges.

The assembly’s closing session followed meetings of the Governing Council, which considered ways to strengthen the role of parliaments in promoting good governance, advancing sustainable development, and addressing shared challenges. – QNA

Qatar and India hold 6th round of political consultations in New Delhi

Qatar and India have held the sixth round of political consultations between their foreign ministries in New Delhi, focusing on bilateral co-operation and ways to strengthen ties.

The talks were co-chaired by HE the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi and Sripriya Ranganathan, Secretary for Consular, Passport and Visa, and Overseas Indian Affairs at India’s Ministry of External Affairs.

Officials said the consultations reviewed co-operation between the two countries and explored ways to support and further develop bilateral relations.

The meeting was attended by Qatar’s ambassador to India Mohammed bin Hassan al-Jaber and Al Johara Fakhro, director of the MoFA’s Asian Affairs Department, alongside other officials.

The consultations form part of ongoing diplo-



matic engagement between Qatar and India, which maintain relations across a range of areas of mutual interest. – QNA

Qatar reaffirms commitment to human rights culture

Qatar has reaffirmed its commitment to promoting a culture of human rights through an approach grounded in the rule of law, transparency, justice and human dignity.

This came in a statement delivered by Third Secretary at Qatar’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations Amina Abdullah Salat, during the 81st Session of the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee under agenda item 70, “Promotion and Protection of Human Rights”, at UN headquarters in New York.

She said that respect for, promotion and protection of human rights are fundamental pillars of Qatar’s policy, reflected in a constitutional and legislative framework that upholds fundamental rights and freedoms for all.

Salat highlighted Qatar’s ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on May 21, 2018, reaffirming the country’s commitment to its international obligations and strengthening the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

She noted that Qatar National Vision 2030

prioritises key human rights issues, including health, education, the environment, women’s empowerment and children’s rights.

Consultations are also ongoing on the National Human Rights Action Plan 2026-30, chaired by HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Dr Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad.

The plan aims to address community needs and aspirations and translate human rights principles into measurable practices that guide policymaking and planning.

Highlighting Qatar’s commitment to the rights and full inclusion of persons with disabilities, Salat pointed to the issuance of Law No. 22 of 2025 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, describing it as a reflection of the country’s commitment to international standards.

She also highlighted Qatar’s current membership of the Human Rights Council for the 2025-27 term, describing it as a reflection of international confidence in the country’s commitment to advancing human rights nationally and internationally.

Amir condoles with Saudi ruler

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of condolences yesterday to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, following the martyrdom of three Saudi citizens in two attacks targeting King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh.

His Highness wished those injured a speedy recovery. 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 condolences to King Salman. – QNA

Amir congratulates Museveni

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations yesterday to Uganda’s President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni on the occasion of his country’s Independence Day.

HH the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent a similar cable of congratulations to Museveni.

Meanwhile, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Uganda’s Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja on the occasion. – QNA

Amir condoles with Nigeria’s president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of condolences yesterday to Nigeria’s President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on the victims of a military plane crash in the southwest of the country.

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 condolences to Tinubu. – QNA

Protecting education and culture, promoting dialogue key to peace

The chairperson of the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) and Qatar’s Permanent Representative to the organisation, Dr Nasser bin Hamad al-Hinzab, has stressed that protecting education and culture and promoting dialogue are fundamental pillars of peacebuilding and mutual understanding among peoples.

He made the remarks in his opening address at the 225th session of Unesco’s Executive Board, emphasising that peace does not begin when conflicts end, but is built in schools and educational institutions through culture, knowledge and respect for others.

Dr al-Hinzab called for protecting schools and universities from attacks, describing them as safe spaces for learning and hope.

He warned that attacks on educational institutions not only destroy buildings but also threaten the future of entire generations.

Protecting education, Dr al-Hinzab said, is fundamentally about protecting peace, while safeguarding culture and heritage preserves peoples’ identities, collective memory and right to the future.

Protecting journalists and freedom of expression, he added, is equally essential to defending truth and the right to knowledge.

Dr al-Hinzab noted that Unesco is undergoing significant institutional changes that present an opportunity to strengthen its ability to fulfil its mandate effectively and efficiently.

He stressed that these changes must reinforce the organisation’s credibility, transparency and responsiveness to the priorities of member states.

Dr al-Hinzab said that Unesco had implemented or accepted 79% of the relevant recommendations issued by the Joint Inspection Unit, while 64 recommendations remained outstanding, including 36 that had been pending for more than two years. – QNA

Qatar urges fair and consistent application of international law

Qatar has called for the consistent application of international law without selectivity or double standards, stressing that the credibility of the international legal system depends on how its rules are enforced.

The remarks were delivered by Second Secretary at Qatar’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations Abdulaziz al-Sulaiti.

Addressing the 81st Session of the UN General Assembly’s Sixth Committee, al-Sulaiti said that respect for the rule of law is not merely an aspiration stated in the Charter, but a firm commitment embedded in its purposes and principles.

The Sixth Committee deliberations addressed the rule of law at both national and international levels under agenda item 84.

Qatar stressed the close relationship between the rule of law at both levels, saying that each reinforced the other.

At the national level, Qatar pointed to the Ministry of Justice’s 2025-30 strategic plan, launched in line with the Third National Development Strategy.

The plan aims to develop an efficient justice system that promotes transparency and integrity. – QNA

Qatar’s recycling industry expands with 61 new units

From Page 1

The planned electronic waste facility will dismantle discarded electronic equipment and recover valuable components and metals, including copper, gold, and tin.

The company will then process these materials into industrial-grade raw materials, reducing waste while recovering resources that would otherwise be discarded.

Previously, the company exported electronic waste to Singapore in batches, depending on available quantities and required regulatory approvals.

Dr Hamad Ali al-Marri, executive director of a plastic factory, said the company had been active in plastic packaging and recycling since 1993.

The factory receives approximately 500 tonnes of plastic waste each month from sorting sites operated by the Ministry of Municipality and from commercial centres.

The company recycles the recovered material and uses it to

manufacture plastic bags. The company exports 700-800 tonnes of products each month to over 15 countries, including the European Union, the US, and Australia.

Dr al-Marri added that the factory was also developing biodegradable plastic made from polylactic acid (PLA), a material derived from organic sources.

Meanwhile, Mohammed Ahmed, head of public relations and communications at a recycling company, highlighted the importance of co-operating with the Ministry of Municipality to advance recycling and sustainable resource management.

The company operates the Rawdat Rashid Recycling Complex, which processes construction and demolition waste into recycled aggregates and materials suitable for use in various projects.

He said the company is preparing a new project to produce recycled aggregates and washed sand using modern technologies, with civil and construction work expected to begin soon.



Las Damas de Rizal Doha Chapter celebrates World Teachers' Day

Las Damas de Rizal Doha Chapter concluded Special Webinar Series 9 on October 3 to celebrate World Teachers' Day. Themed "Igniting the Mind: Ang Pananaw sa Edukasyon at Makabagong Pedagogiya ni Gat Jose Rizal," the event gathered 131 participants via Zoom and was streamed live on the chapter's Facebook page.

Lady Queen Victoria Bedon, Assistant Secretary and Membership Committee Head, opened with an invocation seeking wisdom and guidance. Lady Dr Noemi Formaran, Vice President and Education Committee Head, who served as the moderator, welcomed attendees and highlighted the continuing relevance of Rizal's educational philosophy in today's evolving learning landscape.

Lady Lina Brosas, Grand Matriarch and founder, delivered an inspirational message, stressing that true education goes beyond information. "Education should awaken curiosity, critical thinking, values, and a deeper sense of purpose," she said, echoing Rizal's belief in education as a transformative force.

The highlight was a lecture by Dr Julius A. Reyes, a Doha-based educator at Philippine School Doha. A social science educator, guest professor at Pacific Intercontinental College, and Philippine Normal University alumnus, Reyes holds a Doctor of Education from National University and a Doctor Honoris Causa from Instituto Educando Para a Paz in Brazil. He also coached the champion team in the Order of the Knights of Rizal's Battle of the Brains.

Dr Reyes discussed Rizal's educational philosophy and its relevance to modern pedagogy, including inquiry and critical thinking, holistic development, education for nation-building,



inclusion and accessibility, experiential learning, and teachers as mentors rather than mere dispensers of knowledge.

Participants reflected on Rizal's conviction that education is a "light for the nation"—one that forms citizens who think critically, act compassionately, and serve their communities. The interactive session also invited attendees to remember inspiring teachers who shaped their own journeys.

The program concluded with a recogni-

tion plaque for Reyes. Lady Sheila Marie Cantos, Chapter President, gave closing remarks, thanking the speaker, guests, organisers, partner institutions, and participants. Certificates of Attendance were provided after completion of the webinar evaluation form.

The chapter announced its next webinar on November 6, 2026, featuring Dr Susana Arjeno. Through Special Webinar Series 9, Las Damas de Rizal Doha Chapter reaffirmed its commitment to promoting Rizalian values, educational



excellence, and cultural pride. The event honoured World Teachers' Day and kept Dr Jose Rizal's vision alive and relevant today.

Regalia 2026 unveiled with a burst of youthful talent



The inauguration of Regalia 2026, the School Youth Festival of MES Indian School, Doha – Qatar, Evening Shift, was held at the Conference Hall from 3pm-4pm, marking a vibrant beginning to the celebration of youthful talent and creativity.

The event was graced by chief guest Nadir Abdul Salam, alumnus, singer and music director; principal Dr Hameeda Kadar; senior vice-principal Shihabudeen Pulath; head of Section (Evening) Shalini Sharma; head of Section (Junior) Sameena Ashfaq; head of Section (Kindergarten) Suja Mathew, along with school officials, teachers and students.

The programme commenced with a prayer by Hadiya Fathima, followed by the National Anthem. Filza Ettukattil Amjith of Grade 8-B, the student anchor, conducted the programme with confidence and grace.

Praniti Aggarwal, cultural secretary, delivered the welcome address, followed by an energetic Welcome Dance and the Little Star Talent presentation by Laiba Aymen.

Dr Kadar encouraged students to participate enthusiastically and showcase their talents. The chief guest addressed the gathering and formally declared Regalia 2026 open. The Principal, accompanied by members of the management and school officials, presented a token of love to the Chief Guest.

The programme concluded with the Vote of Thanks by Master Muhammed Nahyaan. The inauguration reaffirmed MES Indian School's commitment to nurturing creativity, confidence, leadership and holistic development among its students through meaningful opportunities beyond the classroom.



MES celebrates the brilliance of young talents

MES Indian School celebrated talent, creativity, confidence, and youthful exuberance at Regalia 2026, a much-awaited youth festival that unfolded on 23rd and 24th September 2026. The vibrant youth festival gives students a dynamic platform to showcase their literary, artistic, cultural, and creative talents through a wide range of competitions and activities. Shivapriya Suresh, Title Winner of Asianet Star Singer Season 10, graced the inaugural ceremony as the Chief Guest.

With more than 2,500 contestants, 300+ competitions, and 40 events across more than 15 venues, Regalia 2026 proved to be a remarkable celebration of the diverse talents and potential of young learners. A wide variety of competitions took place in the Sub-Junior I, Sub-Junior II, Junior, Intermediate, and Senior categories. The events provided students with opportunities to demonstrate their abilities in music, dance, literature, oratory, traditional arts, and Islamic activities. The competitions included Light Music (Eastern and Western), Cinematic Dance, Folk Dance, Mono Act, Poem Recitation, Fancy Dress, Tajweed, Hifz, Group Song, Oppana, Mohiniyattam, Kathak, and Elocution.

Hanan Mohamed Shameem (Class 6), Riham Shahanaaz (Class 8) and Evelyn Johnly (Class 12) emerged as the Best Individual Artists in Junior, Intermediate and Senior categories, respectively, from the Girls' Section. In the Boys' Section, Aditya Prashanth (Class 5), Aasim Ismayil Parambath (Class 8), and Muhammed Hasbin (Class 12) were declared as the Individual Artists in Junior, Intermediate and Senior categories, respectively. In the Junior Section, Muhammed Hazam (Class 1) in the Sub-Junior I boys, Lahaan Latheef (Class 2) in Sub-Junior I girls, Dharshanth Krishna (Class 4) in Sub-Junior II Boys, and Divina Pradeep (Class 4) in Sub-Junior II Girls were adjudged as the Best Individual Artists of their respective categories.

The festival culminated in a grand valedictory function, marking the programme's successful completion and celebrating the students' achievements. The function included, among other things, a video presentation highlighting



the students' performances and the Report presented by Anver K. Dr Hameeda Kadar, principal, addressed the gathering, congratulated the students, and appreciated the staff's dedicated efforts and parents' continued support. The School Activity Conveners, Anver K, Sumitha Abdul Nassar

and Fency Pathrose, along with a team of dedicated teachers, played a pivotal role in planning, coordinating and executing the various events with precision and efficiency. The contributions of teachers, judges, event coordinators, volunteers and student representatives were equally commendable.





PTC WEN MENA Chapter holds inaugural General Assembly

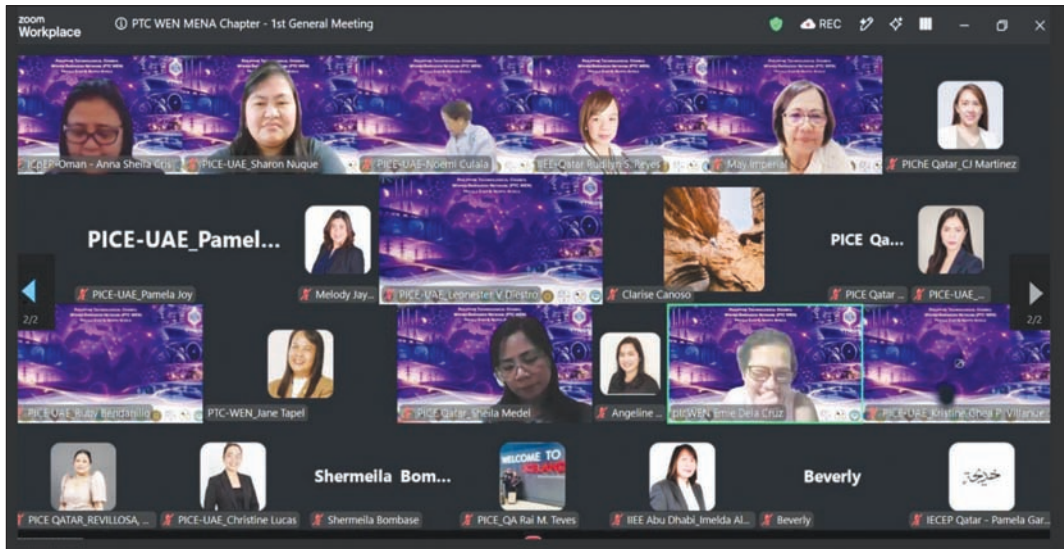
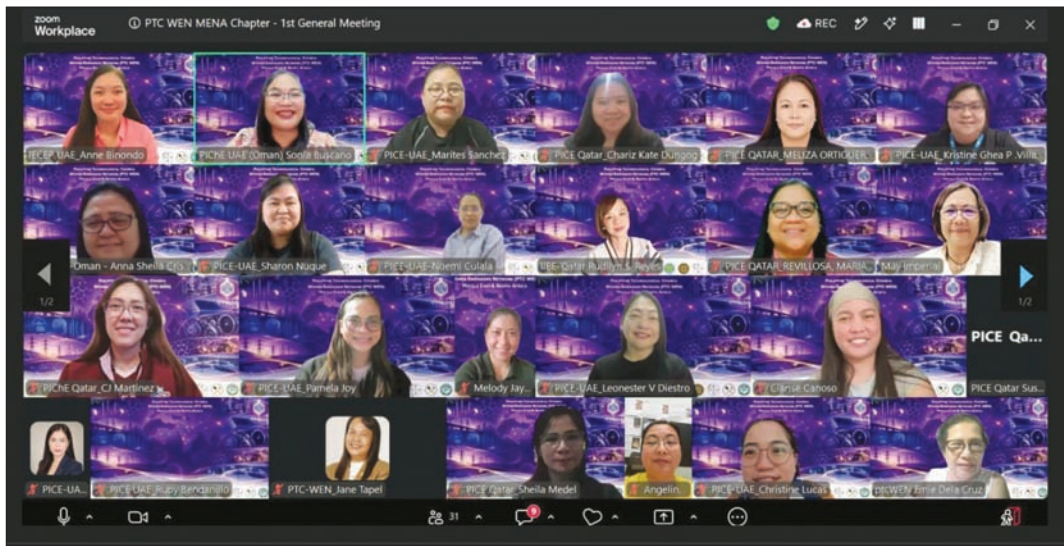
The Philippine Technological Council - Women Engineers Network Middle East and North Africa (PTC WEN MENA) Chapter convened its first General Online Meeting on Saturday, October 3. The assembly gathered 44 Filipino women engineers across Qatar, the UAE, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, along with national advisers and officers from the Philippines.

The meeting commenced with an invocation led by vice chairperson Engr Maria A Michelle Revillosa, offering prayers for divine wisdom, unity across disciplines, and success in empowering Filipino engineers throughout the region. Chapter chairperson Dr Anne Binondo then chaired the meeting. In her welcome remarks, Dr Binondo greeted all advisers, national officers, and delegates across Mena, emphasising the power of unity and calling on members to lend their voices in building a collaborative, supportive, and transformative network for Filipino women engineers on the international stage.

A highlight of the orientation segment was a presentation by Dr May Rose Imperial, Adviser and former Chairperson of PTC WEN (2022-2023), who outlined the network's foundational identity, organisational scope, and long-term strategic blueprint through 2030.

Dr Imperial clarified that PTC WEN does not operate as a separate or competing entity against existing Engineering Professional Organisations (EPOs). Instead, it serves a complementary function, addressing gender representation, professional advocacy, and career development aspects often overlooked within traditional discipline-specific societies.

Dr Juana "Jane" T. Tapel (2014-

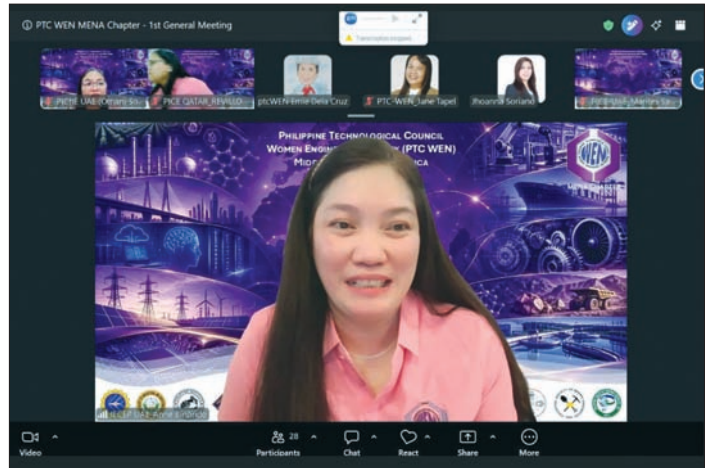


2021 PTC WEN Chairperson, Adviser, and INWES APNN Chair) congratulated the MENA Chapter on establishing its first official international presence, inviting members to participate in upcoming international conferences

in Taiwan and global forums hosted by the International Network of Women Engineers and Scientists (INWES).

Engr Emiliana "Emie" P. Dela Cruz (Immediate Past Chairperson) reminded participants

that every woman engineer's voice matters. She urged members to continue lifting one another, reject "crab mentality," and embrace international opportunities such as the ASEAN Federation of Engineering Or-



ganisations (AFEO) Women Engineers Summit. Engr. Jhoanna B. Soriano (Current PTC WEN National Chairperson) commended the Chapter Chairperson for her dedication to bringing the Mena charter to fruition, encouraging all officers and members to lead with passion, embrace innovation, and build a supportive community that inspires future generations of Filipino engineers.

Chairperson Dr Binondo reflected on the chartering ceremony held on August 5, 2026, during the 20th International Conference of Women Engineers and Scientists (ICWES20) cum 10th Philippine Women Engineers and Scientists Summit (PWESS10) at Clark, Pampanga. PTC President Engr. Federico Monsada, and was witnessed by PTC WEN Founding Chairperson Dr Lydia Tansinsin. She also shared on the Middle East-based recipients of the 2nd Batch of the Inspiring Filipina Engineers Award, recognising

their outstanding professional contributions across the Gulf region.

The assembly also featured a Virtual Meet-and-Greet segment, giving each participant a chance to give a short self-introduction. The exchange showcased a diverse cross-section of expertise—residing across the Gulf region.

Through a nomination and consensus process, the general assembly elected the core executive officers of the PTC WEN MENA Chapter for 2026-2028, ensuring multidisciplinary expertise and broad regional representation across the Mena region: Chairperson Dr Anne Binondo (ICEP UAE); vice chairperson Engr Maria Michelle Revillosa (PICE Qatar); secretary Engr Sonia Buscano (PICHE Oman); treasurer Engr Imelda Alumbro (IIEE Abu Dhabi); auditor Engr Ruby Bendanillo (PICE-UAE); and media relations officer Engr Pamela Joy Carreon (PICE-UAE).

ICC marks Gandhi Jayanti

Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), under the aegis of the embassy of India, Qatar, celebrated Gandhi Jayanti, commemorating Mahatma Gandhi's 157th birth anniversary on October 2 at ICC Ashoka Hall. The event featured heartfelt tributes to Mahatma Gandhi, along with cultural performances that reflected the spirit of his life and values. ICC general secretary Abraham K Joseph welcomed the guests and dignitaries, followed by opening remarks from the ICC head of HR, Admin and Consular, Rakesh Wagh. The chief guest, Indian ambassador Dr K Srikanth Reddy addressed the gathering and spoke about Mahatma Gandhi's values and teachings. The event was also honoured by the presence of Ashwani Kumar, first secretary, embassy of India, as the guest of honour. Delivering the presidential address, ICC president Manikantan A P spoke about Mahatma Gandhi's role in India's freedom struggle and his message of peace and non-violence. The highlight of the evening was a special Ghazal performance by Padmakumar, a renowned Ghazal and Hindustani singer. His captivating performance added a memorable musical dimension to the Gandhi Jayanti celebrations and was warmly appreciated by the audience. As part of the Gandhi Jayanti celebrations, ICC organised a



series of creative and educational competitions for students from Indian schools in Qatar, encouraging young minds to learn about and reflect on the life, ideals, and legacy of Mahatma Gandhi. The Inter-School Quiz Competition for students of Grades 8 to 12 witnessed enthusiastic participation from 14 schools. The competition focused on Mahatma Gandhi, Indian history and the Indian freedom struggle and was conducted by Manzoor Moideen. The winners were: 1st Prize: Birla Public School, 2nd Prize: Olive International School and 3rd Prize: DPS-Modern Indian School. The Sketch & Painting Competition for students in Grades 8-12 and the Painting Competition for students in Grades 5-7 were held on 2nd

October 2026 at Bhavans Public School. The competitions received an overwhelming response, with more than 350 students participating. The winners received trophies and mementoes during the event. The evening concluded with a vote of thanks by ICC vice president Shantanu Deshpande. The presence of several distinguished dignitaries graced the event, Shanavas Bava - president ICBF; E P Abdurahman - president ISC; Thaha Mohammed - president IBP; and P N Babu Rajan - president, ICC Advisory Council; along with members of the ICC Managing Committee, presidents of associated organisations, and other senior community leaders. The event was hosted by Nazia.

DPS delegation pays courtesy visit to Indian envoy

DPS delegation, led by chairman DPS Group of Institutions Yasir Nainar, accompanied by Group Academic advisor Asna Nafees; principal DPS-Modern Indian School Soma Bhattacharjee; and principal DPS Monarch International School Meenal Bakshi, paid a courtesy visit to Indian ambassador Dr K Srikanth Reddy to extend a warm welcome.

During the interaction, the del-

egation presented an overview of the DPS Group's educational journey in Qatar, highlighting the 26-year legacy of DPS-Modern Indian School and the growing presence of DPS Monarch International School. They also shared the institutions' academic achievements, student accomplishments in sports and innovation, diverse co-curricular and extracurricular programmes, evolving education-

al initiatives, and the success of DPS alumni at prestigious universities and in diverse professional fields.

Dr K Srikanth Reddy appreciated the schools' contribution to education in Qatar and conveyed his best wishes for their continued growth and success. The delegation presented the envoy with artworks created by students of both schools of the DPS Group.



BPS claims schools championship at Qatar Debate Open 2026-27

Birla Public School (BPS) emerged as the overall champion in the Schools Category at the Qatar Debate Open (British Parliamentary format) 2026-27, hosted by Qatar Debate at Georgetown University in Qatar on 2-3 October 2026. The two-day championship brought together 84 teams from Indian and international schools worldwide, providing a competitive platform for young debaters to engage in rigorous argumentation and critical discourse. The participating teams competed through four qualifying league rounds, following which the top-performing teams advanced to the knockout stages. Birla Public School fielded three teams in the competition: Team 1, comprising Ananya Roseleen Mathias (Grade XII) and Arnab Suhag (Grade X); Team 2, comprising Ryan Geo (Grade X) and Mohammed Zidane (Grade X); and Team 3, comprising Ayaan Noushad (Grade X) and Hiteshnath Suresh (Grade X). All six debaters delivered strong performances throughout the preliminary league rounds, with the three teams securing 10, 8, and 6 points, respectively. Two teams from BPS progressed through the quarter-final and semifinal stages to reach the Grand Final. Following a closely contested final debate, Team 1 secured the Championship title in the Schools Category, marking a significant achievement for



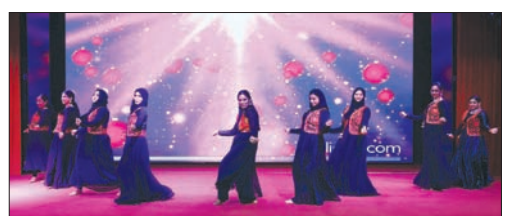
the school on the international debating circuit. The BPS debaters also earned notable individual accolades. Ananya Roseleen Mathias of Grade XII was adjudged the Best Speaker in the League, while Arnab Suhag of Grade X was awarded Third Best Speaker in the League and the Best Speaker in the Grand Final. Khalid al-Ali Rahim, Communication Co-ordinator at Qatar Foundation, and Dr Christine Schiwietz, Senior Adviser to the Dean at Georgetown University in Qatar,

presented the awards during the closing ceremony. The school leadership congratulated the participating debaters, coaching staff, and support team for their thorough preparation and performance on the international debate circuit. The success at the Qatar Debate Open 2026-27 adds another significant milestone to Birla Public School's engagement with the international debate circuit. It highlights the students' ability to perform with distinction on a global platform.



MES' KG section hosts 'MomTalk'

The Kindergarten Section of MES Indian School hosted MomTalk - Empowering Women on October 3 at the Conference Hall, giving mothers an engaging platform to learn, reflect, and interact. The programme opened with a welcome speech by head of section Sufera Ashraf and welcome dance by KG teachers, followed by an Insight & Ideas session on positive parenting, fostering independence, building meaningful connections and understanding children's perspectives. Principal Dr Hameeda



Kadar emphasised the importance of nurturing independence, gender equality, quality family time and mothers' well-being. The session also featured a musical presentation by Steffy Rakesh, an interactive parent session and feedback collection, making MomTalk a meaningful and enriching experience for participating mothers.

EU aviation body widens Saudi airspace warning after Houthi strikes

By **Gianluca Lo Nostro**
Reuters

Europe's EASA aviation safety body said yesterday it had expanded the area of Saudi Arabian airspace where it recommended airlines not to operate, after Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis attacked Riyadh airport.

In an update to a conflict zone information bulletin first issued on September 30, the EU regulator said recent attacks demonstrated the Houthis' ability and intent to strike targets deeper inside Saudi

territory, including the capital. EASA added an area in northwestern Saudi Arabia to the advisory.

Saudi Arabia's civil aviation authority said earlier on Friday that three Saudi nationals were killed and several people were injured in two attacks on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh on Thursday.

The Houthis have renewed threats against airlines flying to Saudi Arabia and said on Thursday they had struck the capital's airport with two cruise missiles.

"These recurrent missile and drone attacks, together with the



activation of air-defence systems, create an increased risk of misidentification of civil aircraft, as well as risks associated with missile and drone overflights, interception activity and falling debris," EASA said.

OPSGROUP, a membership-based organisation with almost 10,000 aviation professionals that shares flight risk information, sent a "do not fly" warning for Saudi Arabia to its members on Friday, citing risks of sustained missile

attacks and "misjudgment" in defensive responses.

"We now recommend avoiding operations in Saudi Arabia entirely, including the use of Saudi airports as en route alternates," it said in the memo shared with Reuters.

Following Thursday's attacks, Lufthansa Group and three Indian airlines said they would suspend flights to Riyadh expected in the coming days.

Gulf airlines were also affected with Etihad Airways cancelling six flights between Abu Dhabi and Riyadh's King Khalid International

yesterday and two more planned for today citing "operational disruption at Riyadh airport".

"Flights to Riyadh and Yanbu have been cancelled up to and including 10 October, while flights to Abha have been cancelled up to and including 11 October," a flydubai spokesperson said.

King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh is Saudi Arabia's second-busiest airport after Jeddah.

Global flight tracker Flightra-24 showed 131 flights to and from Riyadh had been cancelled by 1305 GMT yesterday after hundreds of cancellations the previous day.

Talks with Iran can only succeed without threats, Masoud Pezeshkian says

AFP
Ashgabat

Peace negotiations with Iran would only succeed without "pressure and threats", Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said yesterday, amid deadlocked efforts to end months of fighting in the Middle East.

Diplomatic efforts to end the seven-month conflict, which began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran in February, have been at an impasse since the summer.

The US and Iran agreed a memorandum of understanding in June that spelled out a framework for ending the conflict, but Iranian attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz prompted a resumption of US military operations.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian attends a meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States Heads of State Council in Turkmenbashi yesterday. (AFP)

Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping lane for oil from the Gulf that has been effectively shut since the fighting.

Iran has sought to impose its control over the vital shipping lane since the start of the war, striking vessels that attempt to transit without its authorisation.

The US has imposed its own counter-blockade of Iranian ports and has also struck vessels it accuses of violating it.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday he would "do everything" he could to help end the war during a meeting with Pezeshkian ahead of the summit, Russian media reported.

"We are ready to do everything that is in our power to contribute to the settlement of this situation," Putin said.

He added that Iran had made "real efforts to end the war" since the US-Israeli attacks started on February 28, according to Russian news agencies.

Putin also said there had been a "positive evolution" in Iran-Russia relations.

The two countries, heavily sanctioned by the West, have reinforced diplomatic and military links since Russia launched its offensive in Ukraine in February 2022, becoming increasingly reliant on each other.

Trump told the UN General Assembly in September that he had to choose whether to "annihilate" Iran if it failed to make a deal.

But the US leader has since ruled out attacking Iran again before the US midterm elections on November 3, saying on Thursday that Washington was holding "productive discussions" with the Islamic republic.

UN says Gaza faces grim winter without shelters

AFP/Reuters
Geneva

Almost all of Gaza's population need tents or help with shelter ahead of winter, with the El Niño weather phenomenon expected to bring heavier rainfall, while supplies remain scarce due to Israeli restrictions, the UN migration agency said yesterday.

The El Niño — which could be the strongest ever, according to the UN weather agency — could further weaken unsafe buildings, and cause flooding amid the enclave's heavily damaged drainage systems, the IOM said.

Virtually all of Gaza's 2mn population will go through winter without adequate shelter as the Palestinian territory enters a fourth year under heavy Israeli war restrictions, the UN said yesterday.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said nearly 1.8mn people in the territory "are facing a fourth winter without adequate protection from rain, flooding and cold".

More than 3,600 structures were identified in August as dangerous and at risk of collapse, while around 1.8mn people are liv-



A displaced Palestinian woman walks with a bucket to a water distribution point in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip. (AFP)

ing in displacement sites — most in flood-risk areas, the IOM said.

The UN agency called for international funding for humanitarian aid and for Israel to ease the "constraints" on the entry of critical supplies.

A ceasefire in the Gaza war was announced in October last year but conditions remain dire in Gaza, according to aid agencies.

More than half of all the tents and makeshift shelters are in poor condition and should be replaced, the IOM said.

"With few alternatives available, many families are living in war-damaged buildings that pose serious risks to life."

IOM highlighted the deaths of 21 people, including 12 children, when a war-damaged six storey building collapsed in Gaza city last month.

"Shelter materials must enter quickly, predictably and at the scale required," said Amy Pope, the IOM director general.

Pope said the current humanitarian supplies of shelters would

only cover 17% of Gaza's "identified winter needs".

IOM added that many tents, shelter kits, wood, tools and other material positioned outside the Palestinian territory were blocked from entering.

"Families who have already endured repeated displacement and devastating loss must be able to face the winter in safety and dignity," Pope said, adding that constraints by Israeli authorities are making it hard for agencies to scale up their responses.

Some 8,600 emergency shelter kits, comprising wood, a tarpaulin and some basic materials, have not been allowed by Israeli authorities to enter Gaza, as they have been determined as dual use, the IOM said.

The World Health Organisation had already warned in September that Gaza faces a new health crisis with the start of the rainy season that brings an increased risk from mosquitoes and the spread of disease.

Israel has faced increased international criticism over conditions in Gaza and the entry of humanitarian aid, but has said it is preventing the entry of items that could have military use as it accuses the Hamas militant group of plotting new attacks.

'Palestinians set to delay legislative elections'

Reuters
Paris

Palestinian Vice-President Hussein al-Sheikh has informed France that a Palestinian legislative election planned for November 28 will be postponed for several months because of worsening conditions throughout the Palestinian territories, according to a letter seen by Reuters.

"The assessment concluded that the anticipated political, security and economic conditions, on which the scheduling of the legislative elections for 28 November 2026 was based, have not materialised," said the letter, which was addressed to French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot and dated October 8.

It added that "holding them under the current circumstances faces fundamental obstacles affecting their inclusiveness, freedom of participation and the integrity of the electoral process."

There had been serious doubts that the Palestinian Authority (PA) vote would go ahead in late November. The Palestinians have not held legislative or presidential elections since 2005-06, after which Abbas' rival, the Islamist group Hamas, seized control of Gaza, ousting his loyalists.

Some officials within Abbas' Fatah party have demanded dialogue with Hamas and other factions to agree on a common national vision before proceeding with a vote. Others have cited obstructions to ballot boxes, election papers and ink entering Gaza, which they say would make voting impossible.

The letter said Palestinian officials had expected conditions to improve through the implementation of US President Donald Trump's peace initiative and a UN Security Council resolution, including the deployment of international forces and Palestinian police in Gaza, the disarmament of Hamas and the withdrawal of Israeli troops.

It said the Palestinians had also anticipated US efforts to prevent further annexation of Palestinian territory in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, curb settler violence and secure the release of nearly \$7bn in Palestinian funds withheld by Israel.

"However, these steps, understandings and promises have not materialised. Rather, conditions have worsened throughout the Palestinian territory," the letter said, outlining in detail security issues in Gaza and the West Bank.

Based on their assessment, Palestinian officials recommended to Abbas "that the date of the legislative elections be adjusted by several months, and that dialogue continue to prepare the internal conditions", the letter said.

The letter was addressed to France after it recognised a Palestinian state in September 2025. As part of that decision France had urged that the planned legislative and presidential elections proceed.

'26 women, 4 children killed in Sudan RSF drone strike'

AFP
Khartoum

A drone strike launched by Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces killed 26 women and four children yesterday near the southeastern border with Ethiopia, an official and eyewitnesses told AFP.

The latest front line in Sudan's war between the regular army and the RSF is the border region with Ethiopia, which is facing its own internal conflict that threatens to escalate into a regional war.

Since Sudan's war broke out in April 2023, it has killed more than 200,000 people, aid workers estimate, and created the world's largest hunger and displacement crises.

This year alone, nearly 100,000 people have been displaced across Blue Nile state, according to UN figures.

In a displacement camp in Blue Nile's Abu Shendi, survivors "buried 26 women and four children" from Friday's strike, one person involved in the burial told AFP.

The drone hit just outside the camp, near an informal gold mining site, where women earn a



People, fleeing the ongoing conflict between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese army, prepare to travel to Adre, on the Chad-Sudan border. (Reuters/File photo)

daily wage using chemicals and their bare hands to clear gold nuggets from clumps of earth men have extracted.

The victims included "young girls who work with their families in refining the gold", another eyewitness said.

The country's multi-billion-dollar gold trade, built mostly on makeshift operations like Abu Shendi's, fuels the war efforts of both sides.

Mahgoub al-Sheikh, the governor of Wad al-Mahi where the

attack took place, said the drone was launched from "inside Ethiopia".

Sudan has repeatedly accused Ethiopia of harbouring RSF fighters and bases within its territory.

Ethiopia has denied the accusations, though local sources say the porous border is a key supply line for the paramilitary and its allies.

Throughout this year, the RSF has pushed an offensive approaching state capital El-Damazin.

The advance could put the army in a bind, forcing it to defend territory on both the Blue Nile front and in the Kordofan region, where a year of deadly drone strikes has left the two sides in a stalemate.

The Sudan war, now in its fourth year, has evolved into an ever more sophisticated conflict using armed drones, enabling both sides to launch far-reaching attacks without sacrificing their fighters.

More than 1,100 people were killed by drone strikes during the first five months of this year alone, according to UN figures.

The conflict, which the UN calls a "war of atrocities", has visited a litany of horrors on civilians including ethnic massacres, famine and indiscriminate attacks on residential areas.

The RSF has specifically been accused of genocide and systematic sexual violence.

Attempts to bring the warring parties to the table have failed, as former allies army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo jostle for the upper hand.

Both continue to receive robust support from external powers, according to the UN, who fuel the conflict with weapons and mercenaries.

Syria calls for independent probe into sinking of ship in Black Sea

Syria called on the International Maritime Organisation and Bulgarian authorities on Thursday to conduct an independent investigation into the sinking of a cargo ship in the Black Sea, whose 10 crew members including 9 Syrians were missing.

The investigation should look into why search and rescue operations stopped before the fate of the missing crew was determined, said Mazen Aloush, director for international relations of the Syrian General Authority for Ports and Customs.

Bulgaria said on Wednesday it had halted its search for the crew of a ship that sank after being hit by a drone about 70 nautical miles (130 km) off its coast.

Vice-Admiral Rumen Nikolov said no trace of the sailors had been found and that the rescue operation would not resume.

The ship, the Alfa Watan, was attacked early on Tuesday in Bulgaria's exclusive economic zone, Aloush said.

It remains unclear who carried out the attack.

Aloush added the authority was closely monitoring the incident and condemned the targeting of a civilian commercial vessel,

saying it represented a serious violation of maritime safety and a direct threat to sailors' lives, as well as international trade routes.

He urged authorities to use all available technical means to locate and inspect the wreckage to help establish the cause of the incident, and said the case should not be closed before all available avenues had been exhausted to determine the crew's fate.

He also called on international organisations and maritime bodies to strengthen measures to protect commercial shipping and crews in the Black Sea amid growing risks to maritime transport in the region.

Russia has struck cargo ships in the Black Sea with drones and missiles during its war with Ukraine.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Rumen Radev said on Wednesday that the nature of the cargo and the direction of travel of the ships could point to Russia, but said there was no evidence allowing Sofia to directly attribute responsibility.

Russia's embassy in Sofia said the merchant vessel was not among targets hit by Russian drones. (Reuters)

Outrage over US military plan to livestream firing squad execution

AFP
Washington

Condemnation of the Pentagon's plan to livestream the firing squad execution of a convicted military base mass shooter escalated yesterday, with the UN saying it would amount to torture and US lawmakers from both parties slamming the move.

Nidal Hasan's execution – which is scheduled for December 3 at Fort Hood, where he gunned down 13 people in 2009 – is set to be the first by US military firing squad since 1945.

Senator Thom Tillis, a member of US President Donald Trump's Republican Party, said Hasan

should be put to death, but that streaming it would be “beyond disgusting.”

“Public executions are what oppressive dictatorships like Iran and Afghanistan do,” Tillis said.

Representative Adam Smith, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, said the plan is “disturbing and makes a mockery of our legal system.”

A Pentagon official said the execution would be streamed live, after US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said “we’ll make sure that people are able to watch it, that it’s public.”

The UN’s High Commissioner for Human Rights condemned the move, telling AFP yesterday that “the livestreaming of an execution

is tantamount to a public execution and would breach the absolute prohibition of torture.”

Archbishop Paul Coakley, president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, said it was a “barbaric promotion of a culture of death and must be reconsidered.”

Hegseth said it would be the military’s first firing squad execution since World War II – a reference to the case of Eddie Slovik, who was executed in 1945.

“People need to understand that... there’s serious consequence for these types of things,” Hegseth said in a video disseminated on Thursday on official Pentagon X accounts.

“I kind of like the mentality we had in World War II, which was

win, which was understand when the enemy attacks you, you need to stand your ground,” Hegseth said.

The last US military execution was carried out in 1961, when John Bennett was hanged for rape and attempted murder. The Death Penalty Information Centre says that 135 soldiers have been executed by the US military since 1916.

According to rights group Amnesty International, at least 17 public executions are known to have been carried out in 2025 – six in Afghanistan and 11 in Iran.

The Pentagon announced earlier this week that Trump had approved Hasan’s execution for carrying out the Al Qaeda-inspired attack at the base in Texas.

Twelve of those Hasan killed and

30 of the wounded were soldiers. He was shot and partially paralysed by a civilian police officer who responded to the attack.

Hasan chose to conduct his own defense during the trial but called no witnesses and gave no testimony, and made no attempt to deny the charges. He was sentenced to death by a military jury in 2013.

Court-appointed defence attorneys expressed concern that he was seeking execution. The court that convicted Hasan was told he was opposed to the US military’s occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, and that he had spoken online with an alleged Al Qaeda figure, radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen subsequently killed in a US drone strike in Yemen.

New arrest linked to ShinyHunters hacking group

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Kash Patel said yesterday the bureau has made another arrest related to the ShinyHunters hacking group. In a post on X, Patel said, “Our agents in the field have arrested another suspected co-conspirator of the ShinyHunters group,” whom he said was believed to be responsible for the recent break-in at the FBI jobs site that has exposed a wide swathe of sensitive employee data. Patel’s statement did not provide details and the FBI did not immediately respond to a request for additional comment. It is the third publicly announced arrest since news of the breach broke. **(Reuters)**

Former ICC judge Navi Pillay awarded Nobel Peace Prize

AFP
Oslo

The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded yesterday to South Africa’s Navi Pillay, a judge whose career has seen her tackle allegations of genocide in Gaza, Rwanda and Myanmar, prompting a furious response from Israel.

Pillay, a former judge on the International Criminal Court (ICC), said she dedicated her award to the “survivors of international crimes”, speaking yesterday from the courtroom in Nuremberg, Germany where the trials prosecuting World War II Nazi leaders took place.

She criticised attacks on institutions such as the ICC – which has been in the crosshairs of US President Donald Trump. But hours later the US announced sanctions on the ICC, vowing to cripple the tribunal’s operations.

Israel meanwhile issued an angry response to the award announcement, saying it legitimised “anti-Israel hatred”, and that Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels must be “applauding from hell”.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu later said the nod showed the committee had “lost its moral compass” by honouring “a bigot”.

Pillay, 85, who is currently a judge on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in a case in which Myanmar also stands accused of genocide, has spent her career defending international law.

She has been “instrumental in ensuring that war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide are prosecuted,” said Jorgen Watne Frydnes, the chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee in Oslo.

The daughter of a bus driver in a family of Tamil descent, Pillay’s career has taken her from South African courts, where she defended anti-apartheid activists, to the International Criminal Tri-



International law champion Navi Pillay is pictured after she was awarded the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize. **(AFP)**

bunal for Rwanda after its 1994 genocide, and the ICC.

She headed the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI), which does not speak on behalf of the world body, and which last year found that genocide was occurring in Gaza.

Pillay told AFP at the time that her team had shared “thousands of pieces of information” with prosecutors at the International Criminal Court.

Israel had categorically rejected the report’s findings, slamming it as “distorted and false”.

Pillay’s “independence, her expertise and steadfastness have made her one of the most respected international jurists of our time,” the Nobel committee said.

In Nuremberg, Pillay said world leaders have a “legal obligation to protect human rights and refrain from war”. “We are living through an era when international law and human rights are under significant political attack,” she said, noting it was “particularly visible with the attacks on the International Criminal Court”.

Trump last month called for all ICC member states to quit the body. Yesterday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington would ban transactions with what he called a “rogue court.”

“Either the ICC will end its threats, or we will end the ICC,” Rubio said in a statement.

Frydnes told AFP after the announcement that the decision to award the prize to Pillay was “a clear message to those who are putting pressure on these institutions, to those who are sanctioning the judges and are attacking the institutions. That needs to stop”.

Earlier, Pillay reacted to the news about her prize by making a quip about Trump’s well-documented desire to win the prize himself. “If you clap a little bit more I may share this prize with Trump,” she said during a standing ovation captured on video by Amnesty International Secretary General Agnes Callamard in Nuremberg and posted on the social network X.

The Nobel committee did not

mention the allegations against Israel in Gaza in its comments awarding Pillay the prize.

When asked by AFP, it said it was up to the international court to rule on whether Israel’s actions in Gaza constitute a genocide.

Pillay noted that many had paid tribute to her courage in that report. “You can imagine how surprised I was,” she said. “Why would you need courage to speak the truth?”

Since returning to the White House in January 2025, Trump has made no secret of his desire to win the prize. But his war against Iran, his territorial expansion ambitions as in Greenland, his hard line on migrants, and his attacks on multilateralism and the media have, according to experts in Oslo, disqualified him.

The prize comes with a gold medal, a diploma and a prize sum of \$1.2mn. The award will be presented at a formal ceremony in Oslo on December 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of the prize’s creator, Swedish inventor and philanthropist Alfred Nobel.



President Donald Trump at the White House in Washington, DC. **(AFP)**

Trump sets up panel to probe Fed governor Cook

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump has set up a committee to probe Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook over alleged “false statements” linked to mortgages, renewing his efforts to oust her.

The committee is set to hold an in-person hearing on the matter on November 5, the White House said in a statement published yesterday, attracting swift criticism from a key Democratic lawmaker.

Elizabeth Warren, top Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee, charged that Trump “is convening an illegitimate show trial” in an attempt to exert control over the independent US central bank.

The move comes just months after the Supreme Court blocked Trump’s attempt to fire Cook, saying he had failed to give her notice and a chance to answer allegations that she faced. “As President, it is my job to ensure the laws are faithfully executed, including by firing subordinates who cannot be trusted to tell the truth and follow the law,” Trump said in the statement, dated October 7.

The notice added that the hearing would take place at the White House and last no longer than four hours. Cook’s lawyers expressed “grave doubts that this ‘hearing’ is a legitimate one that would conform to the law,” noting Trump’s repeated statements that he had already decided to fire the central bank official.

“We have engaged with the White House to evaluate whether the process proposed has a possibility of be-

ing a genuine one and not simply a box checking exercise,” added Cook’s lawyers Abbe Lowell and Norm Eisen in a statement.

Nonetheless, they said Cook “welcomes the opportunity to present the facts so she can clear her name and demonstrate there is no legal basis to fire her.”

Members of the committee convened by Trump include his top economic aide Kevin Hassett, the White House statement said.

The other two members are the chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Andrea Lucas, and acting director of the Office of Government Ethics, Keith Sonderling.

Trump’s statement added that Cook “shall appear at the hearing and be examined by the Committee, its representatives, and her legal counsel, if any.”

The committee is expected to submit a recommendation on whether there is cause to remove Cook from her position at the Fed.

No president has removed a sitting Fed governor in the central bank’s 113-year history.

Cook has rejected the White House’s mortgage fraud allegations, saying previously that Trump had no lawful grounds to fire her.

Trump has launched an unprecedented assault on the independence of the Fed in his second presidency, opening a criminal probe against former chairman Jerome Powell and attempting to oust Cook.

But a government watchdog recently cleared Powell of criminal wrongdoing in a costly Fed renovation project, and US Attorney General Todd Blanche said he would not reopen an investigation.

US pledges tens of millions to UN bodies in Geneva

Reuters
Geneva

The US has pledged tens of millions of dollars to UN organisations in Geneva, sources said – a move diplomats said showed Washington still wanted to maintain some engagement with the global body that it has repeatedly criticised.

The US had sent pledge letters to several UN organisations, including the Geneva-based World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the CITES body overseeing trade in wildlife.

The US State Department confirmed it had made a payment to the UN without giving details on the amounts. “This payment should not be mistaken for satisfaction with the status quo. It reflects recognition of reforms achieved – and an expectation of many more to come,” a US State Department spokesperson said.

The Trump administration had slashed funding to the UN and left many commitments unpaid, as it accused the UN of inefficiency and failing to fulfil its potential to broker peace deals. But it has been making moves this year to pay off a significant proportion of its debt, in a bid to maintain influence and

also to keep up its voting rights at a time when a new Secretary-General is being chosen and when China’s influence is rising.

The payments could help stabilise UN agencies that have implemented severe cutbacks in Geneva.

Delayed or unpaid US contributions can be crippling for UN bodies that have long relied on Washington as their top funder.

The WMO confirmed it had received a 15.1mn CHF (\$18.18mn), covering what the US owed to the agency for 2024. That payment maintained US voting rights in that body. Washington also pledged an extra 2.2mn CHF to the WMO, the body said, although 2025 and 2026 fees are outstanding, a spokesperson said. A spokesperson for the International Labour Organisation, owed more than 250mn CHF (\$300.88mn) by Washington, said it has not received a pledge.

Diplomats welcomed the pledges, saying that it indicated some level of UN commitment and to topics such as weather and wildlife not typically seen as US priorities.

For the UN general budget, a payment of \$725mn this month represented less than 20% of the more than \$4bn that the UN said in May the US owed – though Washington has said that total figure is much lower.

Arlington authorities sue over Trump’s triumphal arch plan, citing risks to aviation safety, emergency services

Reuters
Washington

Local authorities in Arlington, Virginia, sued the US Department of Interior and National Park Service seeking to block President Donald Trump’s proposed triumphal arch, saying it poses risks to aviation safety and emergency services.

The 250-foot arch project modeled on Paris’ Arc de Triomphe and planned for near Arlington National Cemetery, just across the Potomac River from Washington, could win approval as early as next month.

The Arlington County governing board said in its lawsuit that the project within a busy traffic corridor will cause “significant harm” to its residents and likely require changes to nearby flight paths.

The suit filed late on Thursday argues that the National Park Service failed to conduct a thorough review and argues it will harm public safety by clogging thoroughfares needed for emergency transport services.

“It threatens to increase noise and air pollution in Arlington by necessitating the diversion of certain flights into and out of Reagan National Airport,” the suit added.



Vehicles drive along the Memorial Bridge near Memorial Circle in Arlington, Virginia, the proposed site for President Donald Trump’s ‘Triumphal Arch’ in Washington, D.C. **(Reuters/File Photo)**

The White House said yesterday that the administration “has been fastidiously compliant with all procedural and legal requirements and are certain this meritless and dilatory lawsuit will be dismissed.” The Interior Department said it was following all laws and regulations.

The proposed arch would be within the airport’s main approach and departure corridors, raising concern among some aviation experts. The Federal Aviation Administration’s safety determination requires the arch to be marked with the flame

atop the structure and floodlight projectors to make it noticeable for pilots. The FAA dropped an earlier requirement for red obstruction lights, which it generally mandates on buildings more than 200 feet tall near airports, such as the nearby 555-foot Washington Monument.

The arch is part of Trump’s broader push to remake Washington, including renovating the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, redeveloping a golf course in East Potomac Park and adding his name to the John F Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts.

Preservationists say the projects would alter some of the capital’s most prominent historic landmarks.

Three veterans and a military historian have also sued to block the arch, arguing it would destroy the historic sight line between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery.

A federal judge in Washington last month ordered the Trump administration to give 48 hours’ notice before engaging in any activity on the proposed arch site, except for work to identify underground cultural artifacts.

Brazil's election offers Jair Bolsonaro a shot at revenge

AFP
Brasília

Brazil's right-wing front-runner Flavio Bolsonaro in Sunday's has vowed that, if elected, he will free his father Jair Bolsonaro from house arrest so that the former leader can place the presidential sash on his son at his inauguration.

The shock first-place finish by Flavio Bolsonaro in Sunday's opening-round election offered a touch of vindication for his father, who has long claimed he is a victim of political persecution.

The far-right firebrand has been serving a 27-year sentence since late last year over his efforts to cling to power after losing his 2022 re-election bid to Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, the incumbent who is now battling his son at the polls.

Due to recurring health issues, the 71-year-old Jair Bolsonaro has been serving his sentence under house arrest in Brasilia. Banned from social media, he received few visitors during the campaign, according to records reviewed by AFP.

On the campaign trail, Flavio Bolsonaro vowed that his father would "walk up the ramp of Planalto (the presidential palace)" at his inauguration.

The former president "needs to be free to embrace the people," Alfredo Gaspar, Flavio Bolsonaro's running mate, told AFP.



Brazilian presidential candidate Flavio Bolsonaro waves as he arrives to attend a campaign event in Rio de Janeiro. (Reuters)

However, he insisted that Jair Bolsonaro was "not hungry for power" nor seeking a role in any potential administration led by his son.

Jair Bolsonaro, his family and allies have maintained his innocence.

"The armed forces discussed staging a coup, so what? They discussed it, but they didn't stage the coup," Valdemar Costa Neto, president of Bolsonaro's Liberal Party, said in a podcast on Wednesday.

Jair Bolsonaro's lawyers recently filed a new request for release, seeking a review of the trial that led to his conviction.

They allege abuses and inconsistencies in the way the trial was

conducted by powerful Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, a figure reviled by Bolsonaro supporters.

The review request is currently before another justice, Kassio Nunes Marques, an appointee of Jair Bolsonaro.

Marques's office told AFP that he intends to submit the matter to the full court after the runoff election on October 25 between Flavio Bolsonaro and Lula.

However, proceedings could drag on beyond the scheduled inauguration date of January 5.

Flavio Bolsonaro has also pledged that the first act of his term would be to grant his father a presidential pardon.

Although a pardon could be

signed "minutes after" taking office, various bureaucratic hurdles would prevent it from taking effect that same day, Thiago Bottino, a law professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, told AFP.

Another option would be to seek amnesty for Jair Bolsonaro in the legislature, where the right now holds a wider majority after Sunday's election.

However, newly-elected lawmakers will only take up their seats in January.

Unlike a pardon, an amnesty would allow Jair Bolsonaro to regain his political rights and thus run for office again.

However, Brazil's constitution would prevent him from running for president right after his son in the 2030 elections.

Flavio Bolsonaro describes himself as more moderate than his father, who became known for misogynistic and racist remarks and often looked back fondly at the country's military dictatorship (1964-1985).

Flavio Bolsonaro holds some similar views to his dad: he has defended the military regime and questioned the role of human activity in global warming, saying extreme weather events are "cyclical."

But he has attempted to win over women voters and his more relaxed, genial manner has made him palatable to a wider range of Brazilians.

"He defends Jair Bolsonaro's legacy, but he is a different person – more capable of negotiation," his campaign manager Rogerio Marinho told AFP.

Helio Schwartzman, a columnist for the daily *Folha de Sao Paulo*, warned of the perils of revenge if the Bolsonaros win a second term in power, describing father and son as "a political collective."

Once in power, the Bolsonaros might lash out at opponents in ways similar to Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu, who seem to harbour "accumulated resentment," he said.

Jair Bolsonaro is currently on antidepressants and is "stable," according to the latest medical reports, although his wife, Michelle, has said that the elections have made him "a bit anxious."



A man is detained after a shooting reportedly involving US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers in the Bronx borough of New York City on Thursday. (Reuters)

Homeland Security chief slams New York mayor's demand to 'abolish ICE'

AFP
Washington

US Homeland Security chief Markwayne Mullin lashed out at New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani yesterday over his demand that federal immigration agents leave the city following the shooting of a Dominican man.

"His words are dangerous and incite hostility," Mullin said at a press conference during which he defended the conduct of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.

Mullin told AFP that Oscar Belgal, 28, the man shot and wounded in the Bronx by ICE agents on Thursday, had an extensive criminal history and was trying to evade arrest.

"He came to this country legally a few years ago, and ever since he's come in, he's committed crime and crime after crime," the Homeland Security secretary said.

Belgal suffered a superficial wound to the neck and was hospitalised. A five-year-old child who was in his car at the time was physically unharmed.

Mullin said ICE officers did not know there was a child in the car when they opened fire.

Mamdani, a Democrat, condemned the shooting and said he would ask President Donald Trump to halt ICE enforcement actions in New York.

"Abolish ICE," the mayor said on X.

"Mayor, if you abolish ICE, who's going to take criminals off the streets of your own town?" Mullin responded. "Who's going to take the murderers and the thieves and the gangbangers?"

Marcos Charles, a senior ICE official, also addressed the press conference and said Belgal had "refused lawful orders to exit his vehicle."

"He then accelerated his vehicle, smashing into two of our government ICE vehicles, and then weaponised his vehicle and proceeded to accelerate, going towards other officers," Charles said.

"Our officers, using their training, and believing that their life and the lives of their partners and general public were in danger, used their training and fired weapons," he said.

Several hundred protesters gathered peacefully at the scene of the shooting Thursday evening to express opposition to Trump's immigration crackdown.

Trump, a Republican, heavily criticised Mamdani before he took office in January, but the two men have since struck a surprisingly warm relationship.

ICE has been involved in several high-profile shootings this year, including the killing of two US citizens in Minneapolis, which sparked angry protests.

New York, a Democratic stronghold, is one of several US cities that bars its police force from assisting with federal immigration enforcement.

Third-place candidate in presidential race backs Bolsonaro

Right-wing candidate Flavio Bolsonaro on Thursday gained the support of Augusto Cury, the third-place candidate in Brazil's presidential election, bolstering his chances against incumbent leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

"My support is not a blank cheque," Cury said in a statement, after winning nearly 3% of the vote in Sunday's first round of voting, compared to Bolsonaro's 47% and Lula's 45%.

Bolsonaro, 45, is the eldest son of far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is under house arrest for plotting a coup after losing Brazil's last election in 2022.

Prior to the announcement, the younger Bolsonaro was leading in polls on Thursday, which gave the senator 52% compared to Lula's 48%, according to the Datafolha institute.

Lula, 81, downplayed the polls as he sought to secure a fourth term.

"I don't assess polls, I don't work like that. I work knowing that I need to have more votes than Flavio to win the election. I have 17 days to do that," he said at a press conference Thursday.

While Bolsonaro is hoping to bank on his allegiances in the final stretch of the campaign, Lula has been strengthening his presence on social media, where the right has an upper hand.

Thousands of people demonstrated on Thursday in Sao Paulo and other cities against the return of the far right to power in Brazil, a day after a similar march in Rio de Janeiro.

Renan Santos, the fourth most popular candidate with 2.6mn votes, has refused to support either leading candidate. (AFP)

Ecuador deploys US Reaper drones in anti-narco fight

AFP
Quito

Ecuador said Thursday that the US had supplied it with two powerful drones to combat drug traffickers that have unleashed violence across the country.

The defence ministry on Instagram said the MQ-9 Reaper drones, which are capable of strikes, would be used for surveillance and intelligence gathering. Ecuador is one of 14 Latin American countries allied to US President Donald Trump that have joined his anti-cartel "Shield of the Americas."

Washington has already sent troops and military aircraft to the Ecuador to combat a surge in violence linked to the cocaine trade.

Quito will use the US drones to monitor its 730 km border with Colombia, one of the main sources of the cocaine that flows through Ecuador's ports, Defence Minister Gian Carlo Lofredo said in a video posted on X.

"Drug trafficking will have less room to operate," the defense ministry vowed on Instagram.

The feared Reapers, widely used by the US in its war against Iran, serve chiefly for reconnaissance and precision strikes.

The US has reportedly been using Reaper drones for its deadly strikes on boats accused of drug trafficking in the eastern Pacific and Caribbean.

Ecuador has become a key gateway to international markets for cocaine smuggled from neighbouring Colombia and Peru.

Rubio urges Figuera to join talks with Venezuela govt

AFP
Washington

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio yesterday called on all opposition factions in Venezuela to join talks with the interim government of Delcy Rodriguez on a future political transition.

Rubio made the comment as he welcomed Dinorah Figuera, who led the opposition bloc that won a majority in Venezuela's last internationally recognised elections in 2015, to the State Department.

The negotiations are proceeding with Washington's approval after the US military's ouster of president Nicolas Maduro in January, which led to Rodriguez assuming

power. The next round of talks are scheduled to begin on October 14, Rubio told reporters, adding that Figuera had Washington's "100% support."

"We ask all elements within the opposition, and all elements of society, to participate in and support this process," Rubio said in Spanish.

So far, Rodriguez's government and Figuera's team have completed two rounds of talks, with the most tangible result being the release of political prisoners.

But cracks in the opposition have appeared, with some factions complaining about the slow pace of progress.

Nobel peace laureate and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado remains in exile, though she has said she will not interfere

and hopes to see concrete results from the scheduled talks.

Figuera and Machado have nevertheless publicly been at odds about the direction and pace of the talks.

"This is the best opportunity Venezuela has had almost in a generation, not just to have elections that are free and fair but, in addition, to leave behind an enduring democracy," Rubio said.

Figuera said it was "not an easy process, but it's a possible one."

"We believe that following this roadmap, with the support of the US, will undoubtedly lead our country to progress," she stated.

When asked when elections might take place in her country, Figuera said: "We will ensure the path and the roadmap are in place for elections to take place."



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio gestures while boarding a plane at Lisbon Airport, Portugal on Thursday. (Reuters)

Hurricane Isaias set to strike US Gulf Coast

AFP
Pensacola, US

Hurricane Isaias rapidly intensified into a major category 3 storm yesterday, triggering mandatory evacuations as it barrelled towards the US Gulf Coast where it was projected to make landfall in the evening.

Isaias is the first hurricane of an Atlantic season held in check by a historic El Nino, and is set to become the first hurricane to strike the US mainland since Milton in 2024.

Fuelled by record-warm Gulf waters heated by climate change, it strengthened rapidly over the past day. "Isaias is coming in right over us," Jane Drescoll, a 63-year-old resident of Pensacola said, clutching her hat as she spoke to AFP on the beach.

She had stocked up on propane and water and said she had been through eight hurricanes since moving to the area a decade ago.

The storm's intensity could



People put up shutters before the arrival of Hurricane Isaias in Pensacola, Florida. (AFP)

fluctuate through the afternoon, but forecasters expect it to slam into the western Florida panhandle at or near major hurricane strength – meaning Category 3 – before weakening over land.

The National Hurricane Center said Isaias was packing maximum sustained winds of 120 miles per hour, and was located about 195 miles south of Pensacola.

Mandatory evacuation orders are in effect in several Florida counties, and states of emergency have been declared in parts of Alabama, Florida and Georgia.

"The resources have been flowing, the preparations have been extensive and we are taking this storm very, very seriously," Florida Governor Ron DeSantis told a press briefing. "We know that this is go-

ing to be a major event in one way or another."

Storm surge combined with the tide is expected to flood normally dry areas, with the NHC warning that water could reach as high as nine feet around the Alabama-Florida border. At least two airports in northwestern Florida were set to suspend operations.

Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin said federal authorities were co-ordinating with state and local governments. "To everyone in the storm's path: ask that you also do your part to stand ready. Now is the time to prepare," he posted on X.

President Donald Trump is scheduled to attend today's college football game between the University of Georgia and the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, but said this week he will "let the hurricane determine" his travel plans.

Isaias's late arrival is largely due to an El Nino of historic strength.

El Nino, the warm phase of the El Nino-Southern Oscillation



The waves churning in the ocean in Pensacola Beach, Florida. (AFP)

(ENSO), creates strong vertical wind shear over the Atlantic that tends to tear storms apart.

In the Pacific, it has the opposite effect, weakening shear and giving storms room to grow.

The Pacific has already produced several hurricanes this year, some of which peaked as Category 5.

Still, "there are some pockets where hurricanes are able to develop, and that's exactly what happened with Isaias," Marc Alessi, a climate scientist with the Union of Concerned Scientists, told AFP.

"Sea surface temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico are in record territory because of fossil fuel-driven

climate change," he added.

"Isaias was able to tap into all of that energy in the ocean to develop into a major hurricane."

Isaias has disrupted oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico, with platforms and rigs evacuated. As of Thursday, about 63% of the region's oil production had been temporarily halted, taking nearly 1.3mn barrels a day off the market, according to the Marine Minerals Administration (MMA). About 57% of gas production was also suspended.

Chevron and Shell have shut down production at several Gulf sites.

Malaysia shuts schools in many parts of country due to haze

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia closed schools in Kuala Lumpur and other parts of the country yesterday, as haze from fires in neighbouring Indonesia again plunged local air quality to among the world's worst.

Toxic smoke from peatland and forest fires has shrouded cities in the region for more than a month, sending respiratory complaints skyrocketing.

The school closures came as Malaysia's leader discussed the choking smoke with his Indonesian counterpart and called for an urgent regional meeting.

Air quality in Kuala Lumpur has been firmly in "unhealthy levels" this week, with a Swiss-based air quality monitor ranking the Malaysian capital among the world's most polluted cities on most days. Malaysia's Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek said she has instructed whole school closures in four states and two federal territories as well as one partial closure in the central Pahang State.

"In the future, we will ensure that any decision to close schools is notified in advance so that parents have sufficient time to prepare," Fadhlina said late on Thursday.

Malaysia's King Sultan Ibrahim weighed in on the matter on Thursday, saying schools should be closed as air quality readings reached 150 or higher on the Air Pollutant Index (API).



Traffic move along a highway amid hazy condition in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. (AFP)

Under Malaysian guidelines, API readings above 100 are classified as unhealthy, above 200 as very unhealthy, above 300 as hazardous, while readings beyond 500 constitute the threshold for declaring a local emergency.

Kuala Lumpur on Friday showed a reading of around 170 API.

The city was the second-most polluted globally behind neighbouring Singapore on Friday morning, Swiss-based air monitor IQAir said.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said on Thursday he discussed the fire situation with the Indonesian leader Prabowo Subianto.

"The haze issue is indeed at a worrying level. And I have personally contacted President Prabowo," Anwar said.

"And he also agreed to take the necessary steps," Anwar said, without going into specific details.

He said Malaysia has been taking measures to combat the haze, including increasing attempts to trigger rain via cloud seeding.

Experts said the flames are being fanned by a turbo-charged El Nino weather phenomenon, causing the worst pollution conditions in years.

Anwar said he asked Malaysia's Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan to contact the 11-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations'

secretariat for an urgent meeting between environmental ministers to discuss the matter.

"So these are all the steps we are taking, but we are monitoring and will try the measures that we ought to take next," Anwar said.

Singapore's air quality levels too dipped into the "very unhealthy" range with a reading of 205 on the Air Quality Index, according to the IQAir website.

The AQI converts measurements of pollutants into a single figure indicating air quality and potential health risks.

Readings above 150 are classified as unhealthy, while levels above 300 are considered hazardous.

Malaysia to work towards Myanmar's reintegration into Asean, says Anwar

Reuters
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said on Thursday his government would do "whatever possible" to ensure Myanmar was re-integrated into the Southeast Asian bloc Asean, even as pro-democracy activists warned against legitimising the rule of its military-backed leader Min Aung Hlaing.

Anwar also pledged to continue working with Myanmar, including on the repatriation of thousands of Myanmar nationals from Malaysia - a move that has been widely criticised by the United Nations and rights groups concerned about the risks from an ongoing civil war.

Former Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was on a two-day visit to Malaysia as he seeks greater international legitimacy after becoming president in April following an election that Western nations and rights groups widely criticised as a sham.

Min Aung Hlaing and other senior Myanmar officials have been barred from attending summits of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) after failing to adhere to an Asean-brokered peace plan following the coup, but some member countries, including Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, have sought to re-establish ties.

Malaysia's Anwar acknowledged ongoing concerns about democratic processes in Myanmar but said differences must be respected, adding that Min Aung Hlaing had shown a willingness to be collaborative.

"I would say that we and our part in Malaysia, will do whatever is possible to make sure that we enhance this collaboration and ultimately, take Myanmar as part of our community of nations, without prejudice, and particularly in the context of Asean," Anwar told a media briefing, following a meeting with Min Aung Hlaing.

Min Aung Hlaing's visit was met with protests by Myanmar's pro-democracy activists and resistance groups, who urged Asean not to confer political legitimacy on his presidency.

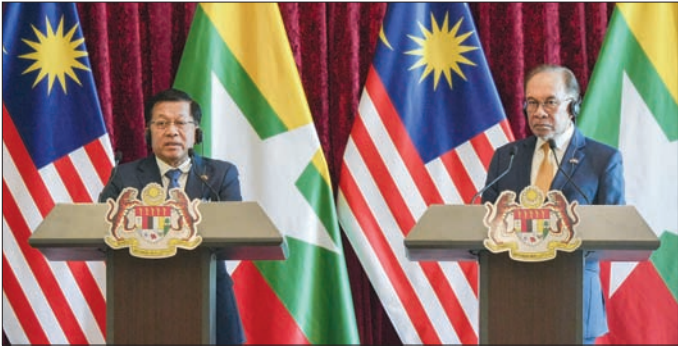
"His legitimacy is a nightmare for the whole nation, for the people who have lost their lives, who have sacrificed their homes," said Swam Saung, a member of the Myanmar Affairs Alliance, at a gathering in Kuala Lumpur.

He also expressed fear for Myanmar nationals being repatriated, saying they could face forced conscription given that the military remained in conflict with various ethnic armed groups.

"They are forcing their own people to fight against their own people. So this is horrifying," he said.

The Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF), an umbrella organisation that includes several major Myanmar armed ethnic groups and democratic bodies, said Malaysia had traditionally upheld principles of humanitarian values, democracy, and human rights during engagements on Myanmar within Asean.

"Receptive diplomatic hosting of Min Aung Hlaing at the head-of-state level stands in direct contradiction to these established principles," it said in a statement.



Myanmar's President Min Aung Hlaing (left) and Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim during a joint press conference following their meeting in Putrajaya, Malaysia, on Thursday. (Reuters)

Prosecutors drop bribery charge in Philippine VP impeachment trial

Prosecutors said yesterday they are dropping a bribery charge against Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte, who still faces three other charges at her ongoing impeachment trial that could lead to her removal from office. The 48-year-old is also charged with misuse of state funds, unexplained wealth, and an alleged assassination threat against one-time ally President Ferdinand Marcos.

If the Senate finds her guilty on any of the charges, she will be stripped of the vice presidency and permanently barred from elected office, ending her bid to become president in 2028.

Prosecutors from the House of Representatives, which voted to impeach Duterte in May, said the decision to drop the bribery charge would speed up the trial, which hit its 37th day Friday. "We think we have presented enough (evidence). To drag it further might be stretching the patience not only of the people



Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte (front right). (AFP/File photo)

but also the senator-judges," Congressman and prosecutor Jonathan Keith Flores told reporters. Prosecutors have already presented evidence and witnesses in support of the assassination and misuse of funds charges. Yesterday, prosecutor Jose Manuel Diokno told

the court they had presented their last witness in the hidden wealth case. That witness will be cross-examined on Monday.

The Senate had originally given prosecutors 60 trial days to present their case, after which Duterte will present her own witnesses and evidence.

Last month, in a ruling widely seen as a blow to Duterte, the 24-seat Senate approved a lower threshold of votes needed to find her guilty, potentially making it easier to execute her ouster.

With at least four senators loyal to the vice president now absent from the trial - two in jail, another in hiding and a fourth on extended medical furlough abroad - only 14 votes are needed to find her guilty.

Senators voted that the constitutionally required two-thirds guilty verdict by "all members of the Senate" referred only to those "capable of participating". (AFP)

Indonesia to boost biofuel production from sugarcane

Indonesia will "open new plantations" for sugarcane used in bioethanol production, the government said, even as it announced a halt to deforestation for rice paddy expansion. The government said last month it would increase the ethanol component of biofuel used for transport from five to 20% (E20) in a bid to reduce reliance on imports of increasingly expensive petroleum products.

To achieve this goal, the country would need about 4mn kilolitres of ethanol per year, according to the energy ministry - many times what it produces today. New sugar cane plantations were therefore needed, said Food Minister Zulkifli Hasan on Tuesday.

"E20 can be (sourced) from sugar cane, cassava, and others... If we want sugarcane, we have to open new plantations," Zulkifli was quoted as saying by state news agency Antara.

Last month, Agriculture Minister Andi Amran Sulaiman said the government wanted to develop about a million hectares for sugar cane production. "The most important is sugar cane. We need 1mn hectares," Andi said. He added the government would seek to convert already degraded land before moving into forested areas, but did not rule it out. Zulkifli's comments came on the same day climate envoy Hashim Djojohadikusumo said Indonesia will halt its programme to clear millions of hectares of land for rice production, having already achieved self-sufficiency levels of the staple grain. More than 50,000 hectares of rainforest, savannah, peat swamp and wetlands had been cleared for sugar cane and rice since 2024, according to the NGO Mighty Earth. (AFP)

Thai court dismisses detention challenge by China reporter

AFP
Bangkok

A Thai court yesterday dismissed a challenge by a Chinese investigative journalist over his prolonged detention in Bangkok, a day after authorities began proceedings to extradite him to China, his lawyer said.

Bai Zhaocong, who is recognised by the UN as a refugee, left China in 2023 and arrived the following year in Thailand.

The 56-year-old had been detained at a Bangkok immigration centre since January, and he earlier filed a petition against what he said was unlawful detention by Thai immigration authorities.

On Thursday, Thai prosecutors arrested Bai under an extradition warrant issued by Beijing and

moved him to a remand prison.

At a hearing yesterday morning, which was scheduled weeks earlier, Bangkok South Criminal Court rejected Bai's challenge against his detention, according to his lawyer.

"Because there is an extradition request from China saying he is wanted in China, the (court ruled that) detention is necessary," Nadthasiri Bergman told AFP.

Bai was not in court yesterday but is expected to appear at a January 25 hearing in the extradition case.

China's foreign ministry said in July that Bai was suspected of extortion and bribery, and an extradition request had been submitted to Thailand.

Bergman said the Chinese embassy in Bangkok sent a letter to the Thai Immigration Office in June 2025 asking to extradite Bai,

while an official request dated March 4, 2026 was sent to the Office of the Attorney-General.

Rights campaigners believe Bai's life could be at risk if he is returned to China, saying he faced growing persecution over two decades of work exposing government corruption.

An undisclosed third country has offered Bai asylum but two attempts to travel there were cancelled this year after Thai immigration authorities withheld exit clearance without explanation, his legal team says.

Reporters Without Borders has called his treatment "scandalous" while Maya Wang, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said the move to extradite Bai was "deeply troubling".

"Thailand should not succumb to pressure from Beijing to ex-

tradite Bai based on trumped up charges," she said.

Thailand is not a party to the UN Refugee Convention, but is bound by the international legal principle of non-refoulement, which bars countries from sending people back to places where their lives or freedom are in danger.

Questioned by AFP at a regular briefing yesterday, Chinese foreign affairs ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning urged all countries to co-operate in "eliminating lawless areas and safe havens for fugitives".

"China's judicial organs handle cases in strict accordance with the law, carry out law enforcement and judicial co-operation with relevant countries in accordance with the law and agreements, and fully safeguard the lawful rights of relevant parties," she said.

Attack aircraft, military vehicles present at new China-Laos base, satellite images show

Reuters
Hong Kong/Bangkok

Light attack aircraft and military vehicles have arrived at the new China-Laos joint training facility announced last Tuesday, according to satellite images reviewed by Reuters.

The images, taken by commercial satellite provider Vantor, show what security analysts believe are eight K-8 light attack jets and more than two dozen support vehicles on a runway that is still being built - China's latest expansion of its overseas military presence.

Taken on September 30, the day after China's defence ministry announced it had set up the facility at Ban Keun outside the capital Vientiane, the images also show extensive construction work around the runway.

The swift development of the new facility is being closely watched by regional military at-

taches and security scholars, some of whom say its construction potentially marks China's first fully fledged overseas military base in Southeast Asia.

Despite more than 20 years of intense military modernisation, China is widely perceived to lack a strong network of overseas facilities beyond the South China Sea, port access in Ream, Cambodia and a logistics base in Djibouti.

Rachel Vandenbrink, a senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said the selection of Ban Keun for a facility that the People's Liberation Army could access "is likely more about a target of opportunity than filling an obvious operational need."

"Laos does have some geostrategic value as an accessible foothold in mainland Southeast Asia, given its shared border with China and infrastructure links, including (its) railway," Vandenbrink said.

The Chinese defence ministry did not immediately respond to



A satellite image shows what security analysts believe are Y-8 light attack fighters and support vehicles at a new China-Laos joint training facility in Ban Keun, Vientiane Province, Laos, (Reuters)

Reuters' request for comment.

The Lao embassy in Bangkok and the Lao foreign ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Singapore-based security analysts Collin Koh and Alexander Neill, as well as Vantor specialists, said the planes appeared to be

Hongdu JL-8 aircraft, which both the Chinese and Lao air forces operate.

Also known as the K-8, the two-seater aircraft is extensively used for training as well as having light attack capabilities. It was jointly developed by China and Pakistan and is exported to other militaries.

Laos currently has four of the planes, according to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies' annual assessment of the world's militaries. Koh, a scholar at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, described the Laotian planes as being of "questionable serviceability".

As construction continues, diplomats and analysts are keeping watch for any sign of air defences, ammunition and fuel storage as well as surveillance facilities - all of which could point to the base serving broader military functions beyond training.

Neill said while the airfield looked relatively short and innocuous at present, it could in future serve larger aircraft, including signals intelligence and electronic-surveillance planes to extend China's reach into Southeast Asia.

"It looks like the airfield has been engineered to accommodate a runway extension allowing larger aircraft to operate," said Neill,

an adjunct fellow at Hawaii's Pacific Forum think-tank.

In helping Laos build up Ban Keun, China is now occupying a site the US used covertly at the height of the Vietnam War.

During the US war against communist forces in Laos in the 1970s, Ban Keun was an airfield known as "Lima Site 44" used by Air America, an airline discreetly owned by the Central Intelligence Agency, according to records shared with Reuters by Ryan Wolfson-Ford, a Southeast Asia specialist at the Library of Congress.

The airline carried American-backed troops from the country's Hmong highland minority as well as supplies into rough mountain airstrips known as "Lima Sites".

As early as 1968, Ban Keun was used as a point from where Air America helicopters delivered Hmong troops to other combat zones, said Dr Joachim Leeker, an academic who has written about the history of the airline.

Burnham's Labour fends off left-wing Greens in London

Reuters
London

Andy Burnham's Labour Party won an election for a parliamentary seat vacated by former leader Keir Starmer yesterday, fending off a strong challenge from the left-wing Green Party in a boost for the British prime minister.

Labour candidate Sagal Abdi-Wali, the leader of the local council, won the seat in the central London constituency of Holborn and St Pancras with 12,292 votes, compared with 8,928 for Zack Polanski, the Green Party leader.

The victory, which had been expected, will buoy Burnham, installed as prime minister by lawmakers fearful Starmer's unpopularity was opening the way for a challenge by the populist Reform UK party at the next national election.

After losing left-wing support to the Greens earlier this year, Labour looks to have won many voters back, a result which triggered more questions about the leadership of Polanski, who had promised to make his party "an eco-populist" movement.

The 43-year-old former actor and hypnotherapist, who had some success in drawing voters away from Labour before Burnham came to power, has come under fire after party members passed a motion declaring that Zionism is racism at their annual conference.



Labour candidate Sagal Abdi-Wali reacts following her victory in the Holborn and St Pancras by-election, triggered by the resignation of former prime minister Keir Starmer as MP for Holborn and St Pancras, in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

The move, which called for "the establishment of a single democratic Palestinian State in all of historic Palestine" was criticised by Jewish groups, other parties and most Green Party lawmakers. Polanski did not vote on the motion.

After conceding defeat in the fiercely contested by-election, Polanski answered his critics, saying he would stay on as leader, and described the result as part of "Andy Burnham's honeymoon."

Yet he did not get a full endorsement from the party's former leader, Caroline Lucas, who struggled to contain her anger over what she said was his lack of leadership over the motion on Zionism at last week's conference.

Asked whether he should stay on as leader, she told the BBC: "I think just let's see what happens

in the coming days and weeks."

"I want him to speak now about what has happened, I want him to show the leadership that was frankly missing on Sunday."

Labour's Abdi-Wali, who arrived in Britain as a child refugee from Somalia, said her victory was a defeat for "those who seek to divide us".

"We have a responsibility to defend what we've built and pass it on," she said.

It was an early test for Burnham, whose predecessor, Starmer, stood down as a lawmaker in September after being ousted as prime minister in July.

Under Starmer, Labour had also ceded ground to the Green Party, which made record gains in London in May's local elections with its widening appeal among younger, left-leaning voters in the

capital and other urban areas.

The Greens have fallen back in opinion polls since, after Burnham made policy pitches that boosted Labour's standing among voters to the left, including a tougher line on Israel and a more ambitious approach to relations with the European Union.

Bridget Phillipson, Labour's chair, said the election result showed the party's "message of hope is really cutting through", describing the Greens' conference motion as something that held "British Jews to a standard that we do not apply to others".

"We tackled antisemitism in our own ranks but all political parties have to be ever vigilant," she told Times radio, describing a period when Labour had to deal with antisemitism in the party under former leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Polanski, who is Jewish, was questioned repeatedly after the by-election over the conference vote on Zionism. The Green leader responded by saying that he believed displacement of Palestinian people and "ongoing genocide" in Gaza were racist. Israel rejects claims of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

For now, he said, the Green Party should focus on whether Labour's first budget under Burnham on October 28 delivers.

"So many people told me on the doorstep that they want to give Andy Burnham a chance," Polanski told broadcasters. "Well, he's got a chance now. Let's see what he does with it."

King Charles paid Andrew's £1.5mn repair bill for former Windsor mansion

AFP
London

Britain's King Charles III privately loaned his brother, disgraced former prince Andrew, £1.5mn (\$2mn) to cover repair costs to his former residence, a person familiar with the matter said yesterday.

The king last year ousted the former prince, now known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, from the Royal Lodge on the Windsor estate near London over his ties to the late offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Andrew, 66, was stripped of his royal titles, and moved to a smaller house on the monarch's Sandringham Estate in eastern England while Charles continues to support him.

The Crown Estate, an independent, commercial business that oversees royal property and hands profits to the government, said Andrew paid £1.8mn to cover repairs needed to the Royal Lodge after he moved out.

He received compensation of 302,000 (\$400,000) for exiting his lease, reducing the total due to 1.5mn pounds, which The Crown Estate said it received.

A person familiar with the matter, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP the king made funds available from his private income as a loan to ensure The Crown Estate was paid promptly.



Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor reacts as he arrives at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. (AFP/File Photo)

The king earns personal income from private estates as well as other sources such as art, investments and private savings.

This is separate from the funding he receives from the government, which can only be used for official royal business.

The Times broadsheet wrote: "It is not known how Andrew intends to repay the King, given his lack of independent income."

Andrew had paid a one-million-pound "premium" to lease the Royal Lodge in 2003, agreeing to spend £7.5mn on improvements to secure a 75-year lease on a peppercorn rent.

This summer the National Audit Office revealed that Andrew had been earning a private income for more than two decades by subletting three cottages on the Royal Lodge's grounds.

2 Latvians arrested inside UK military base bailed

AFP
London

Two Latvian men who were arrested by UK police inside a military base in southeastern England managed by the US military were released on bail yesterday.

The men, aged 32 and 36, were let out "with strict conditions, while detectives continue their investigation," UK counter-terrorism police said.

They were found at the Royal Air Force (RAF) Molesworth base in Cambridgeshire — linked to US and Nato intelligence hubs — early Thursday after police located a "small breach" in the perimeter.

Initially held on suspicion of trespassing and criminal damage, they were later suspected of entering a prohibited place "for a purpose prejudicial to

the UK", said police.

The arrests came days after a major incident at another airbase, RAF Fairford in southwest England, which authorities said were not linked.

Following that incident — in which UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham said there were "strong indications" of Iranian involvement — the US withdrew its B-1 bombers stationed at Fairford.

"We're very aware of the recent heightened interest and concern around military sites, but there is nothing from our investigation so far to suggest this incident is connected to the events at RAF Fairford last week," counter-terrorism policing head Helen Flanagan said.

"A key line of enquiry remains to identify any potential motivation behind why the men were at that location, and this includes whether it may be connected to any criminal activity."

NZ censor says it would be powerless to block livestreamed US execution

Reuters
Wellington

New Zealand's national censor said yesterday it would not have the authority to block Internet users from accessing a livestream of the execution of a former Army major planned by the US, as rights groups pressed governments to protest.

Nidal Hasan, a former Army psychiatrist, was convicted of killing 13 people and wounding 32 others at the Fort Hood military base in Texas in 2009.

The Pentagon said on Thursday Hasan's December 3 execution by firing squad in Texas would be livestreamed, in what would be an unprecedented broadcast of a US execution.

The decision is likely to draw scrutiny from governments around the world amid mounting efforts to protect young people in particular from harmful Internet content.

One of the first countries to react was New Zealand, where the Classification Office, an independent government body, highlighted difficulties in restricting access to such material during a live Internet broadcast.

"The Classification Office cannot classify a livestream event as it is taking place, and we, nor any other body, has the authority to block access to a livestream event," a spokesperson for New Zealand's Classifi-

cation Office said in a statement.

New Zealand Chief Censor Caroline Flora said the threshold for banning content under New Zealand law was high and required balancing freedom of expression with the likelihood of harm.

"Distressing as content may be, it is not always unlawful," she said, adding that she could not speculate on the likely classification of something before it exists.

Other agencies such as online safety organisation Netsafe may provide information and advice as more details emerge, she added.

The New Zealand government did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In Europe, some countries were looking into what they could do, though the sense was that it would be difficult to block the livestream.

The Dutch government said it felt it did not have the tools to do anything. Denmark, France and Spain said they were studying what they could do.

The news has additional resonance in New Zealand, where a gunman killed 51 people at two mosques in 2019, livestreaming his crimes on Facebook.

The country has since been at the forefront of combating violent content online. Then-prime minister Jacinda Ardern launched a global campaign on the issue months after the attack.

AFP
New Delhi

Thousands of police were deployed across the Indian capital yesterday, a day before planned protests to demand the election commission chief step down over alleged voter-roll irregularities.

Demonstrations have erupted this month over the Election Commission of India's (ECI) "special intensive revision" of electoral rolls, which the commission says is intended to remove duplicate and ineligible voters.

Opposition parties and critics allege the exercise could disenfranchise voters to the benefit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

A wave of street protests, including in New Delhi, has attracted key leaders from India's main opposition Congress party, including Rahul Gandhi, who was briefly detained during rallies this week.

Protesters, including from the youth-led Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) movement, are calling for mass rallies in New Delhi today.

Gandhi, the leader of the opposition in parliament, and other opposition leaders are expected to meet President Droupadi Murmu yesterday to express complaints about ECI chief Gyanesh Kumar.

The ECI, India's constitutional body responsible for conducting elections, has rejected allegations of wrongdoing.

More than 20,000 police and paramilitary officers have been deployed in the capital ahead of the protest, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

Yellow metal barricades blocked key roads in the city centre, re-



Security personnel walk past barricades installed at the Jantar Mantar protest site in New Delhi yesterday on the eve of the planned protest against the country's Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar over alleged voter-roll irregularities. (AFP)



A worker installs CCTV surveillance cameras near the Jantar Mantar protest site in New Delhi yesterday on the eve of the planned protest by the Cockroach Janta Party. (AFP)

stricting access to the government-designated protest site of Jantar Mantar, AFP reporters saw.

Police have not authorised rallies at the site, and ordered restrictions on the metro subway system from yesterday evening "in view of proposed protests and the likelihood of unruly mob movement," a police letter to the metro operator said.

The Supreme Court said there

should be no complete shutdown of metro services, and that train cancellations and road closures should be reviewed.

The court also asked the government to consider providing a designated protest venue with adequate facilities.

Mobile Internet services would also be suspended in the central Delhi area from Friday night, according to a government order.

Montenegro expels Russian blogger wanted by US

AFP
Podgorica

Montenegro yesterday ordered the expulsion of a popular Russian pro-Ukraine war blogger Mikhail Zvinchuk on national security grounds, just hours after his arrest, the interior ministry said.

Zvinchuk, who served with the Russian army in Syria and founded the Rybar Telegram channel, is wanted by the US for alleged election interference and has been sanctioned by the European Union for promoting pro-Russia propaganda.

Montenegro's police directorate and the National Security Agency (ANB) "identified five Russian nationals whose stay in the country was cancelled and who were issued



Russian military blogger Mikhail Zvinchuk, who runs Telegram account called Rybar (fisherman in Russian), attends an AFP interview in Moscow. (AFP/File Photo)

expulsion orders on grounds of national and internal security," an interior ministry statement said.

The operation was carried out with the "support of international partners", it added. Authorities did not say where Zvinchuk and the other four would be sent to.

The five, identified only by their initials, entered Montenegro less than two days ago, and were staying at a hotel in the coastal town of Risan, the statement said.

"M.Z. was identified as leader and member of the Russian political-hybrid network Rybar."

Rybar, in a statement on its Telegram channel, confirmed the arrests of Zvinchuk, 35, and other Russian citizens. The arrest was also confirmed by Montenegro's Prime Minister Milojko Spajic.

Rybar said the group were in Montenegro "legally and officially" and had planned to film at the Cetinje Monastery, a Serbian Orthodox site.

Portugal PM warns courts over US base probe

Portuguese Prime Minister Luis Montenegro argued yesterday the US use of the Lajes Air Base during the Iran conflict was fully legal and urged the judiciary not to make political judgments, after prosecutors opened an inquiry last week into the government's authorisation to use the base. The probe, triggered by a complaint from a leftist opposition party, adds a legal dimension to a politically sensitive issue. Several European nations have restricted or refused US military aircraft access to their airspace or bases in connection with the war in Iran. (Reuters)

Is it legal to livestream execution?

The Pentagon has said that it would livestream the firing squad execution of the man who killed 13 people at the Fort Hood military base in 2009, raising questions about the legality of the unprecedented announcement. Here's what US law says about public executions and death by firing squad.

Yes. The US Supreme Court said in a unanimous 1879 decision that execution by firing squad is not "cruel and unusual punishment" prohibited by the Constitution. The justices last year cleared the way for South Carolina to carry out its first execution by firing squad in decades.

Five states currently allow executions by firing squad: Idaho, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Utah. The Trump administration earlier this year said it would allow execution by firing squad in the federal prison system.

The US Army also once regularly carried out executions by firing squad of US soldiers found guilty of desertion or other offences. Hundreds of US soldiers were sentenced to death during the Civil War from 1861 to 1865. Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the president is the only person who can approve a death sentence for a member of the US armed services. President Donald Trump on October 5 signed off on the Pentagon's plan to execute the

Fort Hood gunman, Nidal Hasan, a former Army psychiatrist.

Executions in the US were once public spectacles, but in the last century have been carried out in correctional facilities away from the public eye. In 1936, a man convicted of rape was hanged in front of thousands in Owensboro, Kentucky, while the following year, hundreds watched a public hanging in Missouri.

A US law prohibits the recording or broadcasting of executions in the federal prison system. But military regulations have not applied that same prohibition to military executions. Hasan was convicted of premeditated murder by a military jury in 2013, following a court-martial trial. State laws regulate who can witness executions, generally limiting access to authorised officials, family members, legal counsel, and a handful of media representatives. Courts have long rejected lawsuits brought by media organizations seeking broader public access to executions.

In 2021, a judge denied a request by an internet company to livestream the lethal injection execution of Timothy McVeigh, an anti-government militant who bombed a federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168 people. The Justice Department did provide a restricted, closed-circuit television broadcast exclusively for survivors of the bombing and victims' families. — Reuters

Vance casts early ballot



US Vice-President JD Vance casts his ballot during early voting at the Hamilton County Board of Elections yesterday in Norwood, Ohio. Vance traveled to Ohio to cast his early ballot and campaign for local Republican candidates ahead of the midterm elections. (Reuters)

Israel's pogrom in Gaza

Gaza Media Office director to QNA: Israeli occupation wiped out 2,700 families, caused more than \$80bn in losses over the past three years



QNA
Gaza

Director of the Government Media Office in the Gaza Strip Dr Ismail al-Thawabta revealed the catastrophic toll of the ongoing Israeli occupation aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza over the past three years, confirming that preliminary direct losses across 15 vital sectors have exceeded \$80bn.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Thawabta said that, as the Israeli occupation's aggression against Gaza enters its fourth year, the Strip is undergoing near-total destruction, with more than 90% of its infrastructure affected. He noted that the occupation has dropped more than 230,000 tonnes of explosives on the besieged area, home to over 2.4mn people.

He added that the occupation has imposed military control-through firepower and forced displacement - over more than 80% of the Strip's territory, pointing out that the occupation deliberately misled civilians by bombing areas it had designated as "humanitarian and safe," including Al-Mawasi in the southern Strip, which was struck more than 287 times, turning displacement zones into daily death traps.

Addressing the horrific human cost of the ongoing aggression, the Director of the Government Media Office said the recorded death toll among those brought to hospitals stands at 74,254, in addition to approximately 9,500 people missing beneath the rubble or whose whereabouts remain unknown. He stressed that women, children, and the elderly account for more than 55% of the total casualties.

Al-Thawabta said the Israeli crimes have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable groups: 21,976 children were killed, including 1,125 infants who had not reached their first birthday, while official records documented 612 infants who were born and later died during periods of bombardment. More than 12,500 women were also killed, including 9,000 mothers, alongside 22,500 fathers.

Turning to crimes targeting Gaza's social

fabric, al-Thawabta said 39,022 families had been subjected to direct massacres. Of these, 2,700 families were completely wiped out and erased from the civil registry, accounting for 8,574 martyrs, while 6,020 families were left with only one survivor, with 12,917 members killed.

In statements to QNA, al-Thawabta said the occupation is pursuing a systematic strategy of assassinating field personnel to disrupt relief services and suppress the truth. The occupation has killed 1,723 medical personnel, 262 journalists and media workers, 149 Civil Defense personnel, and 194 municipal employees, including four mayors. It has also killed more than 2,800 police and aid-security personnel, as well as 556 relief workers and community volunteers.

Addressing the state of the healthcare system, al-Thawabta said the sector has almost completely ceased operating, with losses totaling \$6bn. Only 19 of 38 hospitals are currently functioning, all at severely limited capacity, while healthcare services have completely collapsed-reaching zero percent functionality-in the Northern and Rafah governorates.

He added that the occupation has destroyed 96 health centers and 197 ambulances and rendered 80% of medical transport vehicles inoperable because of shortages of fuel and spare parts.

He stressed that the closure of border crossings has caused the deaths of 2,027 patients while they awaited medical evacuation. More than 21,000 patients-including 5,803 children and 4,800 cancer patients-now face certain death unless they are urgently allowed to travel for treatment. On the use of starvation as a weapon, al-Thawabta said the occupation has blocked the entry of more than 500,000 aid and fuel trucks and targeted 48 soup kitchens and 64 food distribution centers. He added that aid distribution points have been turned into "death traps," where 2,605 citizens have been killed and more than 19,000 injured while attempting to obtain food.

He said 460 deaths have been recorded due to hunger and malnutrition, including those of 164 children, and warned that 650,000 children and 40,000 infants under one year

of age face an immediate risk of starvation. Summarising the material and infrastructure losses caused by three years of war, the Director of the Government Media Office in the Gaza Strip said the housing sector had sustained \$34bn in losses, adding that 410,000 housing units and buildings had been either completely destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, while 510,000 units had been damaged in total. As a result, 350,000 families remain homeless and dependent on 162,000 dilapidated tents.

In the education sector, he reported losses of \$4bn, citing the destruction of 17 higher education institutions and damage to 97% of schools. The devastation has deprived 650,000 school students and 90,000 university students of education and resulted in the deaths of 22,000 students, 1,100 teachers, and 194 academics and researchers.

Regarding the agricultural and livestock sectors, al-Thawabta put losses at an estimated \$4bn, citing the bulldozing of 87% of agricultural land and greenhouses, the destruction of 8,700 agricultural wells, and a collapse in annual fruit and vegetable production from 524,000 tons to just 20,000 tonnes.

In the service and economic sectors, the war caused losses of \$6bn in the municipal sector, \$5bn in the commercial sector, \$5bn in household contents, \$4bn in the industrial sector, \$3bn in telecommunications, \$3bn in transportation, \$2bn in the electricity sector-including the destruction of 5,080km of networks-\$2bn in hospitality and leisure, \$1bn in the religious sector-including the complete destruction of 1,076 mosques and the bulldozing of 40 cemeteries-and \$1bn in the media sector.

Concluding his remarks to QNA, the Director of the Government Media Office in Gaza issued an urgent appeal to the international community, the Arab League, and the United Nations, calling for immediate and effective action to halt what he described as a war of genocide, open border crossings unconditionally to allow the entry of aid, medical supplies, and fuel, and facilitate the travel of thousands of wounded and sick people in an effort to salvage what remains of the Gaza Strip.

How drug repurposing could speed up cancer breakthroughs

By Athira Sreekumar
Doha



Drug discovery is often compared to a marathon, but that undersells it. Getting a single new compound from the lab bench to a patient typically takes more than a decade and costs billions of dollars — and even then, most candidates don't make it. The majority fail somewhere in early clinical trials, usually because of toxicity nobody predicted or efficacy that just isn't there. For patients facing aggressive, treatment-resistant cancers like triple-negative breast cancer, that timeline is a problem. They don't have a decade to wait. Which is part of why drug repurposing has become such an appealing idea.

Old drugs, new jobs

The concept is simple enough: take a medication that's already approved for something else — a metabolic condition, inflammation, a viral infection — and find out whether it also works against cancer. Because these drugs have already been through safety testing, dosing studies, and years of real-world use, a lot of the guesswork is already done. Researchers know how the body handles them and what side effects to expect. Take metformin, a widely used type 2 diabetes drug, or everyday aspirin: both have shown surprising potential in clinical studies to inhibit tumour growth and improve survival rates. In practice, this means existing drugs can sometimes be paired with standard chemotherapy to help re-sensitize tumours that have grown resistant, or to interfere with the supportive tissue that shields tumours from treatment.

It's not just about killing cancer cells

The more interesting angle, though, isn't drugs that attack tumours directly — it's drugs that help the immune system see them in the first place. Cancer is good at hiding. Tumours build environments that suppress nearby immune cells, effectively making themselves invisible. Some non-cancer drugs turn out to interfere with that hiding process. They can change how immune checkpoints are expressed, disrupt the tumour's metabolic defences, or affect certain proteins tumours use to stay under the radar. Paired with modern immunotherapy, this can turn a tumour that the immune system was ignoring into one it's ready to attack — what researchers sometimes call turning a "cold" tumour "hot".

Why this matters for Qatar

This approach is particularly relevant here. Qatar has spent the last decade building serious biomedical infrastructure — the Qatar Biomedical Research Institute, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Hamad Medical Corporation, and Sidra Medicine among them. With population-level data from the Qatar Genome Programme and precision medicine tools already established locally, researchers here are uniquely positioned. Instead of relying purely on global clinical models, they can screen repurposed candidates specifically tailored to the unique genetic variants and disease patterns seen in the region. And because repurposing skips years of early safety testing, it offers a direct, expedited pathway into local clinical trials.

A practical middle path

None of this replaces the slower work of discovering entirely new drugs — it's a complement to it. Screening existing, well-understood compounds against resistant cancers gives patients options sooner, without giving up on the longer-term science. Sometimes the next breakthrough isn't going to come from a brand-new molecule cooked up in a lab. It might already be sitting in a medicine cabinet, waiting for someone to notice what else it can do.

• The writer is a Zoology graduate, science communicator, and educator currently based in Qatar.



(pixabay.com)

Global reaction to US sanctions on ICC

AFP
Paris

The US announcement of new sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC), hours after the Nobel Peace Prize went to one of its former judges Navi Pillay, has provoked widespread international criticism.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington would ban transactions with what he called a “rogue court”.

“Either the ICC will end its threats, or we will end the ICC,” he added.

European nations and the UN have led the opposition Washington’s decision.

Here are key reactions:

UN chief Antonio Guterres condemned the US decision, saying he was “deeply alarmed by the expected impact” of the measures, a spokesman said.

“Today’s decision marks a serious blow to our collective pursuit of international criminal justice, of which the ICC is a key pillar,” spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters. “The secretary-general reiterates his unwavering support for the independence of the court and its officials.”

UN human rights chief Volker Turk said the sanctions, “the latest in a series of retaliatory steps against the ICC and its personnel...are unacceptable”.

The ICC is based in The Hague and Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten described the sanctions as “deeply regrettable”. “At the same time,” he added, “these sanctions will not take effect immediately, Jetten told reporters.

“And this is crucial because it provides us vital space for dialogue in the upcoming months.”

The European Union also described the US sanctions “deeply regrettable”.

“The EU will work closely with the ICC to ensure it continues to operate effectively,” the European Commission added. It, too, called for dialogue in the six months before the sanctions start.

Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the Netherlands, also backed the court.

“As committed supporters of the ICC we regret and strongly disagree with the announcement of sanctions to be imposed upon the Court by the US,” said a joint statement from the countries’ foreign ministers.

Rights group Amnesty International called on countries to “resist”.

US announces sanctions on ICC

AFP
Washington

The US yesterday announced sanctions on the International Criminal Court, vowing to cripple the tribunal’s operations just hours after the Nobel Peace Prize went to a former ICC judge who warned of mounting political attacks on the court.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington would ban transactions with what he called a “rogue court,” escalating a long-running campaign by President Donald Trump’s administration against the Hague-based tribunal.

“Either the ICC will end its threats, or we will end the ICC,” Rubio said in a statement.

But the immediate impact of the sanctions was softened by a series of exemptions that offer a de facto six-month grace period.

The State Department said that was meant to give the court’s member states time to show “meaningful progress” toward addressing US concerns.

The grace period could be adjusted depending on the “success or failure” of those efforts, the department added.

The court rejected the US sanctions as an attack on international law and warned in a statement that “history will judge this moment.”



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks during a joint press conference with Portugal’s Foreign Minister at the Necessidades Palace, in Lisbon. (AFP)

Countries including Canada, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom said in a joint statement that they “strongly disagree” with the announcement.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the US decision “a serious blow to our collective pursuit of international criminal justice, of which the ICC is a key pillar.”

The European Union called the sanctions “deeply regrettable” and said it was “ready to take any necessary measures to enable the court to carry out its work.”

The European Commission, the EU’s executive arm, said it hoped the six-month delay meant “there is room for dialogue.”

prosecution by a court the US has never joined.

“President Trump will never allow the International Criminal Court to prosecute Americans,” Rubio said, adding that the measures would cut off the court’s resources and cripple “its ability to operate.”

The top US diplomat said Washington had for more than a year spelled out “basic gestures of good faith” it expected from the court, and had held off on the designation in hopes that the ICC or its member states would change course.

He said no “meaningful steps” had been taken to address US concerns.

Rubio also called on US allies that belong to the court and “rely on American service members for their defense” to rein it in, warning that otherwise Washington would keep working to dismantle the ICC “brick by brick.”

The Trump administration had already sanctioned 17 people linked to the court, including its prosecutor and several judges, over the ICC’s investigations involving the US and Israel, which is also not a member.

Trump last month called on all ICC member states to quit the body, denouncing it as “out of control” and a “rogue institution.”

Ukraine hits second major tech site, expanding range of targets inside Russia

Reuters
London

Ukraine struck and partly disabled a major data centre operated by Russian technology company Yandex yesterday in the second such action in successive days, widening the scope of its attacks inside Russia after Moscow hit data hubs in Ukraine.

Yandex, which is heavily involved in Russia’s AI development and is sometimes called Russia’s Google, said its data centre in the Kaluga region southwest of Moscow had been struck by Ukrainian drones and partly put out of action.

Ukrainian arms maker Firepoint said Kyiv had used its FP-1 one-way attack drones to mount the strike against what it called Yandex’s biggest data centre and said that several of its modules had been completely knocked out of action.

A day earlier, a Ukrainian attack shut down Yandex’s data hub in Sasovo, southeast of Moscow, where two of the three supercomputers used to develop the company’s AI model are housed.

Yandex said it was facing a difficult challenge to maintain its services, used by millions of Russians daily for navigation, music, movies, food orders and other tasks. It also provides cloud computing services on which many businesses depend.

Alexander Savitsky, who runs a start-up dating app called Pulse with 8,000 users, told Reuters that



People walk near the headquarters of Yandex, Russia’s leading AI and technology company, in Moscow. (Reuters)

none of them had been able to access it since Thursday.

He said the company was unable to reach its backup database in Yandex Cloud and was getting an “internal error” message when trying to restore it elsewhere.

“We have no confirmation of actual data loss, but the situation is serious: the project represents three years of work,” Savitsky said.

“The main risk is losing users and their trust: people can’t use the app, and there’s no telling how many will return once service is restored.”

Yandex said it had struck a deal with other cloud providers to enable clients to swiftly move their data and services. Its shares fell by more than 4% on the Moscow exchange.

“The risks involve not only the potential temporary unavailability of Yandex services and lost revenue in specific segments but also the company’s extensive base

of B2B clients,” said Maryana Lazarcheva, head of equity research at T-Investments.

She said the company could redistribute some of the load to its other data centres. “However, if the chain of attacks continues, this possibility vanishes, which could lead to even more severe consequences.”

Locked in a deadly war of attrition after more than four years of fighting, both Russia and Ukraine have expanded drone attacks this year on infrastructure targets, from energy facilities and refineries to ports and vessels carrying oil and grain, e-commerce warehouses and, most recently, data centres.

The full scale of the disruption caused by the attacks was not immediately clear, although messages appeared on at least one Yandex app warning of potential problems in its operation.

Yandex said it was working around the clock to try to restore

services which had been disrupted.

“Right now this is our most important task, but unfortunately it is not an easy one,” it said.

Russia has struck Ukrainian data centres and telecommunications infrastructure over the past month, including targets in central Kyiv.

“We always respond in mirror-like fashion,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Thursday. He confirmed yesterday that his drones had struck the Kaluga data centre in what he called “our tit-for-tat response”.

The regional governor said nine people had been injured in Ukraine’s attacks, five of whom were being treated in hospital.

Ukraine has previously targeted the warehouses of specific companies it deems central to Russia’s economy, including dozens of sites operated by e-commerce giants Wildberries and Ozon. Russia responded by striking their Ukrainian equivalents.

Yandex operates five data centres, two of which have already been hit. It said in 2021 that the Sasovo data hub, which was struck on Thursday, hosted two of its three supercomputers built around Nvidia A100 chips, which it uses to train its YandexGPT large AI model. Yandex has declined to say whether the supercomputers were affected by the attack.

Multiple online services in Russia reported technical issues on Thursday, including real estate aggregator Cian, a book portal called Litmarket, and the websites of Russian Railways and professional football club Spartak Moscow.

Worker dies in Greek refinery accident

One worker died and another was seriously hurt yesterday in an accident at one of Greece’s biggest refineries near Athens, the company said.

The Motor Oil refinery said both men were external contractors, but did not give details on the accident.

Greek media attributed the accident to an explosion and said three other workers were lightly injured at the facility in Agioi Theodoroi near Corinth, around 70km (45 miles) west of Athens. The company said that one worker had died and that the second was in “critical” condition. Motor Oil said it was “fully co-operating” with an official investigation. But police detained a site supervisor over the incident, state news agency ANA said.

Motor Oil had earlier said the accident occurred “during extensive preventive maintenance” at the refinery which suffered its second deadly accident in six years. The refinery, which is owned by the Vardinogiannis group, controlled by one of the country’s most influential families. (AFP)

Austria detains Ukrainians on suspicion of espionage

AFP
Vienna

Two Ukrainians are being held on suspicion of espionage in Austria, authorities said yesterday, while two Ukrainian journalists also arrested in the case are being released.

The Ukrainian paper employing the journalists said one of them had been injured when they were both arrested on Thursday and had been admitted to hospital.

Two other suspects, arrested on Monday, remain in custody on suspicions of “espionage”, Interior Minister Gerhard Karner said.

“Investigations are currently underway,” he told reporters, declining to give further details.

A spokeswoman for the prosecutor’s office told AFP the two journalists were detained on Thursday on “suspicions that have not been confirmed”.

“One has already been released and the second will be,” she said.

The two work for Ukrainian daily *Ukrainska Pravda*, which has condemned their arrests.

“The charges brought against our colleagues during their detention are unlike anything our editorial team has dealt with before and raise serious questions,” the paper said, demanding “explanations” from Austrian law

enforcement authorities.

Ukrainska Pravda said journalist Mykhailo Tkach, head of its investigative journalism team, had been freed early on Thursday “after more than 12 hours in custody in Vienna”.

His colleague, cameraman Yaroslav Bondarenko, was injured during his arrest and was hospitalised, editor-in-chief Sevgil Musaieva said on Facebook.

“The police did not begin questioning him until late at night,” she said of Bondarenko.

Tkach was detained in Vienna while on an editorial assignment related to the search for former Ukrainian prosecutor general Ruslan Kravchenko, who is on the run, the paper said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky fired Kravchenko last month.

He has been accused of taking bribes, allegations he refutes.

Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders said the two Ukrainian journalists were “subjected to a violent police arrest in Vienna”.

“RSF calls on the authorities to shed full light on these events and to ensure the protection of their equipment and sources,” the NGO said on X.

Ukraine’s foreign ministry said it was “continuing to work to clarify the circumstances of the detention” and was in touch with the Austrian foreign ministry.

Merz ‘outraged’ that former chancellor Schroeder attended Putin’s birthday

Reuters
Berlin

Germany’s Chancellor Friedrich Merz is “deeply outraged” by former chancellor Gerhard Schroeder’s visit to Vladimir Putin’s home to celebrate the Russian president’s birthday this week, a German government spokesperson said yesterday.

Schroeder, who served as chancellor from 1998 to 2005, has faced criticism in Germany and abroad over his links to Russian business and Putin, ties that have persisted despite Moscow’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine and subsequent waves of Western sanctions.

“Putin alone is responsible for the war in Ukraine. His orders are the cause of immeasurable suffering, civilian casualties, families being torn apart, dead and wounded,” the spokesper-

son said. “The chancellor sees ... it as downright immoral for Mr. Schroeder to attend such a celebration.”

Putin turned 74 on Thursday. Schroeder, 82, and his wife, So-Yeon Schroeder-Kim, who sometimes handles his communications, did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment.

The visit also drew criticism from within Schroeder’s own Social Democratic Party (SPD).

The party’s co-leader Lars Klingbeil, who is also Germany’s finance minister in Merz’s conservative-led coalition, called it “completely unacceptable” in view of the suffering caused to Ukraine’s people, according to the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* daily.

Last week, Schroeder joined the supervisory board of Russian retailer Hyperglobus, a spin-off of Germany’s Globus Holding which operates more than 20 supermarkets in Russia.



Former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder visits an outlet of Russian retailer Hyperglobus after joining its supervisory board in Moscow. (Reuters)

France students plan more protests, UN ‘concerned’ over violence

AFP
Paris

Students in France were largely back in the classroom yesterday following days of protests demanding better education and school conditions, as the UN voiced “concern” over the sometimes violent clashes.

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets across France since students in late September began blocking entrances to high schools, which led to squads of riot police being deployed.

The students – most aged 15 to 18 – have complained of absent teachers, overloaded timetables, dilapidated classrooms and buildings that cannot cope with rising temperatures.

More than 6,800 people have been detained since the start of the demonstrations, of whom 86% are minors, the justice ministry said yesterday.

A government source told journalists that the cost for damage caused by the demonstrations was “at least 30mn euros”.



A protester holds a placard (centre) reading “Studying in decent conditions is not a luxury” in front of police during a student demonstration in Nancy. (AFP)

The UN said yesterday it was watching the events “with concern” and urged people on all sides to remain peaceful.

“We are following with concern incidents related to the student protests and high school blockades in France, some of which have turned violent,” said Shabia Mantoo, spokesperson for the UN human rights agency.

While the demonstrations have been largely peaceful, some protesters have started fires and

vandalised bus shelters.

In response, police have used tear gas, batons and blast balls, leading to accusations from rights groups and the students themselves of a disproportionate use of force.

Police have opened 18 internal investigations into allegations of misconduct.

After a 15-year-old lost a hand on Monday after police fired a stun grenade, the government has suspended the use of the weapon.



Pact expands access for out-of-school students



The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) and Education Above All Foundation (EAA) have signed an agreement to establish a framework for alternative pathways for out-of-school students.

The framework will support the operation and development of tuition-free Assalam Schools to expand opportunities for students facing barriers to mainstream schooling.

The agreement was signed by MoEHE Assistant Undersecretary for Shared Services Mohammed Kareeb and EAA chief executive Mohammed al-Kubaisi.

The signing ceremony was attended by HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah al-Khater and HE the Undersecretary Dr Ibrahim al-Nuaimi, along with senior officials from both sides.

The partnership seeks to provide appropriate educational opportunities for students who face difficulties accessing formal education, while promoting an inclusive learning environment that takes into account cultural, social and economic diversity.

Officials said the initiative is also intended to strengthen students' academic and social skills and provide them with safe and supportive educational settings.

Kareeb said the agreement reflected the ministry's commitment to providing quality education that responds to the needs of students facing educational challenges, while strengthening co-operation with civil society organisations.

Meanwhile, al-Kubaisi said the agreement builds on existing co-operation between the EAA and the ministry to support Assalam Schools.

He said the foundation works with partners to address barriers preventing students from accessing education and develop appropriate solutions.

Salem al-Mansouri, senior consultant at the Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science and general co-ordinator of the Assalam Schools project, said the agreement marked an important step in institutional co-operation and would help organise the schools' work, strengthen their sustainability and promote equal access to education.

The Assalam Schools project was launched in 2019 and has sought to provide an alternative educational pathway for students facing difficulties enrolling in mainstream schools, in line with the principles of inclusive and equitable education. – QNA

Stronger measures urged to protect children from online risks

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Stronger measures to protect children from online risks should be adopted, participants at a seminar on “My Childhood in a Digital World” have stressed.

They called for the responsible use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) in education, as well as updated policies and legislation to protect children's privacy, security and healthy development.

The Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science organised the seminar in collaboration with Qatar University's Early Childhood Centre.

Participants stressed that protecting children in the digital age is a shared

national and societal responsibility that requires co-ordinated efforts by families, educational institutions, government agencies and the technology sector.

They highlighted the need to balance harnessing the educational opportunities digital technologies offer with mitigating the potential effects of excessive screen time, while ensuring children continue to develop essential cognitive, social, and communication skills.

Moderated by Prof Diala Hamidi, the seminar focused on four key themes: digital innovation, online safety, curricula and digital competencies, and the role of families in establishing balanced technology-use habits.

Dr Latifa al-Mughaysib, head of the Art Education Department at Qatar University's College of Education, emphasised

the importance of developing locally produced digital content that reflects Qatar's cultural identity and societal values.

She also called for selecting educational applications appropriate to children's developmental stages, explaining that digital tools should promote participation and creativity without undermining hands-on learning, exploration, and play.

Latifa Saad al-Kuwari, director of the Planning, Quality and Innovation Department at the Ministry of Culture and a member of the Children's Digital Safety Committee, warned of online threats including cyberbullying, extortion, online grooming and deepfake technology.

She stressed the importance of raising awareness among parents, using parental-control tools effectively, and strengthening safeguards for children's personal data.

Al-Kuwari also highlighted the need for appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks to address emerging digital threats and create safer online environments for young users.

Samira al-Harmi, an early childhood guidance expert at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, stressed that technology should support education rather than replace sensory and physical experiences or social interaction.

She cautioned that excessive screen exposure could affect children's language and cognitive development, underscoring the importance of age-appropriate digital use and maintaining opportunities for direct engagement with their surroundings.

Dr Hala al-Ahmadi, director of Family Policies at the Doha International Family

Institute, presented findings from a study examining digital use among children and adolescents in Qatar.

The study, which covered 578 children and adolescents, found an association between parents' technology-use patterns and their children's digital behaviour.

The findings highlighted how parental habits shape how younger generations use digital devices, reinforcing the importance of responsible technology use at home.

Dr al-Ahmadi called on families to establish clear agreements on screen time and appropriate online content.

She also encouraged parents to offer alternatives such as reading, sports, and social activities, stressing that positive parental role-modelling and open dialogue work better than relying solely on prohibitions and restrictions.



Garden Souq by Visit Qatar in Singapore concludes, welcoming over 1,700 visitors

Visit Qatar has concluded “The Garden Souq by Visit Qatar”, held at Raffles Hotel Singapore on October 7-9 during Singapore's race week, and welcomed more than 1,700 visitors.

HE the chairman of Qatar Tourism Saad bin Ali al-Kharji and Qatar's ambassador to Singapore Abdulaziz bin Ahmed al-Malki attended the event.

As part of Visit Qatar's role as Principal Partner of the Audi Revolut F1 Team, the open-air experience introduced Singapore residents and international race visitors to Qatar's culture, cuisine, and craftsmanship through a contemporary interpretation of the traditional souq.

Audi Revolut F1 Team drivers Nico Hulkenberg and Gabriel Bortoleto visited the activation, enjoyed Qatari cuisine, and explored the experience.

Over three days, guests sampled Arabic coffee and dates accompanied by live oud performances at The Majlis, tried Qatari cuisine at Flavours of Qatar, received personalised leather charms at The Artisan's Workshop and customised caps at The Doha Stamp, and created bespoke perfume blends at Scents of Qatar.

The Garden Souq forms part of Visit Qatar's international partnership strategy, using the global reach of major sporting events to showcase Qatar's cultural identity, strengthen its tourism profile and engage new audiences in key international markets.

QU marks World Mental Health Day with programme fostering dialogue, mental wellbeing

Qatar University (QU) is marking World Mental Health Day with a series of initiatives throughout October that foster discussion, share expertise, and promote mental wellbeing among students and faculty.

The programme forms part of the QU's ongoing efforts to support mental health in Qatar.

Providing a space for open discussion, the programme began on October 4 with a session on “Mental Health in Qatar: Challenges and Prospects”, organised by the QU's Community Service and Continuing Education Centre.

Activities will continue on October 13-14, bringing together students, faculty members and participating organisations.

The two-day programme will feature an exhibition showcasing participating organisations' work and mental health initiatives.

On October 13, HE Sheikha Dr Hessa bint Hamad al-Thani, chairperson and founder of The Centre for Wellbeing, will deliver a workshop on “The Good Vessel”.

On October 14, a panel discussion on “Lived Experiences: Creating Real Change” will bring together speakers from participating organisations

to explore how personal experiences can deepen understanding of mental health and inspire meaningful change.

Dr Nawaf al-Zyoud, head of the Psychological Sciences Department at the QU's College of Education, said: “Our ambition is to help build a future in which mental wellbeing is an integral part of education, healthcare and community life.”

“Universities have a vital role in advancing that future by preparing professionals who recognise mental health as essential to overall health, generating research that can inform better support and care, and ensuring that people's experiences guide progress,” he said. “By connecting these efforts, the QU aims to create an environment where seeking support is understood, encouraged and met with care.”

This commitment to mental health continues well beyond October, with services available on campus year-round.

The QU's Student Counselling Centre provides individual and group counselling, psychological support, and preventive and educational programmes.

Visiting psychiatrists from the Hamad Medi-

cal Corporation (HMC) also hold regular campus clinics for students who need professional assessment and treatment.

On the research front, the QU conducted the country's first national general-population mental health survey through the World Mental Health Qatar study.

Undertaken by the university's Social and Economic Survey Research Institute in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and the HMC, the study formed part of the World Health Organisation's World Mental Health Survey Initiative.

It examined the prevalence and patterns of mental disorders among adults in Qatar, providing national evidence to deepen understanding of the population's mental health needs.

Together, these efforts reflect the QU's commitment to advancing human development by promoting mental health and wellbeing, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

Through research that informs national priorities and initiatives that support its university community, the QU helps raise awareness, encourage dialogue and address mental health needs in Qatar.

