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Nations reject Colombia's embassy move in occupied Jerusalem

The foreign ministers of Qatar, Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Turkiye, and Yemen strongly condemned and expressed their unequivocal rejection of the inauguration by Colombia of its embassy in Jerusalem, a step that contravenes relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and undermines international efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace based on the two-state solution.

The ministers reaffirm that any measure or decision intended to alter the legal or historical status of occupied Jerusalem, or to recognise it as Israel's capital, is null and void and has no legal effect. This position is consistent with relevant United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, particularly Security Council Resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), which reject attempts to change Jerusalem's character or status and call on states to withdraw diplomatic missions from the city, which is part of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967. (**QNA**)



Lebanese President Joseph Aoun welcomed HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani in Beirut to discuss bilateral relations and efforts to reduce regional tensions. During the meeting yesterday, HE Sheikh Mohammed conveyed greetings from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, along with his wishes for the Lebanese president's continued good health and happiness and for further progress and prosperity for Lebanon's government and people. President Aoun asked HE Sheikh Mohammed to convey his greetings to HH the Amir, expressing his wishes for His Highness's continued success and for Qatar's continued development and prosperity. (**QNA**)

Lebanese president lauds Qatar's support for regional de-escalation

QNA
Beirut

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun has praised Qatar's efforts to restore stability across the Middle East, urging Doha to work with Arab and international partners to press Israel to halt attacks in southern Lebanon.

A Lebanese presidency statement said President Aoun made the remarks during a meeting in Beirut yesterday with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani. Aoun commended the role played by Qatar, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, in bringing opposing sides closer together and addressing the causes of regional escalation.

He also thanked HH the Amir and government for their continued support for Lebanon across various sectors. The Lebanese president expressed hope that Qatar would continue its diplomatic efforts with Arab and friendly countries to press Israel to stop its attacks in southern Lebanon and implement a framework agreement reached through US-mediated negotiations between Lebanon and Israel.

Moving to bilateral relations with Doha, President Aoun welcomed further co-operation between the two countries, particularly in the energy sector. He noted that Qatar had expressed its readiness to help find solutions to Lebanon's electricity crisis. The Lebanese president said the Lebanese people would not forget Qatar's assistance, particularly during the country's difficult circumstances.

He also thanked HE Sheikh Mohammed for visiting Beirut, describing the visit as a demonstration of Qatar's solidarity and a renewed message of hope for the Lebanese people. Aoun reiterated Lebanon's condemnation of attacks against Gulf countries, most recently those targeting Saudi Arabia, and expressed solidarity with the Gulf states on behalf of Lebanon's leadership and people. He also outlined the continuing Israeli attacks in southern Lebanon, which he said had caused deaths and injuries and destroyed villages and towns in areas occupied by Israel.

Qatar, Lebanon solidify ties amid regional tension

PM underscores Qatar's commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty, security, stability, and territorial integrity; Qatar pledges continued support for the Lebanese business and industry, and state institutions

QNA
Beirut

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani affirmed Qatar's continued support for Lebanon and solidarity with the Lebanese people amid the difficult circumstances facing the region, underscoring Qatar's commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty, security, stability, and territorial integrity, as well as its continued support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and state institutions.

At a joint press conference with Lebanese Prime Minister Dr Nawaf Salam, HE Sheikh Mohammed said their discussions addressed ways to strengthen the fraternal relations between the two nations and expand their partnership – particularly within vital sectors – alongside reviewing regional and international developments.

HE the Prime Minister said that the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani call for providing Lebanon with support using all available resources to help revitalise its economy, noting that the Lebanese people have long played a fundamental role in economic activity and have been a driver of the region's economy. He added that the talks addressed the importance of expanding cooperation in energy, investment, development, the economy, and electricity infrastructure for the mutual benefit of Qatar and Lebanon, as well as implementing joint projects that contribute to the region's security, stability, and prosperity. To Page 12



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani addressing a joint press conference with Lebanese Prime Minister Dr Nawaf Salam in Beirut yesterday.

Doha's unwavering support for Lebanese armed forces

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani has reaffirmed Qatar's full support for the Lebanese Republic in any measures it takes in response to Israeli occupation actions. Speaking to journalists at the Baabda Palace in Beirut yesterday, HE Sheikh Mohammed stressed the need for Israeli forces to withdraw from occupied Lebanese territory and hand it over to the Lebanese army. His Excellency reiterated Doha's unwavering support for Lebanon and its armed forces, along with its efforts to provide comprehensive solutions to the country's energy needs.

HE Sheikh Mohammed said that his talks with President Aoun focused on bilateral co-operation, particularly in energy, investment and the economy, as well as ways to implement joint projects that could contribute to regional security, stability and prosperity. The talks also covered the latest regional developments, particularly the situation in southern Lebanon and Israeli occupation actions against the country, as well as other issues of mutual interest. (**QNA**)

Qatar urges diplomacy, respect for int'l law to secure lasting ME peace

QNA
New York

Qatar has called for further diplomatic efforts to resolve the Middle East conflicts, warning that continued tensions and restrictions on vital maritime routes threaten regional stability and the global economy. Addressing a quarterly open debate of the United Nations Security Council on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", HE the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani said respect for international law and peaceful settlements remained the only way to achieve lasting peace. She added that Qatar would continue its diplomatic efforts to promote regional and international peace and security.

The meeting in New York took place against the backdrop of regional tensions since February 28, which HE Sheikha Alya said had affected security, stability and development. Qatar condemned Iranian attacks targeting its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as those against other regional countries, and called for full compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 2817, adopted in March.

HE Sheikha Alya stressed the importance of protecting freedom of navigation under international law, particularly along vital maritime routes. Qatar firmly rejected the use of the Strait of Hormuz as a means of political pressure and called for its unconditional reopening, describing freedom of navigation through the strategic waterway as a fundamental principle that could not be compromised.

She warned that the continued closure of the strait posed risks to the vital interests of regional countries and the global economy. Qatar is also continuing mediation efforts between the United States and Iran to bring the two sides closer together and establish common ground, she said, while reiterating Doha's support for Pakistan's mediation efforts.



HE Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani

Meanwhile, HE Sheikha Alya strongly condemned Houthi attacks on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which had caused fatalities, injuries and material damage.

She described the attacks as a serious violation of Saudi sovereignty and reaffirmed Qatar's full solidarity with the kingdom and its right to take legitimate measures to protect its security and territorial integrity. "Saudi Arabia's security is an integral part of Qatar's security and the collective security system of the Gulf Co-operation Council," she said. To Page 12

Iran denies nuclear ambitions, ready for talks

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian denied yesterday that Tehran sought nuclear weapons, expressed readiness for dialogue and condemned US sanctions during talks with Georgia's Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze. The two met on the sidelines of a UN biodiversity summit in Armenia's capital Yerevan. "Iran is not seeking nuclear weapons, and we consider the malicious propaganda against our country to be lies," Pezeshkian said, according to a statement from his office. "We have always been ready for dialogue. They think they can force us to surrender, but we will not bow to coercion," he added, calling US sanctions against Tehran "unjustifiable and inhumane". (**AFP**)

View from the top



The Doha Corniche stretches along the waterfront, with cars moving along its sweeping multi-lane roads past palm-lined medians, traditional wooden boats, and the city's modern skyline under hazy skies. The crescent-shaped coastal boulevard makes for a fascinating aerial view. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam

QATAR





PM meets Lebanon's top politicians, security officials



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani has met top members of the political and security leadership in Beirut.

He held separate meetings with Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, Lebanon's Future Movement party vice-president Bahia Hariri, Lebanese Army Commander General Rodolphe Haykal, and Lebanon's director-general of General Security, Major-General Hassan Choucair.

The meetings discussed bilateral relations, ways to strengthen co-operation, and issues of mutual interest.

HE Sheikh Mohammed reaffirmed Qatar's support for Lebanon's stability and territorial unity, and stressed Doha's commitment to supporting efforts to strengthen Lebanese state institutions.

The meeting was part of HE Sheikh Mohammed's visit to Beirut, during which he also held talks with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and senior security officials. – **QNA**



Interior minister meets Egyptian counterpart

HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani has held talks in Cairo with Egypt's Minister of Interior Major-General Mahmoud Tawfiq. The meeting took place yesterday as part of HE Sheikh Khalifa's visit to the Egyptian capital. The two ministers discussed bilateral relations and explored ways to strengthen co-operation between Qatar and Egypt, particularly in the security sectors, as well as issues of mutual concern.

Following the meeting, the two officials signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen co-operation in combating crime and enhance the exchange of security expertise between the two countries. – **QNA**

Al-Kuwari meets Syrian minister



HE the Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed al-Kuwari met with Syria's Minister of Finance Mohammad Yisr Barnieh on the sidelines of the Annual Meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group in Bangkok.

The meeting reviewed a range of financial and economic topics, as well as developments in the current regional and international landscape and the challenges associated with them. – **QNA**

'Qatar bolsters ties with EU under Amir's leadership'



HE the Shura Council Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim at the second meeting of GCC parliamentary speakers with European Parliament President Roberta Metsola.

Qatar, under leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, has attached great importance to its strategic relationship with the EU and continued to pursue diplomatic initiatives to support peace and stability, HE the Shura Council Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim has said.

HE al-Ghanim made the remarks during the second meeting of Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) parliamentary speakers in Brussels yesterday with European Parliament President Roberta Metsola.

He said that Doha reaffirmed the importance of dialogue, mediation and parliamentary diplomacy in reducing regional tensions and promoting international security.

HE al-Ghanim cited Qatar's diplomatic efforts concerning Afghanistan, Iran and the Gaza Strip, stressing that parliamentary diplomacy could help reinforce these initiatives and strengthen regional and international security.

He reiterated the Shura Council's support for negotiations on a strategic partnership agreement between Qatar and the EU, announced in December last year.

HE al-Ghanim expressed hope that the second GCC-EU summit, scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia, would deepen co-operation between the two sides, with parliamentary engagement helping to advance its outcomes.

The Brussels meeting builds on the first gathering, held in Abu Dhabi last year, and reflects a shared commitment to expanding parliamentary co-operation in line with growing strategic ties between the Gulf states and the EU.

Areas of potential co-operation include trade, investment, economic affairs, security, human and labour rights, counterterrorism, climate change and technological developments.

HE al-Ghanim said that the GCC and the EU are influential economic and political actors whose complementary resources and capabilities could help address global challenges.

He stressed that relations between Gulf legislative councils and the European Parliament should be based on equality, mutual respect, shared interests and respect for each side's sovereignty and national choices.

HE al-Ghanim expressed hope that the GCC-EU summit, scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia, would deepen co-operation

HE the Shura Council Speaker said that co-operation between the two parliamentary bodies should extend beyond bilateral relations to support international peace and security.

He called for more effective parliamentary diplomacy to promote dialogue, encourage peaceful conflict resolution and support reform of the United Nations system and its working mechanisms.

Such efforts, HE al-Ghanim said, could strengthen the international community's ability to respond to crises and help establish a more just and balanced international order based on respect for international law.

Addressing regional security developments, he strongly condemned Iranian attacks targeting GCC countries, describing them as violations of national sovereignty, international law and the principles of good neighbourliness.

HE al-Ghanim warned that the attacks threatened regional stability and had wider implications for international peace, global trade and energy supplies.

He stressed that GCC states stood united against any aggression targeting their members, emphasising that the security of the Gulf states is indivisible.

HE the Shura Council Speaker also condemned Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia and reaffirmed Qatar's solidarity with the kingdom and its legitimate right to defend its security, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

He further reiterated the Shura Council's support for freedom of navigation through international waterways, particularly the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea, warning against actions that could jeopardise maritime security and disrupt the regional and global economy.

On the Palestinian question, HE al-Ghanim highlighted the destruction, displacement and hunger affecting the occupied Palestinian territories, describing the suffering in Gaza as a test of the international community's ability to stop violations and secure justice for Palestinians.

He urged parliaments, as representatives of their peoples, to play a more effective role in influencing international organisations and promoting decisive and fair positions in support of Palestinian rights.

HE al-Ghanim reiterated Qatar's support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

On the global level, he called for supporting diplomatic efforts on the Russia-Ukraine crisis in line with the UN Charter and international law, while safeguarding states' sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The joint statement following the meeting expressed solidarity with the GCC states and affirmed their rights under the UN Charter

HE al-Ghanim concluded his remarks by calling for further GCC-EU parliamentary co-operation to produce joint initiatives that support international peace and help achieve the aspirations of the peoples of the two regions.

A joint statement following the meeting emphasised the need to deepen the strategic partnership between the two regions, strengthen parliamentary co-operation and expand economic, trade and investment ties.

It also called for the resumption of negotiations on a comprehensive free trade agreement between the GCC and the EU.

The two sides stressed the importance of improving connectivity through maritime, land and air transport routes, as well as digital networks.

On Palestine, the statement called for the protection of civilians, respect for international humanitarian law and the safe, sustained and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid.

Participants also backed political and diplomatic efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on the two-state solution, in accordance with international law and relevant UN resolutions.

Regarding the regional developments, the statement strongly condemned continued Iranian missile and drone attacks against GCC countries, whether carried out directly or through proxies.

It expressed full solidarity with the Gulf states and affirmed their legitimate right to self-defence and to protect their sovereignty, security and territorial integrity in accordance with the UN Charter.

The participants called for an immediate halt to the attacks and stressed the importance of freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab Al Mandeb Strait.

They also called for stronger co-operation in maritime security, cybersecurity and the protection of critical infrastructure.

The GCC and EU representatives highlighted the importance of reliable and sustainable energy supplies and the diversification of energy sources amid disruptions in global energy markets.

They called for joint solutions, investment in energy infrastructure and greater interconnection between energy networks to strengthen long-term energy security.

The statement also underscored the need to expand economic and industrial co-operation and address the wider effects of energy market volatility on economies and households.

They commended Gulf countries' humanitarian and mediation initiatives, including efforts to facilitate prisoner exchanges and the return of Ukrainian children.

The statement called on the EU and GCC to intensify efforts to reduce tensions, advance diplomatic solutions and promote security and stability in Europe and the Gulf region. – **QNA**



Qatar takes part in Singapore International Cyber Week

Qatar, represented by the National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA), participated in the 11th Singapore International Cyber Week, held on October 12-15.

Qatar's delegation was headed by NCSA Director-General Ahmed Mohammed al-Mutawa al-Hammadi, who took part in a high level panel discussion on "Algorithms and Alliances: Will AI Take Over Cyber Diplomacy".

The session explored the challenges facing developing countries amid rapid technological advancements, including in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), and the role of developed countries in bridging the resulting gaps.

On the sidelines of the event, al-Hammadi visited the Interpol Global Complex for Innovation and the Asean Singapore Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence. – **QNA**



Culture ministry participates in Al Diwan Arabic Book Fair in Berlin





The fourth edition of Al Diwan Arabic Book Fair opened in Berlin yesterday, with the State of Qatar participating through the Ministry of Culture. The ministry's cultural programme features five seminars covering books, publishing, cultural identity, literature, and poetry, reflecting the richness of Qatar's cultural landscape and the ministry's commitment to strengthening the country's presence at international cultural forums. The fair runs from October 16-18.

It aligns with the Ministry of Culture's efforts to enhance engagement with institutions and organisations in the book and publishing industry. It also showcases Qatar's intellectual and literary output, promotes the exchange of cultural expertise and experience, and opens new avenues for dialogue and collaboration with writers, intellectuals, and publishers worldwide.

Director of the Libraries Department at the Ministry of Culture and Director of the Doha International Book Fair Jassim Ahmed al-Buainain said the ministry's participation, coinciding with the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany, provides an opportunity to showcase Qatar's cultural output, highlight local publications and initiatives, and strengthen ties with cultural institutions, publishers, and authors worldwide.

He added that the ministry's programme comprises five seminars on the role of book fairs in cultural exchange, sea in Qatari memory, the role of cultural institutions in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between societies, the status of Arabic poetry, and digital literature and contemporary publishing.

Al-Buainain said the participation reflects the ministry's commitment to strengthening the international presence of Qatari culture, exchanging cultural expertise and experience, fostering cultural relations, and showcasing Qatar's intellectual and literary landscape.

The participation underscores the Ministry of Culture's commitment to strengthening the presence of Qatari culture at international exhibitions, showcasing the country's intellectual and literary achievements, and promoting cultural dialogue. It also supports the exchange of perspectives and expertise with cultural institutions, publishers, and others, helping to expand cultural co-operation and strengthen communication among peoples. (**QNA**)

Qatar attends Tatarstan president's meeting with GCC envoys in Kazan



The ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Rus sian Federation Sheikh Ahmed bin Nasser al-Thani attended a meeting of the President of the Republic of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov and the ambassadors of Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) member states accredited to the Russian Federation.
The meeting was held at the Kremlin in Kazan, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan. Discussions focused on relations between the GCC countries and the Republic of Tatarstan, as well as ways to develop and strengthen co-operation between the two sides. (**QNA**)

Damaan raises investment assets to QR133.5bn in 2025

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

The General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority (Damaan) increased the value of its managed investment assets to QR133.5bn in 2025, up from around QR129bn in 2024, representing annual growth of 3.4%, according to the state's Internal Achievements Book 2025–2026.

The increase indicates Damaan's efforts to strengthen the long-term financial sustainability of Qatar's pension and social insurance funds, diversify investment portfolios and expand long-term investment opportunities to ensure the system can meet its obligations to retirees and insured members.

Damaan noted that the growth reflected the implementation of its strategic priorities to reinforce the financial capacity of pension funds and enhance investment management, supporting the sustainability of retirement and insurance commitments over the long term.

As part of this strategy, Damaan established a dedicated, diversified investment portfolio in partnership with leading international asset managers, aiming to draw on global investment expertise, broaden portfolio diversification, and provide access to a wider range of investment opportunities. Further, Damaan has also continued to pursue initiatives focused on investment growth, corporate governance, insurance and social services, and improving the experience of beneficiaries.

These efforts include developing policies and programmes to safeguard the rights of retirees, insured members, and their eligible beneficiaries while improving service quality and operational efficiency.

Alongside its investment strategy, Damaan expanded financial support for pensioners through the activation of its retiree advance programme. Last year, 3,383 retirees benefited from the advances, with a total value of around QR600mn, according to Damaan figures. The programme represents a direct financial support measure intended to improve beneficiaries' access to funds and address their financial needs.

Damaan also activated the payment mechanism for benefits relating to service periods exceeding 30 years, extending the applicable benefit to retirees or their eligible beneficiaries. The measure is intended to strengthen pension entitlements and recognise extended periods of service within the retirement and social insurance system, as part of broader efforts to improve insurance benefits and protect the rights of insured members, pensioners, and eligible dependents.

Meanwhile, Damaan has positioned these measures within its wider social protection mandate, which combines the responsible management of pension funds with the development of benefits and services that support beneficiaries' financial and social stability.

Damaan also introduced financial and investment education programmes specifically designed for retirees, aiming to improve their understanding of investment principles, savings management, and financial decision-making.

The programmes use awareness workshops, guidance materials, and multiple communication channels to help beneficiaries develop the knowledge needed to manage their savings more effectively.

In parallel, Damaan continued work on developing new pension and retirement systems and upgrading its digital service infrastructure that include enhancements to its electronic portal and an expansion of digital services intended to make insurance and retirement services more accessible to pensioners and insured members.

الهيئة العامة للتقاعد والتأمينات الإجتماعية
General Retirement & Social Insurance Authority

Family digital awareness key to protecting children online

QNA
Doha



Qatar University has underscored the importance of strengthening digital awareness among families and young people as rapid advances in technology, digital platforms and generative artificial intelligence (AI) expose children to increasingly complex online risks.

The focus comes amid national efforts to promote safe and responsible technology use through the "Digitally Aware Family" campaign, launched by the Ministry of Social Development and Family under the slogan "Their Protection, Your Responsibility". The initiative supports the ministry's 2025-2030 strategy, "From Care to Empowerment", and aligns with the human and social development goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

Academics at Qatar University (QU) stressed that protecting children online requires co-ordinated efforts by families, educational institutions and national bodies. They said digital safety extends beyond technical safeguards and parental controls to encompass awareness, guidance, critical thinking and consideration of the psychological, health and cultural effects of technology use.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), they highlighted the family's central role in fostering safe digital habits through open dialogue, parental role-modelling and helping children develop the critical-thinking skills needed to navigate the digital world responsibly.

Dr Wadha Khalid Lebda, Director of the KINDI Computing Research Center at Qatar University's College of Engineering, said the campaign comes at a critical time, as digital technology increasingly shapes how children and young people learn, communicate and interact with the world around them.

She noted that advances in generative artificial intelligence have broadened the concept of digital safety beyond conventional cybersecurity to include responsible online decision-making, protection of personal data and digital identities, and awareness of the risks posed by misleading content, deepfakes and cloned voices and images.

Dr Lebda stressed that families must be at the heart of digital safety efforts, noting that technological safeguards and restrictions alone are insufficient to build lasting awareness. Effective protection requires cooperation among families, schools, universities, national institutions and the technology sector, supported by sustained awareness initiatives and guidance tailored to different age groups.

Academics at QU highlight the family's central role in fostering safe digital habits through open dialogue, parental role-modelling and helping children develop the critical-thinking skills needed to navigate the digital world responsibly

She also advocated teaching children a simple four-step approach — "Stop, Ask, Verify, Then Decide" — before responding to urgent messages or engaging with suspicious content, helping them develop safer digital habits as online risks evolve.

On the university's contribution to the campaign, Dr Lebda said the KINDI Computing Research Center seeks to translate research in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence into practical guidance for families and young people. Its activities include short videos, podcasts and interactive workshops designed to make digital safety concepts more accessible.

She added that the university's role extends beyond raising awareness to evaluating the effectiveness of its initiatives by tracking changes in knowledge and behaviour before and after campaigns. Such assessments, she said, can help build a lasting digital culture grounded in evidence and safe practices rather than fear.

Dr Aisha al-Ahmadi, Assistant Professor in Qatar University's Department of Psychological Sciences, emphasised the need to account for educational, psychological and cultural factors when addressing digital behaviour. She cautioned against directly generalising findings from Western psychological and behavioural studies to Arab and Muslim societies, given differences in their cultural, social and religious contexts.

Dr all-Ahmadi called for greater reliance on local research to inform educational and therapeutic approaches tailored to the needs of families and children in Qatar. Such studies, she said, can help clarify how digital advances affect local culture and society and guide the development of appropriate interventions.

She also stressed the importance of scientifically evaluating digital awareness campaigns by assessing changes in the behaviour of families and children before and after their implementation. The findings should inform improvements to awareness programmes and help determine whether they lead to lasting changes in everyday digital practices.

Dr Ghadir Fakhri al-Saleem, Assistant Professor in Qatar University's Department of Public Health, said the campaign highlights the family's role as the first environment in which children develop their habits and behaviours. She stressed that parents should help children establish a healthy, balanced relationship with technology and develop digital health literacy, enabling them to understand and critically assess health information available online.

She emphasised the importance of establishing healthy habits from an early age, including getting adequate sleep, engaging in regular physical activity and setting aside screen-free time for family interaction. These practices, she said, help balance the benefits of technology with the need to protect children's physical and psychological well-being.

Citing Unicef reports, Dr al-Saleem highlighted key digital risks facing children and adolescents, including cyberbullying, online harassment, excessive screen time, privacy breaches and fraud.

She noted that sudden changes in a child's behaviour or mood, increased secrecy about device use and using screens late into the night may indicate problematic digital habits. Parents should address such signs through open, trust-based communication rather than blame or punishment, she said, while also making appropriate use of parental-control tools.

Dr al-Saleem said Qatar University contributes to national efforts by linking scientific research with community practice and evidence-based policymaking. Academic research, she added, highlights the importance of open communication and clear family rules in promoting safer digital habits.

She stressed that evaluating awareness campaigns should go beyond counting participants and measuring the reach of awareness messages to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes and family practices before and after implementation. Evaluations should also determine whether these changes are sustained over time.

The academics' remarks highlight the importance of sustained co-operation among families, academic institutions and national bodies in fostering a culture of digital responsibility, helping children and young people navigate an evolving digital landscape safely and make informed use of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence.

Katara novel award winners: Recognition will expand global reach of their works

QNA
Doha

Winners of the 12th Katara Prize for Arabic Novel 2026 expressed pride in the recognition, saying it would open wider Arab and international horizons for their literary works through translation into other major languages.

In remarks to Qatar News Agency (QNA), they said the award would help their works reach more readers, expand translation and distribution opportunities, and strengthen Arab writers' presence internationally amid rapid digital transformation.

Qatari novelist Khalaf al-Khalaf, winner for The Covenant and the Pact, said recognition at a prestigious international literary event was every writer's aspiration.

His novel follows Muteb, a character facing multiple challenges who discovers his abilities and grows stronger and more ambitious despite illness and adversity.

Moroccan scholar Dr Hamid al-Kettani, winner in the critical studies category for The Arabic Novel on the Threshold of Development: A Study in Historical Periodization, said his research examines the novel's history and critical terminology.

It reconstructs the literary history of the Arabic novel and explores its emergence during the transition from classical to modern Arabic narrative in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The awards would open wider Arab and international horizons for their literary works through translation into other languages

It also reconsiders the critical terms used to describe the novel's development from cultural and aesthetic perspectives, drawing on the Doha Historical Dictionary.

Palestinian novelist Huda al-Mashharawi said her award-winning novel reflects the Palestinian people's creativity and cultural resilience.

Her work portrays a Palestinian born in a refugee camp in Lebanon and explores marginalisation, loss and their psychological and social effects.

Yemeni writer Dr Manal Taha, winner for Sunglasses, said her novel offers young readers a simple message about relationships: seeing them clearly helps people understand their true nature and build healthy connections.

Algerian novelist Khadija Telli, winner for The Tailor of Tolga, explained that Tolga is an oasis in Algeria's Biskra Province.

Her novel follows Amjad, a boy passionate about heritage and the past, as he investigates the mystery surrounding a tailor depicted in an artwork.

She said the story explores memory, the fight against forgetting, and the connection between past and present through art.

COMMUNITY

MES wins 'My White Flag' award for third year running



MES Indian School has achieved a milestone accomplishment by securing the prestigious "My White Flag" award for the third consecutive year since the award's inception, in recognition of its exemplary record of zero violations throughout the academic year 2025-26.

Conferred by the Department of Private Schools and Kindergartens under Qatar's Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), this honour reaffirms the school's unwavering commitment to regulatory compliance, institutional accountability and exemplary educational governance.

Ranked among the top five schools in Qatar, MES Indian School is the only Indian school to earn this distinction, marking a moment of immense pride and reinforcing its reputation for sustained excellence, integrity, and responsible educational governance.

The award was received by MES senior vice-president Kashif Jaleel, treasurer A T Usman, and school principal Dr Hameeda Kadar, from the director of the Department of Private Schools and Kindergartens and acting director of the Private School Licensing Department Dr Rania Mohammed, at an award ceremony on October 14.

The key areas covered during field visits carried out by the inspectors of the MoEHE include school academic plans and policies, school administration, commitment to three subjects (Qatar History, Arabic, and Islamic Studies), security, safety, and maintenance of school facilities, staff data management and approval, administrative data and documents, cleanliness and housekeeping, school/student behaviour management, transport management, assistance to students with learning difficulties, school complaints handling procedures, code of ethics issued by the ministry and awareness programmes for parents, and staff and students.

The school management members extended heartfelt congratulations to the fraternity on securing the recognition and the "My White Flag" award.

They commended the leadership and staff for their collective dedication and professionalism, whose concerted efforts have sustained this record of excellence.

Dr Kadar thanked the school management for providing all necessary support and strategic guidance in achieving this landmark achievement.

She also conveyed her appreciation to the parents for their continued trust, co-operation and valued partnership, acknowledging that the collective commitment of all stakeholders has been pivotal in upholding the school's exemplary standards.

Dr Kadar stressed that the initiative seeks to ensure a safe learning environment that reflects discipline and quality.

MES Indian School, Abu Hamour Branch wins 'White Flag' award



MES Indian School, Abu Hamour Branch (MESIS), has received the prestigious "My White Flag" award for the academic year 2025-26, marking its third consecutive year of recognition for maintaining a record of zero violations.

The achievement reflects the school's focus on quality education, student safety, discipline and a supportive learning environment.

The MES Governing Board, which manages both MES Indian School and MES Indian School, Abu Hamour Branch (MESIS), takes pride in its school teams' achievement, as it is the only Indian school whose two branches received the prestigious "My White Flag".

The Private Schools and Kindergartens Department of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) invited the school's licence holder to receive the award at a ceremony held at the ministry on October 14.

MES Governing Board senior vice-president Kashif Jaleel, treasurer A T Usman, and school principal Pramila Kannan received the award on behalf of the institution.

The MES Governing Board appreciated the efforts of the teachers, staff, students and parents in achieving this milestone.







DPS-Modern Indian School hosts third Teenpreneur Pitch Perfect Challenge

DPS Modern Indian School successfully hosted the third "Teenpreneur Pitch Perfect Challenge" on October 13, bringing together participants from 10 schools across Qatar.

Centred on the theme *Waste Not: Turning Waste into Opportunity*, the inter-school competition was conducted in two categories: Grades IX–X and Grades XI–XII.

The challenge encouraged students to transform waste into innovative products and sustainable business opportunities, aligning with Qatar National Vision 2030 and UN Sustainable Development Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.

Chief Guest Shaheen Muhammed Shafi, the vice-president of DPS Monarch International School, urged students to think beyond conventional business models, recognise emerging opportunities and view failures as stepping stones to entrepreneurial success.

Principal Soma Bhattacharjee encouraged students to embrace creativity and innovation, emphasising that entrepreneurship goes beyond winning.

Highlighting the theme *Waste Not: Turning Waste into Opportunity*, she urged participants to transform waste into sustainable solutions for a better future.

Asna Nafees, group academic adviser of the DPS Group of Schools, emphasised the potential of young entrepreneurs to turn small ideas into impactful ventures that generate employment and contribute positively to society.

The judging panel comprised Vimal Thomas, chief accountant at Bureau Veritas International, Qatar; Saumy Thomas, manager of Internal Audit at Qatar University; and Shaheen Backer, business leader, entrepreneur and certified business coach.

Participants presented innovative business ideas, outlining product features, business models, market strategies and financial plans, with a strong emphasis on sustainability, ethical practices and market potential.

In the Grades IX and X category, Shantiniketan Indian School clinched first place with "Venzora Hair Pads", presented by Mohammed Aleem Lone, Mohammad Saahir Shamsheer and Nihal Badshah.

MES Indian School secured the runner-up position with "Foodward", presented by Rayan Majeed, Aaesha Fathima Basheer and Sara Gigani.

In the Grades XI and XII category, Podar Pearl School claimed the top spot with "Restep", presented by Aarefa Merji, Sadiya Saneesh and Haribhakti Subodh Patil.

Loyola International School shared the runner-up honours for "Kyklos", presented by Jevishon Jakson Coonghe, Manya Bhandary and Laximi Jayavardhan Gadde, and DPS Modern Indian School for "Ground2Good", presented by Nysa Singh, Nicole Crasta and Maairah Rimas Chadkhan.

The event concluded with a commitment to carry forward the spirit of innovation, sustainability, and collaboration to create meaningful change.

Qatar Tamizhar Sangam organises free medical camp

Qatar Tamizhar Sangam (QTS), a socio-cultural organisation affiliated with the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) under the aegis of the embassy of India in Qatar, held a free medical camp on October 9 in association with Aster Medical Centre, C Ring Road.

The initiative aims to promote community health and provide accessible healthcare services to members of the Indian community, particularly low-income workers.

The medical camp offered a range of free healthcare services, including laboratory examinations, vision tests, gynaecology consultations, dental consultations, general medicine consultations, and Breast Cancer awareness for women.





More than 200 beneficiaries attended the camp and availed themselves of the services provided.

Satyam Sharma from the embassy's Labour and Community Welfare Department attended the event.

Prominent community representatives also attended the event, including ICC vice-president Shantanu Deshpande, Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF) president Mr Shanavas Bava, ICC Advisory Council chairman Baburajan, ICBF Advisory Council chairman K S Prasad, Outreach Qatar president Krishna Kumar, and community leader Mahesh Gowda.

The QTS thanked the management of Aster Medical Centre, represented by Fazil Sulaiman, for its continued guidance and support in making the initiative successful.

The organisation also extended its appreciation to the doctors and nurses who contributed their time and expertise to provide medical services to the beneficiaries.

Special thanks were conveyed to the co-ordinators, volunteers, and organisers whose dedication and teamwork helped ensure the smooth conduct of the camp.

Volunteers were awarded a certificate of appreciation.

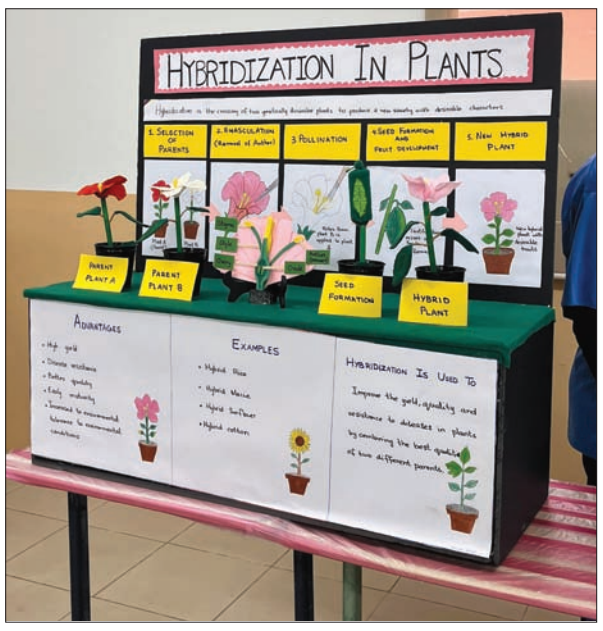
Addressing the gathering, QTS president Muniyappan reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to conducting more community-oriented and charitable initiatives for the welfare of the Indian community in Qatar.

The QTS distributed food to all attendees before concluding the programme.





Snapshots from the event.



PISQ hosts Science Exhibition 2026-27 across all school wings





Pakistan International School Qatar (PISQ) has organised its Science Exhibition 2026-27 across the KG, Primary, Girls, Boys, and Cambridge Wings, giving students a valuable platform to showcase scientific knowledge, creativity, innovation, environmental awareness, and hands-on learning.

The exhibitions reflected the school's commitment to developing scientific curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and an appreciation of how science and technology can contribute to a sustainable future.

The KG Wing Science Exhibition – Inter-House Competition introduced young learners to scientific exploration through colourful, imaginative projects on pollution, saving the Earth, recycling, green vision, clean environments, mosaic art, eco-friendly models, ocean life, and other environmental themes.

Through their creative displays and enthusiastic presentations, the children demonstrated an early understanding of environmental responsibility and the importance of protecting the planet.

The Primary Wing Science Exhibition, held on October 4, showcased a diverse range of classroom projects.

The exhibition provided students with opportunities to explain scientific concepts and demonstrate their understanding through practical models.

Parents attended the event, appreciated the young scientists' efforts, and shared encouraging feedback.

The vice-principal and primary wing co-ordinators acknowledged the dedication of teachers and parents, whose collaboration helped make the exhibition a success.

At the Girls Wing, students from Grades 5-12 participated in the Internal Science Exhibition on October 4, followed by the presentation of selected projects at the Inter-Wing Competition on October 5.

The projects reflected scientific understanding, creativity, innovation, and confident presentation.

Principal Muhammad Afzal, accompanied by the vice-principals of all wings, visited the exhibition, interacted with students, explored their projects, and appreciated their efforts and innovative thinking.

His encouraging words inspired students to keep exploring scientific ideas and pursue excellence.

The Boys Wing Science Exhibition featured projects addressing a broad range of scientific and technological themes, including environmental protection, biodiversity, robotics, smart irrigation, bioplastics, gravity, optics, DC generators, the human respiratory system, renewable energy, water conservation, pollution control, recycling, automation, and sustainable technology.

With guidance and support from their science mentors, students demonstrated how scientific principles apply to real-world challenges and practical solutions.

The Cambridge Wing Science Exhibition highlighted the application of scientific principles through projects such as Physics of Drifting, Windmills, Wind Turbines, Maglev Trains, Volcanic Eruptions, Electroplating, Sound and Vibrations, Hydraulic Arms, Solar Energy, Smart Fire Detectors, Iron Dome, and Water Filtration.

Under the mentorship of Yusuf Wasil, students confidently explained the concepts behind their models, connecting classroom learning with practical applications in science and technology.

The successful organisation of these exhibitions reflected the collective efforts of the school management, vice-principals, science mentors, teachers, co-ordinators, parents, and students.

Their collaboration created an enriching learning environment where students could explore ideas, share knowledge, and build confidence in presenting their work.

Through the Science Exhibition 2026-27, the PISQ reaffirmed its commitment to promoting scientific inquiry, environmental responsibility, creativity, and innovation among its students.

The exhibitions encouraged young learners to look beyond textbooks, ask questions, experiment with ideas, and recognise the role of science in building a more sustainable and technologically advanced future.



DGC Ladies launch new season with 'Return of the Queens to the Greens'

The DGC Ladies League officially opened its new season on September 17, with a special Ladies Day event, "Return of the Queens to the Greens", at Doha Golf Club.

The Ladies Pairs Shamble Tournament brought together Doha Golf Club lady members and guests for an afternoon of golf, friendship, and celebration.

The event provided an opportunity to welcome new faces, reconnect with existing members and introduce more women to the growing DGC Ladies golfing community.

The tournament produced closely contested results, with the winning pair decided by net countback.

Tournament results were:

- 1st Place: Rukkaiya Pachisa & Niamh McDaid
- 2nd Place: Lyndel Christensen & Marina Nikitina
- 3rd Place: Nicola Murdoch & Elina Ikstrums

The competition also featured several individual hole prizes.

Betty Faniega took the Longest Drive on Hole 3, while Lyndel Christensen was Closest to the Pin on Hole 6. Grapes Curilan won the Longest Putt Holed prize on Hole 9.

The event was designed not only to mark the start of another golfing season, but also to encourage greater women's participation in golf and sport.

The DGC Ladies League welcomes women of all playing abilities, from experienced golfers to those new to the sport.

The aim is to create an inclusive, supportive environment where women can develop their golfing skills, build friendships, and become part of a growing sporting community.

Golf offers a unique combination of physical activity, mental focus and social interaction.

The DGC Ladies League also recognises the wider contribution that women's sport can make to society.

By creating opportunities for women to participate, connect, and stay active, the league aims to help build a healthier, more inclusive, and connected sporting community in Qatar.

The DGC Ladies League hopes to build on the success of the opening event throughout the season, welcoming new members and continuing to expand the community of women enjoying golf in Qatar.

DGC Ladies captain Lyndel Christensen expressed her sincere appreciation to the main sponsor, Regal 360 Facilities Management, for its generous support.

Special thanks were also extended to the Doha Golf Club Pro Shop, Mayfair Hospitality and Doha Golf Club for their valued support in helping make the event a success.

For enquiries about joining the DGC Ladies League or to find out more about upcoming events, contact Doha Golf Club on +974 4496 0777.

The DGC Ladies League is ready to welcome the next generation of women to the game.



Birla Public School students secure first place in ICC Quiz Competition

Students of Birla Public School, Doha, brought laurels to the school by securing first place at the ICC Quiz Competition 2026, organised by the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) as part of the Gandhi Jayanti Celebrations on October 2, celebrating Mahatma Gandhi's life, values, and vision.

The event was held at ICC Ashoka Hall, Doha, under the aegis of the embassy of India, Qatar, and brought together students from Indian schools across Qatar to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's life, ideals, values, and vision.

The competition saw 15 Indian schools across Qatar participate, with 51 teams of 102 students competing in a series of challenging and engaging rounds.

The competition featured Preliminary, Audio, Visual, Rapid Fire, Missing Link and Clue Rounds, culminating in the much-anticipated Grand Finale.

Representing Birla Public School, Doha, four teams participated under the guidance of Rakesh Verma:

- Team 1: Swarnali Biswas (10 B) and Aarna Mishra (10 M)
- Team 2: Drishti Jain (11 O) and Shanmugapriya Sivakumar (11 B)
- Team 3: Nihal Raval and Wendron Horwing Machado (Grade 12)
- Team 4: Alenta Mulakkalethu Shibu (12 O) and Hafsa Velakadu Navas (12 O)

Nihal Raval and Wendron Horwing Machado (Grade 12) secured first place in a landslide victory, displaying remarkable knowledge, quick thinking, confidence, and excellent teamwork throughout the rounds.

The achievement is a moment of immense pride for Birla Public School, Doha, and reflects the students' strong general awareness, historical understanding, patriotism, intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm for learning.

Their success also highlights the school's continued commitment to encouraging students to broaden their knowledge, develop critical thinking skills and participate confidently in inter-school academic competitions.

The school leadership team congratulated the winners and participating teams for their enthusiastic participation and commendable performance.

WORLD

Suspect in Syria's Assad-era massacre arrested in Lebanon

AFP
Damascus

Syrian authorities have announced the arrest of a former paramilitary leader who is the main suspect in a massacre of nearly 250 civilians by Assad-allied forces during the country's civil war.

A Syrian security source told AFP that Ali Kayali was apprehended in Lebanon during an operation coordinated with Lebanese authorities. Syrian state news agency SANA said "intelligence services have arrested Ali Kayali, who also went by the name Mihrac Ural, the main suspect in the Banias massacre of 2013". It said he "was attempting to flee across the border."

Kayali was a member of a paramilitary group that fought alongside former Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's troops during the war. In May 2013, government forces and their allies killed at least 248 people in mass executions in the predominantly Sunni Muslim towns of Bayda and Banias, located in the coastal province of Tartus, according to Human Rights Watch.

The monitor at the time described the killings as "one of the deadliest instances of mass executions in Syria's increasingly bloody conflict".

Syrian Justice Minister Mazhar Alwais wrote on X Thursday that the arrest "sends a clear message: there is no room in Syria for impunity for criminals; the rights of victims will not be lost, no matter how much time passes".

Syria and Lebanon have been trying to write a new chapter in their relations since al-Assad was deposed in late 2024 by a coalition, which has contributed to the weakening of Hezbollah, an al-Assad ally.

Lebanese authorities in September arrested a distant cousin of al-Assad, and earlier detained a former Syrian intelligence officer and several accomplices alleged to have planned attacks against forces of the new Syrian government.

In August, Beirut also extradited to Damascus a former general from the al-Assad era who is accused of crimes including murder and torture. Syria's war began with pro-democracy protests in 2011 that were violently suppressed by the government. The protests quickly morphed into a complex armed conflict that drew in paramilitary forces, fighters and foreign powers.It ended with the ousting of al-Assad in a lightning offensive led by a rebel group that subsequently took power. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor, the death tolls in Banias and Bayda came to around 400.

Kayali, originally from Turkiye, and convicted there before fleeing in 1982 to settle in Syria, where he formed a paramilitary force allied with al-Assad's government. Nicknamed the "butcher of Banias", Kayali and his group fought alongside former Assad's troops during the civil war. Turkiye's official Anadolu news agency reported that he is married to a relative of Assad's, and was also suspected of having planned a double car bombing attack that killed 53 people in Reyhanli, southeast Turkiye.

UN says Gaza malnutrition gains fragile as commercial supplies halt

Reuters
Geneva


Palestinian children peek through a tent cover at the site of an Israeli strike earlier this week on a tent in Khan Younis, Gaza. (**Reuters**)

Gains in tackling malnutrition in Gaza remain fragile and could be undermined by disruptions to supplies entering the Palestinian enclave, the UN children's agency Unicef said yesterday, urging that all crossings remain open.

Israel said on Wednesday commercial goods were no longer entering Gaza because of what it described as a dispute over taxes between local merchants and Hamas. That has cut off a vital source of food and other goods in a territory where most depend on humanitarian assistance after three years of war, repeated displacement and stringent Israeli restrictions on aid deliveries.

Although the ceasefire has improved aid access and reduced large-scale fighting, humanitarian agencies say ongoing strikes, continued displacement and widespread destruction have left civilians highly vulnerable.

Unicef spokesperson Ricardo Pires said the flow of both commercial and humanitarian supplies must remain predictable and continuous. "The impact on children obviously will be felt if this situation is not resolved," he said.

"We can't go back to a situation where children and families are not getting all the supplies, goods, and services that they require."

A new Unicef report published yesterday found that while the ceasefire since October has allowed more humanitarian aid and commercial supplies to enter, acute malnutrition remains a risk. The report said progress in pushing back the threat of famine, confirmed by a global food security monitor in August last year, had been achieved through a scaled-up food and nutrition response, the easing of restrictions on the entry of food and nutrition supplies, and the ceasefire.

However, those gains remain fragile, it said. "Acute malnutrition rates have fallen, but only one in three children under the age of two is currently achieving minimum dietary diversity," the report stated.

A survey conducted by Unicef in June also found a significant prevalence of chronic malnutrition, affecting one in eight children under five.

In besieged city of Yemen, life suffers as Houthis close in

Reuters
Taiz, Yemen


Displaced Yemeni, Ali Hasan fills a container with water as his daughter sit at a school-turned-shelter in Taiz. (**Reuters**)

Ali Hassan and his family took shelter under a stairwell at a school in Taiz as Iran-allied Houthi forces closed in around them, tightening a siege of Yemen's third-largest city.

The 42-year-old said the latest fighting between the group and Saudi-backed government forces had forced him to flee several times. The wider conflict has also left its mark on his body: a shot from a Houthi sniper paralysed his hand in 2021, he said.

"I only have my left hand," he told Reuters. A month ago, he added, another sniper shot his sister in the spine while she was herding sheep, leaving her completely disabled. Reuters could not verify his accounts.

The city is fast becoming the most important front in Yemen's reignited civil war — itself a new theatre in the wider regional conflict that began with US and Israeli strikes on Iran in February.

Houthi forces have encircled the city by cutting the main road south to Aden, forcing people from their homes and deepening a humanitarian crisis.

A Houthi victory in Taiz would mark one of the biggest turning points in a war that resumed this summer after a four-year truce. The group denies being armed by Iran and says it is fighting a corrupt system in Yemen.

Hassan said residents were facing Houthi fire and shortages of food and water as the group pushed for more territory. Last month, the Houthis tightened their grip on the Bab el-Mandeb shipping lane in a lightning advance.

On Thursday, the group fired missiles at the presidential palace complex in the southern city of Aden, killing five people, the government said.

The Saudi-led coalition has also listed dozens of Houthi attacks on Saudi infrastructure in recent weeks.

The Aden strike and the Houthis' determination to take Taiz suggest the conflict could drag on, prolonging suffering in a city of almost 600,000.

Taiz has been on the frontline between the Houthis and the government since the war's first days.

It is now the last major urban stronghold of anti-Houthi forces in the southern highland area of Yemen.

Resident Wathiq Mahyoub said prices were rising, fuel was running short and garbage was piling up on the streets.

"The siege is suffocating. It's strangling the citizens," Mahyoub told Reuters. "The Houthis refused to open the crossing for us, even to dump the rubbish."

War broke out in Yemen in 2014 when the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa, driving the government south to Aden. A Saudi-led military intervention the following year led to a bloody stalemate before a 2022 truce that held until this year. Last week, government forces launched a campaign to recapture areas controlled by the Houthis, recovering ground near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a key shipping artery.

Aid agencies have warned of rapidly worsening conditions in Yemen.

"There are no camps equipped to receive these families. We find some of these families living in large unfinished buildings," said Ahmed al-Jalal, director of the Executive Unit for the Management of Displaced Persons' Camps, Al-Muzaffar district, in Taiz governorate.

"Some are in shops, some in buildings unfit for living, with no essentials for living," he added.

Speaking to reporters in Geneva, Zoe Brennan, spokesperson for the UN migration agency, said 233,077 people have been displaced so far in the latest conflict, 121,530 of them in Taiz.

World Health Organisation spokesperson Tarik Jašarevi said 12 hospitals would soon be running out of fuel while there was a shortage of oxygen and medicines.

"Taiz is being cut off, and its hospitals are running out of supplies as fighting has reached urban districts where the main referral hospitals stand," he said. "Unfortunately, the road closures are blocking the resupply."

Taiz faces looming healthcare crisis

AFP
Taiz, Yemen


Buildings in the southwestern city of Taiz, Yemen. (**Reuters**)

Crammed with beds and stretchers, the dilapidated Al-Jumhuri hospital in Yemen's besieged city of Taiz is running so low on fuel and medicine that it may have to close, officials warn.

With pro-Iran Houthi fighters surrounding Taiz and blocking all supplies, the facility is symptomatic of a collapsing health system in Yemen's third-largest city, they say. At Al-Thawra General Hospital, Taiz's biggest, the kidney centre is treating 420 patients. But its generators have just 14 days' worth of fuel, its director Youssef al-Zakri said.

"We don't know what will happen to them" after that, he told AFP during a visit this week. Without dialysis, they will die, he warned. One of the patients, Ahmed al-Issai, needs two treatments a week and never leaves his hospital bed. "A dialysis patient is like a fish. If it leaves the water, it dies," he told AFP.

Houthi fighters have encircled Taiz since early October, blocking the road that links it to Aden, interim capital of the Saudi-backed, internationally recognised government.

The Houthis seized the capital Sanaa in 2014, sparking a brutal civil war in the country.

After a years-long lull, the conflict — which triggered a major humanitarian crisis — has flared again during the US-Iran war, impacting Yemen's beleaguered populace once more.

"Most of Taiz's medical facilities are threatened with closure due to the lack of diesel," Ilan Abdulhaq, Taiz's deputy governor in charge of health affairs, told AFP.

She also lamented "a shortage of medicines and medical supplies, which are impossible to find because of the total blockade" on the city's entrances imposed by the Houthis.

Discussions have taken place to set up humanitarian corridors, but "we have received no assurances in this regard", she added.

Fadl al-Bukhari, who suffers from a heart condition, says the shortages are increasingly acute. "The pharmacies say: 'It's not in our hands. There is a blockade, the medicines have not arrived,'" he said.

Across Yemen, hospitals and health facilities are "overwhelmed" by the most intense fighting in years, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) warned this week.

Clashes in Taiz governorate and along the Red Sea coast left hundreds of fighters dead and displaced more than 100,000 people, according to military sources and the UN. "Frontline hospitals are receiving large numbers of wounded people with limited supplies of surgical materials, anaesthesia, oxygen and medicines," ICRC health coordinator Feras Abusamra said in a statement.

The World Food Programme (WFP) said the renewed fighting has left it unable to reach 600,000 people in Taiz who rely on humanitarian aid, including 200,000 women and children.

Taiz governorate has "some of (Yemen's) highest levels of food insecurity", with 10 of its 16 districts classified at emergency levels, the WFP said this week.

"The latest monitoring indicates that wheat flour stocks are nearly depleted while local markets are running out of food," it said in a statement.

According to the WFP, more than 18mn people — most of Yemen's population — are facing severe food insecurity. About 2.2mn children under five suffer from acute malnutrition.

"We are critically concerned about the escalating conflict, but even more so about the growing number of people we can no longer reach because of it," said El-Khidir Daloum, WFP country director in Yemen.

"This is the kind of situation that can rapidly spiral into a humanitarian catastrophe," he added.

Trump move to restart direct US flights with Lebanon hits roadblock

Reuters
Beirut

The UN aviation agency has found Lebanon's main airport lacks valid certification, in a setback to US President Donald Trump's move to revive direct US-Beirut flights.

Trump made the announcement in July and signed an order last month for the US government to allow direct flights from the US to Lebanon, reversing a four-decade-long suspension after TWA Flight 847 was hijacked and forced to land in Beirut in 1985.

While the US Federal Aviation Administration and the Transportation Security Administration would still need to conduct safety reviews before flights could resume, the Lebanese embassy in Washington called Trump's order "a significant first step towards restoring direct air service between Lebanon and the US."

However, the UN's International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) technical assistance mission to Lebanon in July identified shortcomings at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport and in the aviation system.

The findings, which two senior industry officials familiar with the matter expect to delay the resumption of service, complicate efforts to follow up on an order Trump signed after meeting Lebanese President Joseph Aoun. Washington has backed Aoun as it pushes for Iran-backed Hezbollah to be disarmed.

The agency sent its internal report, made at the request of the Lebanese Civil Aviation Authority (LCAA), to Lebanon in September.

Beirut airport's firefighting resources are equipped for single-aisle planes, but not twin-aisle jetliners used for long-haul flights, according to a summary of ICAO's report. The airport also lacks an emergency plan, and its conditional certification has expired, the report said.


Lebanese Middle East Airlines airplanes on the tarmac at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport. (**Reuters/File Photo**)

"This is a serious and time-critical matter that must be addressed immediately to preserve the airport's operational status," the summary said.

The report also found the Lebanese regulator LCAA lacks qualified inspectors to oversee air traffic control licensing, and has no fully established, operational and independent aircraft accident investigation authority with clearly defined roles. Such concerns were flagged during a two-day workshop last month where officials from ICAO, Lebanon's government, the FAA and others discussed efforts to revive direct air service.

Lebanon's Minister of Public Works and Transport Fayez Rasamny said Lebanon was taking steps to address the concerns, with efforts to certify the airport starting today. The LCAA expects to issue conditional certification in the coming days.

"Most of the issues highlighted in the report had already been identified by the LCAA, and corrective action had already been initiated," Rasamny said in a statement, adding that progress had been delayed by war. Israeli forces remain in southern Lebanon and have continued strikes despite a US-brokered framework agreement signed in June between Israel and Lebanon. Hezbollah, which was not party to the deal, has rejected it.

The FAA and ICAO declined to comment. The US State Department advises Americans not to travel to Lebanon given safety concerns. It said the FAA advises caution for flights operating in Lebanese airspace due to heightened military activity in or around Syria, including the risks of errant long-range surface-to-air missiles originating from Syrian territory.

Foreign airlines have avoided large swathes of Middle East airspace because of missile and drone threats since US and Israeli strikes on Iran in February triggered regional hostilities, with an airport in Saudi Arabia the latest site to come under attack.

Lebanon and its national carrier have been praised domestically for maintaining air navigation services and flights, helping to prop up an economy that depends on tourism and remittances.

Three US airline officials told Reuters on the condition of anonymity they do not think any American carriers would resume flights to Lebanon in the near term, citing security concerns.

Meta employees admit Lula's accounts were hindered during Brazil election, *Folha* reports

Employees at Meta acknowledged in internal communications that the Instagram accounts of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva were negatively affected by restrictions during the country's election, newspaper *Folha de S Paulo* reported yesterday.
The messages also acknowledged the platform recommended the profile of challenger Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, as well as his WhatsApp channel, according to the report.
Meta did not immediately respond to a request for comment
Lula will face Bolsonaro in a runoff on October 25, following a stronger-than-expected performance by the senator in the first-round vote earlier this month
Lula's camp said earlier this week it would file a complaint before the Organisation of American States alleging that Meta, which owns Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook, manipulated social media during Brazil's election According to Lula's party, some of his posts appeared without a share button, suffered reduced reach, and had stories that prevented reactions and sharing, in addition to appearing without audio or playing at accelerated speed
A justice at Brazil's top electoral court on Thursday ordered the company not to unjustifiably limit the reach of political content related to both candidates through the end of the runoff campaign
The ruling also stipulated that Meta AI, the company's artificial intelligence chatbot, must not favor either candidate when generating election-related content. (**Reuters**)

Left rallies as Lula closes gap before tight runoff

AFP
Brasília


President and presidential candidate Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva claps as the enacted bill ending the six-days-on, one-day-off work schedule is displayed during a ceremony at the Federal Senate in Brasilia. (**AFP**)

Brazil's left has mounted a political fightback ahead of the October 25 presidential runoff, rallying supporters in the streets, overhauling its social media campaign and pushing through a landmark labour reform.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, 80, was jolted when he finished behind right-wing Senator Flavio Bolsonaro — son of former president Jair Bolsonaro — by 47% to 45% in the October 4 first round.

But a Datafolha poll published Thursday showed Bolsonaro's lead in the runoff narrowing from four percentage points to two, putting the rivals in a statistical tie.

Bolsonaro was on 51% of valid votes against Lula's 49%, within the survey's two-point margin of error.

Seeking a fourth term, Lula is now targeting the 33.4mn Brazilians who stayed away from the first round — more than one in five eligible voters.

"Lula is still in the race, and the election is far from decided — despite what many of us thought after the first round," political scientist Eduardo Grin of the Getulio Vargas Foundation told AFP.

Congress approved a constitutional amendment Wednesday abolishing Brazil's six-day working week, a flagship Lula campaign promise that will give employees two paid days off without cutting their wages.

The reform will replace the widespread "6x1" system — six days of work followed by one day off — with a five-day week, gradually reducing the maximum working week from 44 to 40 hours.

The vote handed Lula, a former trade union leader, a major victory just 10 days before the runoff, giving him a popular achievement to champion among working-class voters who have traditionally formed his political base.

The measure was so widely supported that even Bolsonaro, who had previously opposed it, voted in favor.

Lula attributed his rival's reversal to "pressure from society," hailing the reform as a victory born of the street protests demanding change.

The president has also unveiled debt relief for small businesses, new university grants and measures to ease fuel costs, while proposing free weekend public transport.

His government had already increased payments under Bolsa Familia, Brazil's flagship welfare programme for low-income families, before the first round.

But the flurry of economic measures has raised concerns over government spending in a country whose public debt already exceeds 80% of GDP.

"The government is acting with zero fiscal responsibility," economist Marcos Mendes of the Insper research institute told AFP, describing the succession of benefits as potentially amounting to "indirect vote-buying."

Lula has also shaken up a digital campaign he acknowledged was his most "disorganised" in decades, seeking to challenge the Brazilian right's formidable social media operation.

He has recruited young politicians with large online followings, including Ana Elisa, a 21-year-old newly elected lawmaker from Minas Gerais state who has millions of followers.

Lula has even dubbed himself the "selfie king," embracing informal, direct-to-camera campaign videos.

Long resistant to using a mobile phone, he has promised to buy one if a pro-Lula WhatsApp channel reaches 5mn followers. The "Lula Army" has already attracted around 4.6mn.

Created by lawmaker Andre Janones, the channel assigns supporters online "missions" to spread campaign material and encourages ordinary users to share their own videos.

The left has meanwhile returned to the streets in force, staging demonstrations on a scale observers say Brazil has not seen in years.

Led by students and social movements, protesters dressed in the red of Lula's Workers' Party have marched under banners proclaiming "Bolsonaro never again" and "For democracy."

The demonstrators fear a return to the policies of Flavio Bolsonaro's father, far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro, whose 2019-2022 administration faced fierce criticism over its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, attacks on democratic institutions and the rights of minorities.

Grin believes the demonstrations could play an important role in drawing voters to the polls.

"This rapid, mass mobilsation in the streets has a multiplier effect and can undoubtedly bring out voters," he said.

Police seek answers after Oregon school shooting leaves five dead

Reuters
Oregon

Police in Bend, Oregon, were investigating yesterday why a 16-year-old boy shot dead three children and a teacher at the Silver Rail Elementary School, and how he got hold of the long gun used in his attack.

The latest deadly school shooting in the United States unfolded on Thursday afternoon when the teenager, who has not been publicly identified, shot through a locked door at the school in central Oregon, according to the Bend Police Department.

The teenager killed three children aged 5, 8 and 11 and one teacher before he himself was shot dead by an armed bystander who had pursued him into the school, Police Chief Mike Krantz said at a Thursday evening press conference.

Such shootings have become common in the US, with each one reviving debates over gun laws in a country where a right to "keep and bear Arms" is protected under the Constitution's Second Amendment.

The bystander has not been publicly identified by police, though recordings of 911 emergency calls released by authorities include a dispatcher saying he was possibly a father of a child at the school.

Oregon Governor Tina Kotek said at the press conference that the bystander "heroically intervened to stop further loss of life."

Beyond those killed, a 7-year-old student and a 54-year-old teacher were taken to hospital with critical injuries.

It was not clear if the shooter had any prior connection to the school, which has about 450 students from kindergarten through the fifth grade, roughly ages 5 to 11, and 40 staff members.

CBS News, citing unnamed law enforcement officials, reported that the attacker used a shotgun that his mother had purchased.

Some of the deadliest school attacks in the US include those at Columbine High School in 1999, Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018 and Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, in 2022.

Advocates for gun-owners' rights have argued for arming teachers as a means of defence. The Gun Owners of America advocacy group pointed to the armed bystander's intervention in Bend as evidence for their position.

Residents of the small city of Bend were left grieving after the attack, which unfolded in minutes, with emergency responders receiving a call at 12:59 pm PDT from a person in a vehicle who reported being shot at multiple times by someone with a long gun, police said.

In the minutes afterwards, dozens of calls were received saying the shooter had entered the school. Officers arrived at 1.02pm and moments later an officer reported the shooter had been killed, police said. Officers entered and confirmed the teenager was dead.

American influence, AI content and mistrust loom over Alberta's independence vote


Mark Carney at a rally at the BMO Centre in Calgary, Alberta. (**Reuters**)

The run-up to a referendum in Canada's Alberta region on a future independence vote has been clouded by US political influence and AI-manipulated online content, suggesting that the results will be contested no matter the outcome.
Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said Thursday that he expected foreign governments — the "US included" — would not get involved in Canadian elections.
But the US is already on the scene.
President Donald Trump has launched a trade war and repeatedly claimed that Canada should be incorporated into the US.
US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has called Alberta a "natural partner," while Canada's Globe and Mail newspaper recently detailed contacts between separatist leaders in the province and US Republican operatives.
Canada's foreign influence transparency commissioner said in September his office was "aware of concerns" about non-Canadian activities around the Alberta referendum.
The minority New Democratic Party (NDP) has advocated for a parliamentary debate on the issue. "None of these things can be taken in a vacuum," NDP Member of Parliament Heather McPherson told AFP. Close Trump allies have also inserted themselves into the online independence conversation.
Last week, tech billionaire Elon Musk posted on X after francophone Quebec's separatist party win: "They would be better off. Alberta and Saskatchewan should separate too."
Brian McQuinn, a co-director of an institute of the University of Regina said it "would be folly" to discount the impact this could have in Canada. Along with Americans, he also observed Russian-linked activity pushing the most extreme aspects of the independence debate. (**AFP**)

Ethiopia appoints interim Tigray govt

AFP
Addis Ababa

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced yesterday the establishment of an interim administration in the northern Tigray region, which has been controlled by rebels who have clashed with federal forces in recent weeks.

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) launched a major offensive against government forces on September 23, before being pushed back and losing control of its strongholds, including the regional capital Mekelle.

Tigray had been outside of Addis Ababa's control and did not participate in June federal elections, which were resoundingly won by Abiy's Prosperity Party (PP).

The federal government caretaker administration, which aims to create "a stable political situation so that free and transparent elections can be held", will administer Tigray for the next six months, Abiy's office said on social media following a cabinet decision.

The TPLF leadership "did not desire peace", it said, instead initiating the latest "devastating war".

The region fought a 2020-22 war against federal forces supported by Eritrean troops, which left an estimated 600,000 dead.

A 2022 peace deal ended the fighting but left lingering discontent over the terms.

Tigrayans "must break free from the cycle of conflict", the statement said, in order to "ensure their right to self-governance, and to enjoy the benefits of development".

Addis Ababa also announced the appointment of five officials, including the mayor of Mekelle.

In a comment to AFP, TPLF vice president Amanuel Assefa said the region "cannot be ruled by puppets of the genocidal regime" in Addis Ababa.

The TPLF, which previously ruled Ethiopia before being locked out of power in 2018 when Abiy became prime minister, was banned as a political entity last year.

Kjetil Tronvoll, regional specialist at Oslo New University College, told AFP the question of elections was "key", including whether a six-month timeline was even possible.

"Which parties will be allowed or denied to participate?" he asked, also questioning whether Abiy's PP would establish a local branch in the region.

In late September, the TPLF formed an uneasy alliance with several disparate armed groups opposed to the government.

The group has also moved closer to neighbouring Eritrea, long at odds with Ethiopia.

Addis Ababa says Asmara is supporting the TPLF, with a foreign security source saying thousands of Eritrean troops had deployed to the Tigray region.

For its part, Eritrea alleges that landlocked Ethiopia is planning to use the conflict as a justification to invade its territory and seize control of Assab port on the Red Sea.

Worsening water crisis sparks protests in Mexico's Guadalajara

Reuters
Guadalajara/Mexico City


A protester runs as a water cannon is deployed during a demonstration demanding clean water in Guadalajara. (**Reuters**)

Residents in Guadalajara, one of Mexico's biggest cities, are demanding answers over a worsening water-quality crisis that has left many households reporting foul-smelling, sediment-filled tap water and sparked police clashes as protesters urge government action.

A major protest last weekend put the issue in the national spotlight after police deployed water cannons and tear gas, dozens of people were injured, and officials said nearly 40 people were arrested. The incident prompted President Claudia Sheinbaum to rebuke the police for their tough response and pledge to review two water infrastructure projects for the area.

Still, further demonstrations are planned in the coming days as frustration builds, with videos circulating on social media of people collecting buckets and jars of murky brown or black water flowing from their taps.

The crisis has intensified scrutiny of water management across a metropolitan area of more than 5mn people that is also Mexico's largest industrial and manufacturing center, located in the western state of Jalisco. The problems echo broader concerns across Mexico, where many major cities struggle with water quality and reliability amid aging infrastructure, pollution and mounting pressure on limited resources.

A June citizen-monitoring study by the Mexican Institute for Community Development (IMDEC) analysed 184 household water samples from 90 neighbourhoods and found that more than 93% contained no detectable residual chlorine, meaning much of the system lacked the disinfectant normally used to protect water from bacterial contamination.

The study also reported elevated levels of lead, mercury, nitrates and E coli, a bacterial indicator of fecal contamination, in some samples.

Following the findings, IMDEC called for a public-health alert, independent testing by accredited laboratories and investigations into the sources of contamination.

At a rally this week, Aleida Morales, 54, said that for at least 15 years, the water arriving at her home has often been cloudy and brown. The situation has helped drive residents into the streets, she said, because many feel economic development in Guadalajara, which was one of Mexico's host cities for the World Cup this year, has come at the expense of environmental protection.

Guadalajara sits within the larger Lerma-Santiago watershed, one of Mexico's most polluted river systems and a region long burdened by wastewater, industrial pollution and rapid urban growth.

"There must be other, environmentally sustainable ways to create jobs," Morales said. "The current approach is poisoning us."

Thirty years ago, her grandparents described some of the region's local rivers and waterfalls as a "paradise." "Today, they are the source of toxic contamination," she added.

Federal authorities have acknowledged broader environmental challenges affecting the region.

In July, Sheinbaum and Secretary of Environment Alicia Barcena launched a 20 billion-peso ($1.09bn) restoration programme for the Lerma-Santiago basin and two other heavily polluted river systems, saying authorities had identified hundreds of priority pollution sources.

Allan Tejeda, an environmental engineering expert at the University of Guadalajara, said the crisis reflects years of accumulated pressures rather than a single contamination event.

He pointed to a combination of untreated or poorly treated wastewater, direct or undocumented discharges, rapid urban growth and chronic underinvestment in water infrastructure and treatment systems. Existing treatment facilities face growing pressure from contaminants entering the system and are increasingly inadequate for the scale of the challenge confronting the region

Trump 'did not order curb to Starshield for Ukraine'

Donald Trump did not request a reduction in Starshield services for Ukraine, a US official said yesterday, after tech billionaire Elon Musk insisted any limits on the communications system would ultimately have come from the president.

Kyiv on Wednesday reported restrictions to the SpaceX-operated service, which it sees as crucial to fending off Moscow's invasion, shortly after Trump criticised Ukraine and urged it to stop targeting Russian oil refineries.

"No such request was ever made by the president," the US official said on condition of anonymity, when asked whether the order had come from the White House as reported by the Reuters news agency.

Musk has said that "any limits on speed or usage" of his SpaceX company's Starshield systems were "decided by the US military and ultimately POTUS," referring to Trump. (**AFP**)

WORLD

Four die fighting Indonesia fires as haze cloaks region

AFP
Jakarta

Four people died on Indonesia's Java island fighting the blazes that have sent toxic smoke across southeast Asia, closed schools and fuelled a surge of respiratory complaints, authorities said yesterday.

The impact of the months-long fires has also prompted Singapore's leader to vow legal action against any companies responsible for the blazes that have made regional air quality among the world's worst.

Singapore again topped IQAir's live ranking of the world's most polluted major cities on Friday, with Kuala Lumpur second and Jakarta eighth.

"Where warranted, we will take action under Singapore's Transboundary Haze Pollution Act, and also explore joint action with other countries," said Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, without giving further details.

The law allows authorities to target companies whose activities overseas cause or contribute to unhealthy haze levels in Singapore

Legal experts have cautioned that pursuing companies linked to the smoke is challenging, with investigations reliant on cooperation from foreign authorities.

Singapore has no plantations or forests of its own, but several companies with concessions in Indonesia are reportedly based in the city-state.

Singapore's investigations into four Indonesian companies over their alleged role in the 2015 haze crisis remain open, a case that strained relations with Jakarta at the time.

An official at Indonesia's national police investigations agency on Wednesday said it was probing companies responsible for the fires, but did not give specific names.

Indonesia experiences wildfires regularly during its dry season, but this year the blazes have been especially severe because a strong El Nino has brought drought.

While drought contributes to the fires, experts say deforestation and drying of peatlands has damaged previously fire-resistant landscapes.

"We cannot control the weather or the winds, nor can we directly control what happens beyond our borders," said Singapore leader Wong.

"But we will do everything we can to protect Singaporeans, while working with our neighbours to address the underlying causes of the haze."

On Friday, the city-state's air pollution surged to around 251 on IQAir's Air Quality Index level into very unhealthy levels at around 0400 GMT.

Under the Swiss-based company's system, readings of 151-200 are considered unhealthy, 201-300 very unhealthy and above 300 hazardous.

A local Singaporean tour guide, who asked AFP not to use his name, said "You can't see much from Singapore's famous landmarks."

"Usually I can see as far as the national stadium. Today we can't see anything," he added.

The smoke is a direct consequence of the fires, which four people lost their lives battling in East Java's Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park on Thursday, Indonesia's forestry ministry said.

Two others suffered serious burns and were receiving further medical treatment.

"This incident serves as a reminder that forest and land fire extinguishing is a high-risk operation," it said, adding that personnel safety remained a primary concern.

The forestry department in the same statement said there was a significant jump in hotspots in several areas in six "priority provinces" where 615 so-called hotspots were detected.

A hotspot is a location where a satellite detects an unusually high temperature, indicating a potential fire or other strong heat source.

In Indonesia's Palangkaraya, a city in central Kalimantan, air pollution levels hovered in the hazardous zone above 300 yesterday, according to IQAir.

But many residents did not wear face masks, and stall owners went about their business as usual, but the ongoing haze had an impact.

"It leads to shortness of breath, and in terms of business, there's an impact," said Syehan, 43, who goes by a single name like many Indonesians.

"People travelled from afar to go to the market to purchase staple food. Nowadays, they don't go to the market anymore," Syehan said.

The haze has also affected regional aviation in Indonesia.

Since the haze first hit on August 11, more than 2,020 flights were affected, civil aviation chief Lukman F Laisa said.

Of these, 1,067 were cancelled, 919 flights were delayed and and 18 other flights were diverted to other airports, Lukman said in a statement shared yesterday.


A man takes photographs from an observation deck in Singapore, yesterday, as the country continues to be shrouded in haze caused by fires in Indonesia. (**AFP**)


A firefighter extinguishes a fire at Sungai Tabuk village in Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan yesterday. (**AFP**)

In Malaysia, frustration grows over Indonesia haze

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

Closed schools, shuttered sports centres and mass mask handouts. Indonesian wildfire haze has caused a regional pollution crisis and prompted growing frustration in neighbours, including Malaysia.

"You need to treat them as an outcast in the region," Malaysian parliamentarian Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman railed this week talking about the Indonesian fires.

His comments go much further than the gentle diplomatic pressure Malaysia's government has so far applied, but they reflect a simmering frustration with Indonesia's inability to control the fires.

"Malaysia and Indonesia are close neighbours, but that relationship must also come with responsibility," Malaysian parliamentarian Syerleena Abdul Rashid told AFP.

"Why should Malaysians continue paying the price for irresponsible actions beyond our borders?" she said.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on Thursday defended the approach, saying the southeast Asian nation "has done everything we can" to engage neighbouring Indonesia on the issue.

But at the popular Batu Caves tourist site, visitors and workers alike expressed frustration.

"You cannot see," tour operator Diddy Hamidon told AFP, looking out at a vista now shrouded in haze.


Oxygen tanks are seen as they await to be refilled at a medical supply warehouse in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday. (**AFP**)

"The Indonesian (government) needs to do the right thing," he added.

Malaysia has been forced to close schools over the haze, and has offered Indonesia help fighting the blazes.

But not until Wednesday did the offer appear to finally have been taken up, after talks involving disaster management officials on both sides, Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan said.

"The form of co-operation will depend on the outcome of the discussions," he told local reporters.

"But the authorities of both countries have, for the first time, begun talks on how we can work together to tackle the haze, which appears to be getting worse."

The fires have burned through hundreds of thousands of hectares in Indonesia and caused air pollution spikes in Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and East Timor, where schools closed this week due to the haze.

Malaysia has asked Asean for an urgent meeting to discuss the latest crisis, and this year's summit host Manila confirmed the issue will be on the agenda at a foreign ministers meeting next month.

"Asean members are more than willing to help," Malaysian parliamentarian Hassan Abdul Karim told AFP, "provided Indonesia is willing to swallow their bigger ego and pride."

Anger about Indonesia's inability to control the haze was stoked further by comments over the weekend from Jakarta's communications agency chief.

"We do not just send smoke... The oxygen in Singapore and Malaysia also comes from our forests," said Syahganda Nainggolan in a video that swiftly went viral and prompted furious responses.

Syerleena called the remarks "downright insensitive."

"We value our relationship with Indonesia, but that should not prevent us from speaking up when remarks are inappropriate," said the parliamentarian.

The growing public frustration in Malaysia but also neighbouring Singapore, which has topped global major city pollution rankings in recent days, is pressuring governments, said Chin.

'Korea reviews expanding military mission in Mideast'

Reuters
Seoul

Republic of Korea is reviewing an expansion of its military operations in the Middle East, the Kyunghyang Shinmun newspaper reported on Thursday, as the US ally faces pressure from President Donald Trump to provide support for the war in Iran.

Seoul is weighing expanding the operational area of its Cheonghae anti-piracy unit, which was dispatched to the Gulf of Aden in 2009, to include the Gulf of Oman, which links to the Strait of Hormuz, the newspaper said, without naming sources.

The administration of President Lee Jae Myung plans to submit a motion to parliament to extend the unit's mission, which is set to expire at the end of this year, the report said.

The government was also considering sending a frigate to the region to reinforce operations, the paper said.

Korea's Defence Ministry said in a statement to Reuters that the government was reviewing whether to send a motion to parliament on an extension of the unit's service before it expires on December 31, 2026.

Nothing had been decided on details of the extension of the anti-piracy unit's operations, the ministry said.

The situation in the Gulf of Aden was worsening with pirate activity up sharply from a year ago, the statement said. The Cheonghae unit currently includes a 4,400-tonne-class destroyer, a maritime operations helicopter, up to three rigid-hull inflatable boats and around 300 service members, according to broadcaster YTN.

President Lee said on September 18 he would not deploy military assets to the Middle East in a way that could draw the country into conflict.

China can 'easily win' a confrontation with Philippines: envoy

AFP
Manila

China's ambassador to Manila has said Beijing could "easily win" a conflict with the Philippines, though it would never choose force, comments the archipelago nation said could be read as a "thinly veiled threat".

Beijing claims most of the South China Sea despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis, and Philippine and Chinese ships have engaged in repeated confrontations in recent years, some leading to collisions and injuries.

The ambassador's remarks came a day after Philippine defence chief Gilberto Teodoro labelled Beijing a regional "troublemaker".

"We should feel fortunate enough that you have a neighbour like China in this region," Chinese ambassador Jing Quan told local reporters in Manila on Thursday.

"If we want to use force, we may easily win. But no, we will not choose force, and we love peace," he said after giving a speech at a school in Manila.

Jing added that the troublemaker label was "nonsense", while accusing Manila of harassing Chinese workers and teachers, without offering specific examples.

In a response late Thursday, the Philippine foreign ministry bemoaned comments it said were "hardly helpful" given the two countries' complicated ties.

"It is regrettable that Chinese ambassador Jing Quan today had a poor choice of words that would seem to convey a thinly veiled threat of the use of force," it said in a statement.

Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Rear Admiral Jay Tarriela had earlier called Jing's pronouncement a "direct threat".

"No people feel fortunate when a larger neighbour repeatedly violates the law and then tells them to be thankful it was not worse," he said in a post on X.

"Not using force against a country whose rights you are already violating is not peace. It is coercion by other means!" he said, adding that Philippine coast guard personnel were often subjected to ramming and water cannons.

The Chinese embassy in Manila, while confirming Jing's remarks, accused Tarriela of taking them out of context and scheming to undermine bilateral relations.

"(Jing) emphasised that China views the Philippines as a neighbour across the sea and a friend bound to China by deep historical and cultural ties," it said, adding it sought only "stable relations".

Last week, the Philippine Coast Guard accused its Chinese counterparts of obstructing the medical evacuation of an ailing Filipino soldier near a disputed shoal in the contested South China Sea.

Seoul dismisses Pyongyang's scepticism over hypersonic weapon test

AFP
Seoul

Republic of Korea's military yesterday dismissed Pyongyang's doubts over Seoul's homegrown hypersonic missile launch, as the two Koreas appear to be intensifying an arms race over the high-tech weapons.

Hypersonic missiles travel at more than five times the speed of sound and can manoeuvre mid-flight, making them significantly harder to track and intercept.

Days after North Korea announced it tested an intermediate-range hypersonic missile that involved the use of AI, Seoul earlier this month test-fired its own weapon — calling it a "key strategic asset capable of changing the course of the battlefield".

On Thursday, North Korea raised doubts over Seoul's launch, saying images released by Korea "may serve as evidence proving" the weapon "failed to make a hypersonic flight".

After reviewing one of the photos, Jang Chang Ha, head of North Korea's missile administration, said it was "hard to believe" the missile underwent hypersonic flight given its clean exterior, intact coating and lack of "any soot" generated by extremely high temperatures.

Korea's military said yesterday its homegrown weapon had a "robust design" that used domestically produced heat-resistant materials to provide thermal protection, leaving it "free from any soot" even in hypersonic conditions.

Moving forward, Seoul plans to "further advance the relevant technologies throughout the process of weaponising" the hypersonic missiles, which it called a "key strategic asset for future national security".

Analysts say North Korea, which remains technically at war with the Republic of Korea, has stepped up testing of its own hypersonic weapons with technological support from Russia, particularly since sending troops to help Moscow fight Ukraine.

Pyongyang said its latest AI-assisted hypersonic missile followed a "wave-like trajectory" that left Korea and Japan unable to track it effectively.

But Seoul and Washington said the North Korean weapon could be "sufficiently detected and intercepted" using the allies' existing defence assets.

The two Koreas' pursuit of hypersonic weapons could further fuel an arms race on the peninsula, while their speed and manoeuvrability could make detection and interception harder, with implications for US and Japanese defences, analysts say.

Thai farmers, fishermen challenge IMF, World Bank at Bangkok rally

Thai farmers, fishermen and workers marched through Bangkok yesterday as global finance and business leaders gathered for IMF and World Bank meetings, demanding a say in policies shaping their livelihoods.

Hundreds of protesters, many wearing straw hats and colourful scarves, had hoped to reach the main conference centre but were stopped by a line of police more than a kilometre away, the road blocked by shipping containers.

Some carried fishing nets and hoisted banners reading "World Bank, stop destroying the poor", a reference to criticisms that the global lenders extract too high a price from countries which borrow money.

Some protested specific projects, notably the World Bank-backed Pak Mun dam, a hydropower project completed in 1994 that fishing communities say damaged their livelihoods.

"There are no more fish. They can't swim upstream," said fisherman Putta Muansaen, 67, who travelled overnight from northeastern Ubon Ratchathani province.

"The water has changed, the river has changed, and the ecosystem has changed," he told AFP.

Somporn Yamyong, 62, travelled from rice-rich central Suphan Buri province to draw attention to years of debt and meagre earnings.



Demonstrators gather during a protest in Bangkok against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank Group yesterday. (**AFP**)

The rice farmer said she wanted Thai leaders and the IMF and World Bank to hear about the "hardships facing farmers" like her.

Thailand received an IMF loan three decades ago but paid this off in 2003. It has some projects with the World Bank.

Coconut farmer Sombat Chuekrod, 51, from Prachuap Khiri Khan province, southwest of Bangkok, added: "Thai people are already poor. Please don't make us any poorer."

There were some non-Thai protesters in the crowd, including Harry May, a 59-year-old South African activist and researcher, who said global lenders were "bankrupting our countries, especially developing countries".

"We shouldn't be indebted to the same people who say they're going to relieve debt and provide development and then just create more debt for those countries," he said. (**AFP**)

Dodge the cops, reach the protest: India's latest online political game goes viral

Reuters
New Delhi

A web-based multiplayer game in which players dodge police and detention on their way to a protest site in New Delhi has gone viral, as young Indians use satire and humour to respond to police actions.

As youth-led protests over jobs, exam paper leaks and voter roll revisions spread across India, a growing crop of online games is transforming political grievances into shareable digital content.

The trend shows a generation raised on Instagram is expressing dissent in ways that differ sharply from the political communication style of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

One such game, 'Jantar Mantar Chalo', was developed by 27-year-old IT professional Suraj Kushwah, who has described it as "dark humour".

The game satirises the difficulties protesters face in reaching Jantar Mantar, a main protest site in the capital, amid police blockades, road closures and public transport suspensions. Players can build a kafila, or procession, evade checkpoints and stage a demonstration, or switch sides and deploy batons and tear gas to disperse crowds.

"Whatever news was coming was kind of like a circus," Kushwah said.

"People were trying to reach Jantar Mantar. And they were getting detained. And I imagined it as a 3D game."

Kushwah said at least 2,000 people had been playing the game at any point in time since its release on October 14.

Another game casts firebrand left-wing activist Neha Bora as the protagonist of a retro 8-bit-style platform reminiscent of classic arcade games.

"We as artists believe that satire is the most powerful way to talk about things," said 30-year-old Anav Nayar, who co-developed the game with his brother, Akshay.

The protests were triggered by the "cockroach" youth movement, which also started as a joke online.

The games draw inspiration from protests against the Election Commission's voter roll revision exercise, which opposition parties and activists say has disenfranchised 130mn eligible voters and favoured Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

The Election Commission and BJP deny the allegations.

Gen Z's style of expression poses an unusual challenge for Modi. After the "cockroach" movement forced the resignation of Modi's education minister in July, he intensified outreach to younger Indians through self-shot Instagram videos.

But analysts say Modi's outreach might not be enough.

"The BJP has long enough enjoyed its dominance of controlling the narrative online and on the ground, but this time the younger generation has countered them everywhere," said Rasheed Kidwai, a political analyst.

India detains 'cockroach' leader as hundreds protest in capital

AFP
New Delhi

Indian police detained Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) leader Abhijeet Dipke yesterday ahead of fresh protests demanding the removal of the country's election chief, the youth-led movement said in a social media post.

Dipke, 31, was detained shortly before a rally called by the online movement in the heart of New Delhi where hundreds of protesters marched yesterday evening, despite heavy security measures.

The CJP founder had urged supporters to gather in the capital's busy commercial hub of Connaught Place with Indian flags in a show of solidarity after two of his colleagues were detained this week for breaching security barricades at Jantar Mantar, a protest site declared off-limits by police.

"Abhijeet is detained by Delhi Police!!! This government is so scared of the youth waving national flag!!," the CJP said on social media, with footage of his detention also broadcast live on local television channels.

Police did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment on the grounds for Dipke's detention.

The CJP, as well as opposition parties, have been seeking the resignation of India's chief election commissioner over a large-scale voter roll revision that they say favours Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party.

The Election Commission of India, which oversees voting in the world's most populous nation, has denied any wrongdoing.



Protesters chant slogans as they take part in a flag rally by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) seeking the resignation of India's Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, in New Delhi, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Thousands of security personnel were deployed in central Delhi yesterday, with police warning protesters to stay away, citing orders restricting public gatherings.

But hundreds of young protesters defied the crackdown to march close to Connaught Place's Central Park, many of them waving flags in a show of defiance.

Student activist Neha Bora was also detained and taken away in a bus by police as she was leading a march close to Central Park yesterday, AFP journalists witnessed.

Vishwajeet Pratap Singh, 18, said he had come to voice his protest against what he saw as a "targeted drive" to remove citizens from the electoral rolls who were not likely to vote for Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"If I don't speak today, no one will speak for me later," he told AFP.

In the past week, the Indian capital has seen several street protests against the electoral roll revision, overseen by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

More than 133mn names have been removed from electoral lists under the exercise, according to figures reported by Indian media and cited by opposition parties in court filings.

Critics say the removals have disproportionately affected minorities, particularly Muslims.

Members of BJP have long alleged that large numbers of undocumented Muslim migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh have fraudulently entered India's electoral rolls.

Election authorities say the move was intended to eliminate duplicate, deceased and fraudulent entries.

Yesterday, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh dismissed the accusations, saying the agenda of opposition parties was "to destroy democratic institutions and create unrest in the country".

Ambani's Reliance breaks silence on Musk, says Jio awaits same clearances as Starlink

Reuters
Mumbai

Indian billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance said it welcomed competition from Elon Musk's Starlink and that its own satellite services were also awaiting clearance, its first response to accusations that Ambani was blocking Starlink's India launch.

Musk, the world's richest man, has repeatedly accused the Indian government and Ambani of stalling Starlink's years-long efforts to launch in a market of more than a bn Internet subscribers. India has denied any bias in its approval process.

The Friday statement, which did not name Musk, comes days before Reliance Industries' digital unit Jio Platforms seeks a $108bn valuation in India's largest IPO to date.

Jio houses Reliance's telecom arm, which has over 530mn customers and is a potential competitor to Starlink in India's Internet market.

"At Reliance, we have never feared competition," the conglomerate said yesterday, addressing "remarks about Reliance and the Indian market" in a statement it said was intended to "place the facts on record".

Musk's posts on X have ranged from asking whether Ambani was the "real boss" of India to addressing him as "Prime Minister Ambani" and asking whether he would allow Starlink to compete.

The attacks mark a sharp turn for Musk, who has a warm public rapport with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and come as New Delhi courts foreign investment and negotiates a trade deal with Washington.

India has licensed Starlink, Jio's satellite Internet arm and Bharti-backed Eutelsat OneWeb to operate services, but none has the security clearance needed to launch.

Satellite broadband could help to connect hundreds of millions of Indians who remain offline, mostly in rural and remote areas.

Musk has said he would price Starlink affordably in India to take on Jio's low-cost Internet plans. Cheap data is how Jio built its presence in India, and Musk has used the same strategy in markets like Kenya to disrupt local telecom players.

Norwegian teen gets 20 years for UK murder plot

AFP
London

A Norwegian teenager found guilty in the UK of conspiring to commit murder for Sweden's most notorious criminal network was yesterday handed a 20-year sentence.

Would-be hitman Johannes Kongsnes Natland, 19, travelled to Britain in March 2025 to shoot the unknown target for 25,000 euros ($28,000). However, police arrested him at a northern England hotel before he could carry out the hit.

Sentencing Natland at London's Woolwich Crown Court, Judge Bobbie Cheema-Grubb said he had agreed to "murder for money" at the age of 18.

"At the heart of this case is a stark fact you agreed to assassinate another human being, a stranger to you, in a foreign country and you knew nothing of that person's life or circumstances," she told him.

Officers found two firearms and live bullets in a plastic bag stashed under his hotel room bed, which he had collected from a nearby wooded area.

Natland had been hired by the Swedish-based Foxtrot organised crime group, which the UK government has sanctioned, according to London's Metropolitan Police.



Johannes Kongsnes Natland. (**AFP**)

Its wanted leader Rawa Majid, who has alleged ties to Tehran, formed the network which has been connected to dozens of violent crimes in Sweden in the late 2010s.

The judge said Natland had previously been a "good student" from a financially secure home, whose life had been disrupted by cannabis and class A drugs to the "horror" of his parents.

She noted his immaturity, but said he remained "responsible" for his actions.

"You were recruited to travel to England to kill an unidentified target," she said.

"You agreed to be the enforcer and pursued it despite numerous opportunities to extricate yourself."

Jurors at London's Old Bailey court in July found Natland guilty of conspiracy to commit murder. He admitted possessing the firearms and ammunition.

Giving evidence, Natland claimed he had not intended to carry out the killing but was instead planning to "shoot himself in the foot" to avoid repercussions if he had refused the mission.

Commander Helen Flanagan, head of Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) London, said Natland was "clearly being tasked by someone in the Foxtrot Network", sanctioned by the UK and the US for helping to orchestrate "violence against targets in Europe on behalf of the Iranian regime".

Natland sent messages to his friends back in Norway, including pictures of the guns, police revealed earlier.

Natland's recruiter, a 17-year-old youth, was convicted in Norway of attempting to "contribute to murder" in May 2025.

Three other Norwegian teenagers went on trial in Norway last month on charges of helping plan a murder in Britain.

The identity of the intended victim remains unknown.

Fiji to deploy solar-powered Australian drones at sea

Maritime drones powered by sun and wind that can stay at sea for months will patrol Fiji's waters for drug traffickers and other threats under a deal with Australia announced yesterday.
Fiji approved a maritime security strategy on Thursday to combat transnational crime, including a surge in methamphetamine and cocaine trafficking across the Pacific.
The Bluebottle drone, manufactured in Sydney, is named after a small jellyfish with a painful sting that washes ashore on Australian beaches.
Australia's military uses the small uncrewed boats to quietly surveil its vast northern coastline, powered by a solar mast and wind.
Australia's Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy said the drones carry sonar equipment to detect vessels and submarines.
Australia will provide Fiji with Bluebottle drones and training, under a AU$600mn ($420mn) pledge made to Pacific Island countries last month to tackle organised crime at sea, officials said. (**AFP**)

In Sri Lanka, human-elephant conflict takes deadly toll

Reuters
Galgamuwa

Clad in his khaki wildlife officer's uniform, Dewagiri Mudiyanselage Thilakaratne Bandara rides his motorbike the short distance from his home to the electric fence that is the main line of defence against the dozens of wild elephants that live in the rapidly shrinking forest nearby.

The fence stretches 14km (9 miles) along the Siyambalangamuwa tank, a reservoir in the island's northwest, to protect the more than 2,000 families who live in the nearby villages.



Wild elephants cross a road in Ambanpola. (**Reuters**)

Galgamuwa is on the front line of one of the world's most serious human-elephant conflicts. An average of 138 people have been killed in encounters with the animals each year in Sri Lanka since 2019, the second-highest death toll in the world. The death toll for elephants, forced into villages for food as their habitat shrinks, climbed to an average of 402 a year during the same period, the world's highest.

"Twenty years ago, we didn't have this situation because across from the tank there were large forests, but they were eventually cleared and then the elephants started moving closer and that's how this village started being affected," Bandara said, as he worked to repair the fence with his team.

"When we were little, we had to go to a corner of the tank to see elephants. Now, in the nights, the elephants come to see us."

Sri Lankans have deep cultural ties with elephants. The animals feature in colourful temple pageants, and owning one is a status symbol. Elephants are also a mainstay of the island's $4bn tourism industry.

But elephant deaths reached a record high of 488 in 2023, according to the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC). Data shows dozens were shot as they encroached on villages, while others died from poisoning, electrocution, in train accidents or after falling into wells.

Bandara, 48, has first-hand experience of how devastating the human-elephant conflict can be.

Last December, an elephant wandered into Bandara's backyard to snack on mangoes. He attacked Bandara and his wife, Rathnayake Mudiyanselage Shirani Rathnayake, after she rushed to help him.

Bandara was left with a broken leg and dislocated shoulder. Rathnayake, also 48, was trampled and had to have her right leg amputated. She now uses a wheelchair.

"Our lives are now completely different from before the elephant attack. My wife and I used to do everything together. We used to farm together. But 200% of those activities have been disrupted. Now we must look after her and the mental strain of that is something we both feel," Bandara said, standing outside his home.

Villagers have been forced to adapt their daily lives to reduce the risk of confrontations. The nearby school starts lessons 30 minutes after the nationally mandated time of 7:30am to avoid the early morning when elephants might be around. Villagers also finish work earlier so they can get home before dark, while funerals and weddings are scheduled to minimise the chance of an elephant encounter.



Villagers and wildlife officials feed a sick elephant in Ambanpola. (**Reuters**)

Bandara and his neighbours have a WhatsApp group dedicated to tracking elephant movements. Neighbours often come together to try and chase away any elephants that attempt a raid, yelling and lighting firecrackers, and also take people to hospital in the event of an attack.

Bandara supports ending forest clearing, usually done for farming, and wants to see a commitment to reforestation. Sri Lanka's forest cover has plummeted from roughly 70% in the 1920s to about 34% today, World Bank data shows.

To complicate matters, as many as 70% of Sri Lanka's estimated 7,451 wild elephants live outside protected areas. The elephant population is also growing, recording a 27% increase from a decade ago, according to the latest census data.

All this has pushed elephants and people closer.

"I do not feel any hatred towards the animal or any animal. He was hungry because of the activities of us humans," Bandara said. "I see this situation more as karma that my wife and I must endure. What will I get by hating that animal? He is innocent."

OPINION

Turning the spotlight on Starshield, SpaceX's military version of Starlink

Ukraine said earlier this week that Elon Musk's SpaceX had restricted "military-grade" Starlink services, hampering Ukrainian drone strike missions and air defences. The complaint has drawn renewed attention to the distinction between Starlink, SpaceX's commercial satellite internet service, and Starshield, a military version developed for the Pentagon. While Musk has said the two systems are separate, in many cases they share the same underlying satellite technology.

"Starshield systems are owned and controlled by the US government," Musk said on Wednesday in a post on X, adding that any limits on speed or usage are decided by the US military or the president. "Starlink is a commercial service owned and controlled by SpaceX. Usage of Starlink is limited to civilian or defensive activities and cannot be used for offensive military action, as doing so would be inappropriate for a commercial company."

Starlink, the main profit engine of SpaceX, is a satellite internet network of more than 11,000 satellites that beam broadband service directly to user terminals about the size of a folded newspaper. Its roughly 13mn subscribers range from households and hikers to shipping companies and major airlines.

Since launching its first Starlink satellites in 2019 aboard reusable SpaceX rockets, the company has built a vast low-Earth-orbit constellation that blankets much of the planet, delivering faster connections than traditional communications satellites, which typically operate much farther from Earth and in far smaller numbers. Starlink gave Ukraine a critical communications advantage early in the war, reshaping how militaries operate on the battlefield. But Musk has restricted Starlink for certain military uses while highlighting Starshield, a more secure network developed for government and military missions.

Starshield is a SpaceX business unit that develops military and intelligence satellite systems for the Pentagon.

While its missions are separate from Starlink's commercial broadband service, the distinction is not always clear-cut: Starshield's secure communications services use enhanced encryption and dedicated terminals, but rely on the vast Starlink constellation as their backbone. Starshield leverages the technology, engineering and operational experiences of Starlink, according to SpaceX. In addition to secure communications, the company says the militarised version can also provide users with Earth observation and the ability to integrate sensors or other payloads.

The Pentagon, Starshield's largest customer, has spent billions of dollars on both Starlink and Starshield services. It has also bought dedicated Starshield satellites, including communications spacecraft for missile-warning missions and a spy constellation for the National Reconnaissance Office, Reuters reported in 2024.

Questions over the relationship between Starlink and Starshield have persisted since Russia threatened Western satellites supporting Ukraine in 2022. SpaceX unveiled Starshield later that year, but the secrecy surrounding national security space programs has left the precise boundaries between the two systems opaque.

Those distinctions became a point of contention earlier this year when the Pentagon clashed with SpaceX over higher prices for satellite services used by military drones during the Iran conflict, Reuters reported. SpaceX argued that some customers paying roughly $5,000 per terminal for Starlink should instead have been using a Starshield service costing about $25,000 per terminal.

Britain has also adopted Starshield. Under that arrangement, the service uses the same satellite constellation, ground stations and terrestrial infrastructure as Starlink, but operates through dedicated terminals and separate network gateways, Britain's defence ministry has told Reuters. Other US partners are evaluating the system as well. New Zealand is doing a trial of Starshield to assess its usefulness for military operations, the New Zealand Defence Force previously told Reuters. — Reuters

What is the 'hospital of the popes'?

Rome's Gemelli Hospital, where Pope Leo is recovering after surgery for lung cancer, is known as the "hospital of the popes". The hospital, with a suite especially for popes, has become the preferred medical facility for modern pontiffs since the time of Pope John Paul II. Located some 5km from the Vatican City, the Gemelli hospital offers every major medical speciality under one roof. It also serves as the teaching hospital of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and has more than 1,600 beds. There is a dedicated suite for popes on the 10th floor, including a private chapel. However, this is currently under renovation, meaning Leo is staying in a different set of rooms. In the 2026 Newsweek-Statista "World's Best Hospitals" rankings, Gemelli was named as Italy's top hospital and ranked 33rd globally among more than 2,500 hospitals assessed across 32 countries. Popes were traditionally treated by doctors summoned to their residence. For example, Pope Paul VI underwent prostate surgery in 1967 in a specially equipped operating room set up inside the Vatican's Apostolic Palace. Everything changed during the pontificate of John Paul II. He was rushed to the Gemelli after a 1981 assassination attempt, undergoing emergency surgery that saved his life. He returned repeatedly to the hospital over the following decades for treatment, spending more than 150 days there during his pontificate. He dubbed the place "Vatican III", after the official residences at the Vatican itself and Castel Gandolfo. Benedict XVI was never admitted during his pontificate.

By contrast, Francis, who died in April 2025, was hospitalised several times, including for colon surgery in 2021, respiratory problems and abdominal surgery in 2023, and for bilateral pneumonia in the weeks before his death. The Gemelli hospital was built on land originally owned by the Vatican that was donated by Pope Pius XI in 1934 to the body that oversees the Catholic University. Opened in 1964, it is named after Agostino Gemelli, the Franciscan friar, physician and psychologist who founded the university. However, despite its close association with the papacy, Gemelli is not a Vatican institution. It operates as a private non-profit academic medical centre within Italy's healthcare system, with most patients treated through the country's publicly funded health service. The Vatican owns the Bambino Gesù hospital in Rome, but that facility specialises in paediatric care. — Reuters

Drought hits Duden lake



Flamingos walk in the shallow waters of the Duden lake, which is part of 'Tuz Golu' salt lake, near Konya in central Turkiye, at sunset. Turkiye's second-largest lake has become a stark symbol of a growing water crisis, with drought and intensive groundwater use threatening a unique ecosystem that supports wildlife, industry and tourism. Known for its stunning natural beauty, Tuz Golu -- Turkish for Salt Lake -- is a shallow lake that stretches across the heart of central Anatolia about 150km south of Ankara, the capital. (**AFP**)

Will Albertans choose to go independent?

Reuters, AFP
Toronto



Canadian PM Mark Carney greets students during a visit to the University of Calgary, Canada. (**PICTURES**: **Reuters**)



Carney meets with volunteers at Bridgeland Riverside Community Association Park in Calgary.

Alberta is holding a nonbinding referendum on Monday to ask residents if they want to remain part of Canada, marking the first time the oil-rich province has ever put the question of separation to the public. Polls have consistently shown most Albertans — about 70% — want to stay in Canada, with roughly a quarter of residents supporting an independent Alberta.

There are 10 questions, each with its own colour-coded ballot. The last ballot voters see is question 10, on whether Alberta should remain a Canadian province or start the legal process required to hold a binding referendum on separation. A simple majority in favour of separation could trigger that process. There are nine other nonbinding questions about immigration, access to provincial services - including education, social care and healthcare - and voter identification requirements.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith said in May it was "time to have a vote, understand the will of Albertans on this subject, and move on," when she announced the government would add a question on separation. Smith's decision followed months of campaigning by a small but vocal group of separatists, who argue Alberta's energy wealth is subsidizing poorer parts of the country and that bureaucracy in Ottawa has stifled the province's economy. Some members of the group had backed Smith's candidacy for premier. Smith says she voted for Alberta to remain in Canada during advance polling, according to a video she posted on social media on Wednesday.

The majority French-speaking province of Quebec has had two referendums, in 1980 and 1995. Quebecers voted to remain in Canada both times, but by the slimmest of margins in 1995. The separatist Parti Quebecois won a provincial election earlier this month and has pledged to hold a third referendum, but only after US President Donald Trump has left office and if the party holds a majority. The PQ was elected with a minority government on October 5, meaning it will rely on smaller parties to pass legislation.

Canada is a federation of 10 provinces and three territories. While Ottawa is responsible for matters of national interest, such as defence, trade and foreign policy, the provinces and territories hold significant power over medical care, education and land rights.

Polls are scheduled to close at 8pm on Monday. Elections Alberta says it will count ballots by hand and that the question on separation will be counted first. It will publish results on the Elections Alberta website as they are received, and unofficial results are expected within 48 hours after voting ends.

Smith has said she will respect the result and quickly begin the process to hold a legally binding referendum. But separation would not happen imminently. After the 1995 Quebec referendum, Canada's Parliament passed the Clarity Act in 2000, which says talks about secession can only be triggered if there is a clear majority from the public, without specifying the necessary threshold. The act also states provinces and territories have no unilateral right to leave Canada and that a constitutional amendment negotiated by provincial, territorial and federal governments is required.

First Nations groups have objected to the idea of an independent Alberta, as their land treaties with Canada predate Alberta's entry into Confederation. In May, an Alberta court judge ruled the province's chief electoral officer was wrong to allow separatists to collect signatures requesting a referendum, because the process should have prompted a consultation with Indigenous peoples whose rights might be violated by separation. Alberta has appealed the decision.

Prime Minister Mark Carney, who was largely raised in Alberta, has previously said "the best place for Alberta is in Canada" and that the country cannot succeed if it's divided. He released a video on Canadian Thanksgiving, October 12, saying national unity is critical as Canada fights threats from abroad, including a trade war with the US. Carney has campaigned for Alberta to remain in Canada.

Carney campaigned for national unity in Alberta on Thursday, before the oil-rich province votes on whether it wants a binding independence referendum. Polling indicates less than a quarter of Alberta's roughly 5mn people want to break away from Canada, but Carney, who grew up in the western province, said "polls don't vote."

"We need people to show up and vote and stand up for Alberta, stand up for Canada," he said during a television interview in Calgary. Speaking later with local business leaders, Carney said he couldn't think of a "worse time to have a referendum," citing a "more dangerously divided world" and friction with the United States.

Alberta's right-wing Premier Smith says she is against independence but called Monday's non-binding vote to settle a divisive issue. If a majority votes for independence, she has committed to launching a legally binding separation process. If a majority votes to stay, Smith says she won't approve another referendum. Mitch Sylvestre, who heads the Alberta Prosperity Project, a prominent separatist organization, told AFP his side might "actually win this referendum."

"I would be very surprised if we got less than 40%," he said in an interview. Carney has put Alberta's oil industry at the centre of his plans to solidify Canada's economy and reduce dependence on the United States, warning close economic ties have been permanently fractured by President Donald Trump. Carney has backed a new pipeline and other projects to increase crude production, marking a clear break from his predecessor, Justin Trudeau, who was broadly reviled in Alberta over allegations he stifled oil industry growth in favour of environmental policies. Carney has repeatedly cited the proposed pipeline to argue for Alberta's future prosperity within a united Canada.

Alberta separatists voice familiar conservative frustrations, from concerns about immigration levels to generalised fears about fraying individual liberty, but their grievances often hinge on oil industry management. Smith told the CBC that Alberta separatists stepped up mobilisation because Trudeau, who left office last year, was "actively trying to kill" the oil industry.

Oil's dominance in separatist discussion makes Alberta "mostly an outlier," said Syracuse University professor Ryan Griffiths, an expert on global secessionist groups. Secessionist movements regularly have "economic motivations," but typically those are married to a linguistic or nationalist component, Griffiths said.

"There's no magic line" dictating what defines a nation, he told AFP, but noted Alberta's case for nationhood appears harder to make than that of other groups, like Catalans, Scots and French-speaking Canadians in Quebec. The alleged influence of Trump allies in Alberta has attracted intense scrutiny in Canada.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has called Alberta a "natural partner" for the United States, and Alberta Prosperity Project leaders held several meetings at the State Department.

Earlier this month, Canada's 'Globe and Mail' newspaper detailed contacts between Sylvestre, his team and Republican Party operatives.

Sylvestre told AFP that, for him, US interests "don't play any role" in Alberta "until we win and become government," at which point he would work to ensure free-flowing trade. "There's no animosity towards America here," he said. "I can't see why we wouldn't want to continue trading with the biggest economy in the world."

Asked about alleged foreign interference, Carney said: "our expectation is — to be absolutely clear on foreign governments, United States included — we don't get ourselves involved in their elections, they don't get themselves involved in our elections."

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Romania resumes search for seven missing sailors

Reuters
Bucharest

Romania resumed a search yesterday for seven sailors missing from a chemical tanker hit by a drone near its Black Sea coast, the latest in a series of attacks highlighting risks to commercial shipping near Nato's eastern flank.

The missing crew were among 12 sailors aboard the San Marino-flagged tanker Wine Trader, which was struck early on Thursday about a mile outside Romanian territorial waters. Five crew members were rescued, but efforts to find the others have been hampered by strong winds and rough seas.

"Our colleagues returned today to search the ship and continue the mission to identify the rest of the crew," an interior ministry spokesperson told Reuters.

Officials said a Black Hawk helicopter would place four rescuers aboard the vessel while a ship continued searching nearby waters.

The Wine Trader was one of two tankers hit by drones within about 12 hours near Romania's Black Sea coast.

The second vessel, the Comoros-flagged chemical and oil tanker Yara J, was struck inside Romanian waters late on Wednesday. Its crew were unharmed and the ship was towed to the port of Constanta.

Romanian President Nicusor Dan said the two ships had been struck by drones, while a Nato military source said the drones came from Russia.

The attacks have intensified concerns about the spillover of the Russia-Ukraine war into Black Sea shipping lanes. Both vessels were anchored near the Sulina canal, which links the Danube River to the Black Sea and is a key export route for Ukraine.

At least five other cargo ships have been hit near the coasts of Romania and neighbouring Bulgaria in the past 10 days, with 23 sailors reported dead or missing. Most of those incidents occurred outside Nato territorial waters.

Bulgaria has asked Nato to deploy combat aircraft and anti-drone systems to bolster its sea capacities, Defence Minister Dimitar Stoyanov said yesterday. Romania's president said the country had also asked for additional equipment.

Families of children killed in Pakistan school roof collapse demand justice

AFP
Peshawar

The families of children killed in a roof collapse at a school in northwest Pakistan called for "justice" yesterday, the day after more than 30 pupils and a teacher were crushed to death.

A woman teacher and 32 students, mostly younger than 14, died in the building collapse in the city of Peshawar on Thursday morning.

"The parents of all these children must receive justice," tailor Muhammad Wahab, who lost his 11-year-old nephew Hammad in the accident, told AFP yesterday.

"I appeal to our rulers," he said, adding that Hammad had been "doing well in school" before the tragedy.

Dozens of people gathered yesterday outside the school to mourn the children who were killed in the collapse, which officials blamed on dilapidated infrastructure.

One grief-stricken father showed AFP a picture on his mobile phone of his young daughter, dressed in red and gold, who lost her life.



People gather outside a school a day after its roof collapsed killing several students in Peshawar yesterday. (**AFP**)

Another parent, Asadullah, said he lost a son, nephew, and three other close relatives in the tragedy.

"The children were good students and often achieved top positions in their classes," he told AFP. "They happily went to school every day."

Residents and rescuers described chaotic scenes in the aftermath of Thursday's collapse, as people scrambled to pull children out from under the rubble.

A man named Sohail told AFP that "everyone began screaming in panic" when his niece, who had escaped the building, arrived home to tell them it had collapsed.

"When I arrived at the scene, I saw around 10 to 15 children trapped beneath the rubble, with debris piled up to their necks. We quickly pulled them out," he said.

Images released by emergency services showed rescue workers in high-visibility vests scrambling to move debris, rubble and dirt.

A senior official in Peshawar told AFP that initial reports suggested the roof collapse was due to "weak infrastructure".

"The school owner has been detained," the official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to talk to media.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed "deep sorrow and grief over the loss of precious lives" in an X post.

President Asif Ali Zardari described the roof collapse as a "heartbreaking tragedy".

Building collapses are common in Pakistan, largely due to poor safety standards and substandard construction materials in the South Asian nation of more than 240mn people.

In June, more than a dozen children were killed when a roof collapsed at a tutoring centre in the eastern city of Lahore.

In 2025, 27 people were killed and 10 injured when a five-storey building collapsed in the impoverished Lyari area of the southern city of Karachi.

Putin: Russia building non-negotiable 'security zone' inside Ukraine

Reuters
Moscow

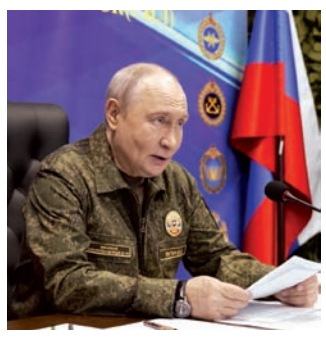
Russia is establishing a "security zone" inside Ukraine along their border, which will be non-negotiable in any future talks with Kyiv, President Vladimir Putin said yesterday.

Putin, wearing military uniform and speaking during a visit to a command post, said the operation was in response to Ukraine's 2024-25 incursion into Russia's western Kursk region.

"The Russian armed forces were tasked not only with expelling the enemy from our land but also with establishing a security zone in the adjacent territory. This task is being carried out successfully," he said in televised comments.

"Our goal is to ensure the absolute security of Russia's border regions for the future, and we do not plan to make this a subject for potential peace negotiations with Ukraine."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the planned security zone spanned 660km (410 miles), of which 70% was currently under Russia's control.



Russian President Vladimir Putin visits a command post of Russia's joint force grouping, at an unidentified location, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

He did not say how deep it would reach inside Ukraine.

Putin has spoken before about the need for such a zone but has not previously spelt out the planned extent of it or said it would be off-limits for talks.

It requires Russia to carve out land in the Sumy and Kharkiv regions, which are not among those it has claimed as its own territory since launching the war in Ukraine in 2022.

Putin, who rarely dons military uniform, struck a hawkish and confident tone in his comments to senior officers.

Zelensky drums up European backing as Trump ties slump

AFP
Brussels

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged EU leaders yesterday to keep financing Kyiv's fight with nearly $80bn more next year, as he insisted he was standing up for his country amid a fresh row with US President Donald Trump.

Kyiv's ties with Trump have nosedived after the US leader eased sanctions on Russia as part of a deal to supply diesel.

Trump branded Kyiv's actions a "disgrace" and said it was easier to deal with Russia's President Vladimir Putin than Zelensky after the Ukrainian leader ordered his forces to resume strike on Russian refineries.

"I defend the interests of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people exclusively," Zelensky told journalists after talks with EU leaders in Brussels.

Asked if he was being made a scapegoat for Trump's domestic woes ahead of the US midterms, Zelensky just smiled.

"This is my answer," he said, after an extended pregnant pause.

The latest breakdown between Trump and Zelensky has fuelled fear that the US leader is siding with Moscow.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky speaks during a press conference as part of a European Union summit at the EU headquarters in Brussels yesterday. (**AFP**)

Those concerns have been heightened by disruptions to a critical US-provided satellite system that has hampered Ukraine ability to counter Russia's intense bombardments.

Ukraine uses the Starshield system from Elon Musk's SpaceX for battlefield communications, mid-range strikes on Russian-occupied territory and interceptor drones. It also uses SpaceX's parallel Starlink civilian satellite system, but not for offensive operations.

Tech billionaire Musk — though a virulent Zelensky critic — said his company was not behind the disruption and a US official denied any intervention by Trump.

"Has the speed been fully restored to what it was before? No. Is the speed being restored now? Yes," Zelensky said.

In his speech to EU leaders, Zelensky said that he believed that most Americans supported Ukraine's fight against Moscow's invasion.

"At the end of the day, the American people will have their say," he said.

While he grapples with Trump, European leaders put on a show of unity with Zelensky.

"This is no time to withdraw the support to Ukraine. This is no time to relieve Russia's sanctions," European Council chief Antonio Costa said.

"Now it is time to increase our support, to increase our pressure."

Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten said that "the situation in Ukraine is currently truly dire, with numerous Russian attacks and a tense relationship between Ukraine and the US."

"It is crucial that we, as Europe, demonstrate our unconditional support for them today — and explore what additional steps we can take," he said.

But the EU leaders will need to find more than just words to keep Ukraine going.

Zelensky asked the bloc to provide Kyiv an extra 70bn euros ($79bn) in funding next year to help it keep fighting Russia.

"This is a realistic amount. And I ask you to find this support. It will help us hold Russia back."

The EU — Ukraine's biggest intentional backer — is currently paying out instalments of a 90-billion-euro loan for Kyiv that was set to help cover funding to the end of 2027.

But the Ukrainian authorities have warned they will still face a major budget black hole as Russian strikes have battered the country's economy.

Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz said on Thursday the European Union will have to find more money to finance Ukraine.

The talks on new funding have reignited calls for the European Union to tap around 200bn euros in frozen Russian central bank assets to fund Ukraine.

"The frozen assets are there. That's what should be used for supporting Ukraine," said Latvian premier Andris Kulbergs.

But there seems little momentum on that front as Belgium, where most of the funds are held, remains opposed.

Solar-powered plane altitude record is confirmed

Swiss pilot Raphael Domjan beat the altitude record for a solar-powered electric plane in a 2025 flight that took him soaring to 9,640 metres, the World Air Sports Federation (FAI) confirmed.

The FAI governing body, holding its 120th general conference in Lausanne from Wednesday to Friday, validated the record attempt after verifying the flight data.

The SolarStratos plane made the landmark flight from Sion airport in southwest Switzerland on August 12 last year, taking advantage of warm air thermals to beat a 15-year-old record.

The previous certified altitude record for a solar plane was 9,235 metres (30,298 feet).

Domjan's flight lasted five hours and nine minutes.

"After several months of verification and certification, FAI ratification now gives this achievement full international recognition," the SolarStratos team said a statement.

"SolarStratos officially becomes the highest-flying crewed electric and solar-powered aircraft in history."

On Wednesday, Domjan was given the FAI's Louis Bleriot Medal — established in 1936 and named after the French aviation pioneer — in recognition of his world record flight.

"This distinction crowns more than 10 years of research, testing and commitment to pushing the boundaries of electric and solar-powered flight," SolarStratos said. (**AFP**)

Rama blames 'foreign hands' for days of unrest

AFP
Tirana

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama called for calm yesterday and blamed "foreign hands" for days of violent unrest as protesters again gathered in the capital to demand his resignation.

Since Tuesday, violent demonstrations have gripped Tirana, with thousands of protesters calling for Rama to step down over poor university conditions and high tuition fees.

Protests also spread to several other cities as students held university boycotts, marking a significant escalation after months of anti-government protests in the country.

Police again clashed with protesters in Tirana, who had gathered in the hundreds outside the education ministry, chanting "Rama resign!"

Officers used water cannon and tear gas as demonstrators hurled rocks.

Days of unrest have left government buildings badly damaged.

"We are not criminals. We simply want a better life for our parents and ourselves. We do not want to leave Albania," 18-year-old Ledia told AFP.

"The government's indifference and arrogance since the beginning of our movement have been unbearable and have made the situation worse," said the high school student, who asked to be identified only by her first name.

Overnight the finance ministry entrance was set ablaze, and the windows of a university complex were smashed as groups, mostly masked young men, remained on the streets.



A jet of water is released from a riot police vehicle on demonstrators amid an anti-government protest by students in Tirana, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Demonstrators piled and burned trash bins to block the roads and hurled stones at police, who responded with tear gas and water cannon.

According to a police statement, 160 people were detained for committing acts of violence on Thursday evening.

An AFP journalist also saw masked groups smashing shop fronts and looting stores, with similar reports around the city.

Dozens of people, mainly police officers, have been injured in the clashes since Tuesday, according to the authorities.

This week's escalation comes after months of anti-government protests in the Balkan nation, initially sparked by a controversial resort development linked to US President Donald Trump's family.

Rama, in a statement yesterday, insisted the protest had "absolutely nothing to do with the hardships, problems or legitimate aspirations of anyone who desires a better life".

"All of this is the work of the very same hand, the hand that has gripped the Albanian opposition by the throat, the hand that has burned and destroyed Albania more than once."

The Socialist prime minister accused unnamed "foreign hands" of fuelling the unrest and wanting to hamper his country's bid to join the European Union.

"These are foreign hands that do not wish for Albania to be at peace," he said in a Facebook video.

Rama has routinely dismissed protesters' concerns, accusing them of being manipulated by foreign interests — without providing details or evidence — and driven by misinformation.

Italy braces for 'autumn of discontent' as students protest

AFP
Milan

Italy is preparing for a turbulent autumn following a spike in inflation because of energy prices, with students, truck drivers and farmers taking to the streets ahead of elections next year.

Several disparate protest initiatives, some inspired by movements in France and Spain, are united in their opposition to Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's hard-right government.

Students protested nationwide over conditions in schools yesterday, along with a teachers' union demanding wage increases and new hires.

Thousands rallied outside the education ministry in Rome, with police saying bottles and flares were thrown at their officers.

Schools have been occupied in several cities.

"Italy is in a dramatic economic and social crisis," Christian Ferrari, a leader of the major CGIL trade union, told AFP.

"The cost of living is unbearable, our productive system is losing pieces every day, there is a climate emergency... Some people are saying enough is enough," he said.

Ferrari said the protests are to keep "at the centre of the electoral campaign the material living and working conditions of Italians".

Italian media have dubbed the season an "autumn of discontent" for Meloni, who often touts Italy's political stability.

Her government became Italy's longest-serving last month, also earning plaudits for keeping the country's public finances in check. But inflation has surged.

While the waves of inflation following the Covid-19 pandemic and later geopolitical tensions have affected all of Europe, they have had a particularly strong impact in Italy, where wages and productivity have stagnated for several decades.

Real wages, adjusted for inflation, fell by 6.6 percent between 1990 and 2026, according to the Parliamentary Budget Office.

They also took longer to recover after the pandemic than in most other major European economies, according to the OECD.

And after months of calm, inflation accelerated sharply in September, reaching 4.2 percent year-on-year, notably because of fuel prices, according to the National Institute of Statistics.

Fuel prices led farmers and truck drivers to block roads earlier this week in the Puglia, Calabria and Sicily regions, slowing fuel transport and threatening pasta production.

The hauliers' union Conftrasporto is now threatening a "national blockade", denouncing "the climate of tension created by the unbearable situation linked to the surge in energy prices".

Since the start of the US war with Iran, Meloni has sought to curb soaring fuel prices, first through costly tax suspensions and then with the help of major fuel distributors who are keeping petrol prices below two euros per litre for now.

With just months to go before elections, the issue of purchasing power is becoming increasingly sensitive.

QATAR

Qatar, Lebanon solidify ties amid regional tension

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Joint projects

Regarding the energy sector, HE the Prime Minister said the discussions covered a project Qatar and Lebanon have explored for years, expressing optimism that it is nearing the implementation phase. He revealed that QatarEnergy has reached an agreement with TotalEnergies to jointly develop a solar power plant, describing the project as an initial step within a broader energy co-operation framework that both sides have agreed to develop, with the aim of delivering integrated solutions and a major investment project benefiting the Lebanese economy and the participating Qatari companies and entities.

He added that HH the Amir attaches great importance to advancing joint projects, particularly in development, education, and health, while emphasising that Qatar's support for Lebanon extends across sectors that strengthen the country's capacity for recovery and revitalisation.

HE Sheikh Mohammed affirmed that Qatar has been, and will remain, a supporter of the Lebanese Armed Forces, a national institution that plays a fundamental role in safeguarding the country's security, unity, and stability, pointing out that his discussions with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Lebanese Army Commander General Rodolphe Haykal addressed prospects for support and co-operation in the coming period.

He said the talks also touched on the ongoing escalation in Lebanon, reiterating Qatar's condemnation of Israeli attacks on peacekeeping forces and Israeli violations of Lebanese territory, while stressing the need for all parties to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1701, for Israel to withdraw from all occupied areas, and for hostilities to end in accordance with existing understandings.



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani held talks in Beirut with Lebanese Prime Minister Dr Nawaf Salam on bilateral co-operation, economic ties and regional de-escalation. The meeting on Friday focused on ways to strengthen co-operation between Qatar and Lebanon, particularly in the energy, investment and economic sectors. The two sides also discussed opportunities for joint projects that could contribute to regional security, stability and prosperity.

Fraternal ties

HE the Prime Minister reaffirmed Qatar's steadfast support for Lebanon's unity, sovereignty, security, and stability, and its commitment to standing with all segments of the Lebanese people, adding that Qatar continues its efforts through the five-nation group on Lebanon to bolster the country's security and stability and support the Lebanese Armed Forces.

For his part, Lebanon PM Dr Nawaf Salam highlighted the deep fraternal ties between Lebanon and Qatar, while appreciating Qatar's political, economic, and humanitarian support, particularly its backing for the Lebanese Armed Forces, state institutions, and the national recovery process.

Dr Salam announced that the Lebanese and Qatari governments are close to reaching a joint project to rehabilitate, develop, and modernise Lebanon's electricity generation infrastructure under a build-operate-transfer (BOT) model, with the Lebanese treasury bearing no upfront investment costs.

Dr Nawaf Salam expressed gratitude to HH the Amir, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the government and people of Qatar for their enduring support for Lebanon. He said this support continues Qatar's historic stance, notably its contribution to reconstruction following the 2006 war and its ongoing role in promoting stability and supporting Lebanese state institutions.

He also voiced appreciation for Qatar's support for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and stability, as well as for the Lebanese state's efforts to secure a full Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territories and extend its authority across the country through its forces alone.

Dr Salam said his meetings with HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Doha and on the sidelines of international gatherings, most recently in New York last month, addressed efforts to end the war in the region and strengthen bilateral co-operation, particularly in energy, electricity, investment, and reconstruction, in a way that helps displaced people return to their villages and towns and resume their lives and livelihoods.

He explained that, during their latest meeting in New York, the two sides explored a framework agreement for Qatar's contribution to developing Lebanon's energy sector.

Since then, government and technical teams have continued their work, moving from considering various options to defining the foundations of a comprehensive, actionable project.

The Lebanese PM reiterated his appreciation to HH the Amir, government, and people of Qatar for their steadfast support for Lebanon, affirming that the Lebanese people deeply value Qatar's contributions over the years, while noting that relations between the two countries are rooted in a longstanding bond of brotherhood, solidarity, and a shared commitment to building a better future for the Arab region based on cooperation, trust, and mutual interests.

Qatar urges diplomacy, respect for int'l law to secure lasting ME peace

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The Qatari envoy said the Palestinian issue remained central to efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Qatar continues to work alongside Egypt, the United States and Turkiye in mediation efforts that led to a ceasefire in Gaza, she said. She called for the full implementation of US President Donald Trump's comprehensive plan to end the conflict, endorsed by Security Council Resolution 2803, saying it would help address the humanitarian crisis, pave the way for reconstruction and recovery, and advance prospects for lasting peace.

She also stressed that the roadmap formed an integral part of the wider plan and provided a framework for implementing its second phase. All parties, she said, must fulfill their commitments in good faith and without delay.

Qatar reiterated its categorical rejection of any measures aimed at expelling or forcibly displacing Palestinians from their homeland, or changing the geographical or demographic character of the occupied Palestinian territory. HE Sheikha Alya also condemned continued Israeli settler incursions into Al-Aqsa Mosque, describing them as violations of international law and international humanitarian law, and as provocations to Muslims around the world.

Qatar further denounced Israel's settlement policies in the occupied Palestinian territory and rejected the E1 settlement plan, warning that settlement expansion and settler violence against Palestinians and their property undermined international peace efforts.

Doha reaffirmed its support for Palestinian rights, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with international resolutions and the two-state solution.

The Qatari representative also reiterated Doha's support for Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. Qatar welcomed the US decision to approve the removal of Syria's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency's decision to close its non-compliance file concerning Syria.

At the same time, she condemned continued Israeli violations in Syrian territory and called on the international community to take urgent action to ensure compliance with international resolutions, particularly the 1974 disengagement agreement.

On Lebanon, Qatar reaffirmed its support for the country's sovereignty over all its territory and rejected Israeli statements concerning the annexation of areas in southern Lebanon. She called on the international community to press Israel to halt repeated attacks on Lebanon and fully implement UN Security Council Resolution 1701.



Environment ministry removes waste from various desert areas







The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's Wildlife Protection Department removed waste from 2,357 sites in open desert areas between July and September as part of its wild-waste monitoring programme and preparations for the 2026–2027 winter camping season.

The cleanup campaign was conducted in co-operation with several relevant entities, including the Ministry of Municipality's General Cleanliness Department, the Joint Committee for the Removal of Abandoned Vehicles and Equipment, the Committee for Removals and Encroachments, and the Seashore Group.

These co-ordinated efforts support national initiatives to preserve the cleanliness of Qatar's wilderness areas and protect their natural resources. The operations focused on locations where waste had been identified, helping prepare them to welcome campers and outdoor enthusiasts ahead of the winter season.

The initiative also aims to reduce environmentally harmful practices, preserve desert landscapes and natural meadows, and safeguard their natural features.

The ministry urged campers and visitors to comply with environmental regulations, keep camping sites and natural areas clean, avoid leaving waste behind, and refrain from damaging the environment.

It emphasised that protecting the environment is a shared responsibility requiring the cooperation and commitment of the entire community.

Doha's waterfront beckons as families plan weekend outings

Hazy skies and warm weather set the scene along Doha's Corniche yesterday, where traditional wooden boats lined the waterfront, and the city's shaded roads and green spaces offered a glimpse of the capital's outdoor appeal.

The views were a reminder that a weekend outing need not involve travelling far from home. From a leisurely walk along the bay to an evening spent exploring the city's cultural attractions, families have plenty of options to make the most of their time off.

Yesterday, the Department of Meteorology forecast hot daytime conditions with occasional clouds, following hazy to misty conditions in some places early in the day. Some clouds were expected overnight into Saturday.

For those planning to head outdoors, the Corniche remains an appealing choice, with its waterfront views, open promenade and traditional wooden boats. The area offers opportunities for a family stroll, photography or simply taking a break from the pace of the city.

Doha's parks and shaded green spaces offer another setting for families, particularly those with young children. As the weather remains hot, however, visitors are advised to carry water, seek shade and plan outdoor activities for the cooler hours of the day.

Families looking to combine a walk with a cultural outing can head to Katara Cultural Village, while Souq Waqif offers a chance to wander through traditional alleyways, browse local shops and enjoy a meal.

For those who would rather spend time by the sea, Qatar's beaches provide another option, subject to local access arrangements and conditions.

Early mornings and evenings are generally better suited to outdoor activities during hot weather. Although occasional clouds may soften the bright skies, they should not be taken as a sign that temperatures will drop significantly.

Whether it is a stroll beside the water, an afternoon in a shaded park or an evening exploring one of Doha's popular destinations, a little planning can help families enjoy the weekend while staying comfortable in the heat.



The Corniche remains an appealing choice, with its waterfront views, open promenade and traditional wooden boats.



Doha's parks and shaded green spaces offer another setting for families, particularly those with young children. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam