



Insurance
made simple



Visit
qic.online



Regulated by QIC





SUNDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13337
April 6, 2025
Shawwal 8, 1446 AH
www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

published in QATAR since 1978



Get 3X roaming data
with our Passport Packs







The first Paint product that obtained
Qatar Quality Mark



Robshield Topcoat Matt
by
ROBSON PAINTS
Used as Exterior Coat - Matt

National Paints Factories Co., Doha - Qatar
www.npfqatar.com. Tel: 44601602



SHOP OUR EXCLUSIVE
EID COLLECTION
NOW!
BUY 2
GET 1
FREE
GARMENTS . FOOTWEAR . LADIES BAGS

SPORT | Page 1

QSL: Al Sadd fight
back to upstage
Al Rayyan 2-1 in
Qatar Clasico

FOR RENT
INDUSTRIAL CATERING
& FOOD STORAGE
Ideal for High end catering
-Cloud Kitchen
-Food Storage
(2500 pallet: chiller / freezer / ambient)
Contact: 55601482



Proud to stand with
local brands for a
thriving Qatari market!



QATARI PRODUCT
مناوطينا

selfdrive
NOW
RENT A CAR
STARTING FROM
1199
QAR PM

KNOW MORE!

Macron to hold Gaza summit with Egypt, Jordan leaders

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday announced that he would hold a trilateral summit on the situation in Gaza with Egypt President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II. "In response to the Gaza emergency and during my visit to Egypt at President al-Sisi's invitation, we will hold a trilateral summit with the Egyptian president and the King of Jordan," Macron wrote on X ahead of his trip to the north African country on Monday and Tuesday.

Malian musical great Amadou passes away

Friends, family and fans flocked in mourning to the home of Malian music star Amadou Bagayoko yesterday a day after he died aged 70. One half of the husband-and-wife duo Amadou & Mariam, the Grammy-nominated blind guitarist and singer, died on Friday following an illness. His wife Mariam Doumbia is also blind. **Page 4**

Anti-Trump protests in US cities, Canada

Some 1,200 demonstrations are planned across the US in what organisers expect to be the largest single day of protest against President Donald Trump and his billionaire ally Elon Musk since they launched a rapid-fire effort to overhaul government and expand presidential authority. Thousands were streaming into downtown Washington as the protests got underway. Protests are planned in all 50 states plus Canada and Mexico. **Page 5**

Wathnan Racing's Hit Show powers to Dubai World Cup victory



Wathnan Racing's Hit Show, ridden by Florent Geroux, won the \$12mn Dubai World Cup at Meydan in Dubai yesterday. The Brad Cox-trained colt produced a strong turn of foot to outpace Mixto, under Frankie Dettoni, in the final furlong and clinch the feature race on the nine-card programme. The 2,000m dirt showpiece saw 11 of the world's best battle for glory, but Forever Young — the Saudi Cup winner

and favourite — could not live up to expectations and had to settle for third. Walk of Stars followed in fourth. The eight-year-old Ushba Tesoro, who broke from stall four, finished sixth.

Sheikh Mohammed al-Maktoum congratulates Amir

"An extraordinary night at the Dubai World Cup, with the



participation of the top 100 horses from around the globe, along with the best jockeys and horse owners from all five continents," UAE Vice-President, Prime Minister and Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-

Maktoum commented on X. "Congratulations to Qatar and my brother Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on winning the main race of the Dubai World Cup with the horse "Hit Show". "We extend our heartfelt

congratulations to all the horse owners and jockeys for making this evening truly remarkable. "We take pride in this spectacular event for the UAE, which was broadcast live to over 170 countries worldwide."

‘Israel knowingly killed 15 Gaza aid workers’

AFP
Gaza City

A video recovered from the cellphone of an aid worker killed in Gaza alongside other rescuers shows their final moments, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent, with clearly marked ambulances and emergency lights flashing as heavy gunfire erupts.

The aid worker was among 15 humanitarian personnel killed on March 23 in an attack by Israeli forces, according to the United Nations and the Palestinian Red Crescent.

The Israeli military has said its soldiers "did not randomly attack" any ambulances. Military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani said that troops opened fire on vehicles that had no prior clearance from Israeli authorities and had their lights off.

But the footage released by the Red Crescent yesterday appears to contradict the Israeli military's claims, showing ambulances travelling with their headlights on and emergency lights flashing.

The six minute 42 second video, apparently filmed from inside a moving vehicle, captures a red firetruck and ambulances driving



This image grab from the cellphone of an aid worker killed in Gaza and released by the Palestine Red Crescent Society on April 5, 2025, shows ambulances with their emergency lights flashing and a rescuer near one of the vehicles in Rafah. The aid worker was among 15 humanitarian personnel who were killed on March 23 in an attack by Israeli forces.

through the night amid constant automatic gunfire.

The vehicles stop beside another on the roadside, and two uniformed men get out.

In the video, the voices of two medics are heard - one saying "the vehicle, the vehicle", and another responding: "It seems to be an accident."

Seconds later a volley of gunfire breaks out and the screen goes black.

The Red Crescent said it had

found the video on the phone of Rifat Radwan, one of the aid workers killed.

"This video unequivocally refutes the occupation's claims that Israeli forces did not randomly target ambulances, and that some vehicles had approached suspiciously without lights or emergency markings," it said in a statement.

"The footage exposes the truth and dismantles this false narrative." **Page 3**

DR Congo, M23 hold first talks in Qatar

Further talks to be held in Doha on April 9

AFP/Reuters
Doha

A Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) government delegation has met with Rwanda-backed M23 rebels in Qatar in a bid to halt fighting in the country's east, a source with knowledge of the talks said yesterday.

The M23 has taken control of large swathes of the DRC's eastern provinces of North and South Kivu since 2021 and captured their capitals Goma and Bukavu in a lightning offensive earlier this year.

"A discreet meeting was hosted by the Qataris in Doha last week between delegations from the government of DRC and the AFC/M23 movement, marking their first direct encounter in a long time," the source said.

"Further talks are now expected in Doha, again with the Qataris mediating, to sustain the momentum and explore constructive solutions to end the conflict peacefully"

The source described the opening round of talks in late March as "positive", saying it had built "trust between the two sides that led to the withdrawal of M23 force-



FILE PHOTO: Members of the M23 rebel group stand guard as people attend a rally in Bukavu, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

es from the strategically important city of Walikale as a gesture of goodwill?"

The M23's rapid advance since January has resulted in thousands of deaths and forced hundreds of thousands more from their homes.

The fighting has raised fears of a wider regional war.

Earlier reports said that Kinshasa and M23 planned to hold their first direct talks in Doha on April 9. But the source with knowledge of the situation said private talks were also held last week.

The April 9 talks are still expected to go ahead in Doha.

Rwanda has denied backing M23.

Phase 1 of ‘Wastewater’ Treatment Plant nearing completion

The first phase of the Industrial Wastewater Treatment Plant Project being implemented by the Public Works Authority (Ashghal) will be completed during the third quarter of 2025.

Ashghal, on its website said the project when completed will provide a cutting-edge treatment facility dedicated to industrial wastewater treatment in Qatar. "It will bring in a remarkable facelift in treating industrial wastewater," Ashghal said. The project has



A view of the wastewater treatment facility.

made significant progress according to schedule.

Located about 2km southwest of the Doha Industrial Area, the plant will receive industrial wastewater transported through tankers from industrial facilities located in the Doha Industrial Area and other places.

At an estimated cost of QR693mn, the plant is designed with integrated industrial wastewater treatment features and capabilities with an initial capacity of 10,000 cubic metres per day.

Ashghal has said this is with the possibility of future industrial expansion.

The project earlier won the 'Distinction' Award from the British Safety Council and the 'Gold Award' from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) for 2023, reflecting Ashghal's efforts and desire to co-operate effectively with all its partners to implement the highest standards of worksite safety, raise awareness and encourage the adoption of best practices in

the field. The recognition came after the project achieved 3.5mn man-hours without injuries since the project's commencement. The project received certification from ISO 14001:2015 in Environmental Management System and ISO 45001:2018 in Occupational Health and Safety Management. Ashghal requires that contractors provide a clear and integrated plan with specific standards and procedures to provide a healthy and safe working environment for workers.



Shura partakes in 150th assembly of IPU

The 150th assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU-150) was convened in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, yesterday with the participation of the Shura Council. HE the Speaker of the Shura Council, Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem, chaired the Shura Council's delegation at the opening of these meetings.

The session's agenda comprises numerous topics related to the current global issues, foremost of which are the developments in the occupied Palestinian territories, issues of international peace and security, the environmental governance mechanisms to combat climate change-induced consequences, and the reinvigoration of legislative frameworks to achieve social and economic justice.

Participants are set to review the parliamentary initiatives that aim to accelerate the pace of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) at both the regional and global levels, in addition to assessing the progress made toward their realisation.

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council chaired the co-ordinating meeting of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA), which tackled the areas of regional co-operation among the member states, bolstering the role of Asian parliaments in supporting development and stability, in addition to crystalising a unified position on the emergency item the Arab Group intends to submit during the General Assembly, calling for an end to the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and all occupied Palestinian territories, and rejecting the displacement of the brothers in Palestine.

HE al-Ghanem has so far participated in the coordinating meeting of the Islamic Parliamentary Group, which deliberated on key issues on the global stage and ways to co-



ordinate positions within the IPU's General Assembly to amplify the voice of the Islamic world in international legislative forums.

In addition, the Shura Council, represented by Member of the Shura Council Dr Sultan bin Hassan al-Dosari, took part in the joint meeting between the legislative councils of the Gulf Co-operation

Council (GCC) member states and the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC). The participants discussed ways to boost parliamentary co-operation and co-ordinate positions on the issues set forth on the agenda of the 150th Assembly of IPU and the 215th session of the Governing Council, in addition to the recent parliamentary de-



velopments of shared interest. This convention comes in the wake of rapid regional and global challenges through which parliaments strive to enhance multilateral co-operation and bolster the principles of sustainable peace and development in alignment with the IPU's goals. Regional and global crises dominated the speakers' deliberations

during the opening ceremony, primarily Chairperson of the Senate of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tanzila Narbayaeva; President of the IPU, Dr Tulia Axson; and Secretary-General of the IPU, Martin Chungong, in addition to delivering a visual presentation entitled From Paris to Tashkent: In Celebration of the 150th Assembly of the IPU. (QNA)

Oscar unveils 100" 4K UHD frameless smart TV with WebOS, magic remote

Oscar, the proprietary brand of Jumbo Electronics, has launched its most impressive innovation yet — the 100" 4K UHD Frameless Smart TV with WebOS and Magic Remote. This state-of-the-art television redefines home entertainment, offering an ultra-large display, cutting-edge technology, and seamless user experience in one sleek package.

Exclusively distributed by Jumbo Electronics across Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UAE, Oscar has established itself as a trusted name in the region's consumer electronics space. With a focus on quality, affordability, and smart design, the brand continues to elevate expectations for home entertainment. The Oscar 100" Smart TV features a frameless design, delivering a clean, modern look that maximises screen space. Its 4K Ultra HD resolution ensures stunning clarity and detail, making movies, shows, and games truly come alive. Powered by the WebOS operating system, users enjoy a smooth and intuitive interface, with quick access to popular streaming apps and content. The included Magic Remote enhances the experience with point-and-click navigation, voice control, and universal compatibility with other devices.



Smart connectivity is built in, with support for EShare, Airplay, and Bluetooth, allowing users to share content and connect devices effortlessly. In addition, Dolby audio technology provides rich, cinematic sound, while the sturdy metal stand ensures the massive screen is well-supported. With this launch, Oscar further strengthens its position as a go-to brand for next-gen smart TVs in the GCC. The new 100" 4K UHD model brings together high-end performance, stylish aesthetics, and intelligent features — offering an unbeatable value for families and entertainment enthusiasts.

Shura Council speaker meets IPU president

HE the Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanem met yesterday with President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Dr Tulia Axson on the margin of the 150th General Assembly of the Union, which was set to begin in Tashkent, Uzbekistan later yesterday.

The meeting discussed key topics on the General Assembly's agenda, including ways to enhance international parliamentary co-operation and the role of parliaments in addressing common challenges, particularly in light of humanitarian crises and regional conflicts.

The meeting also touched on the partnership relations between the Shura Council and the IPU, within the framework of the memorandum of understanding signed between the two sides in 2021, and ways to activate them to support capacity building and



enhance co-ordination in international forums.

The two sides highlighted the humanitarian and political conditions in the region, especially in the occupied Palestinian territories. In this context, HE the Speaker of the Shura Council stressed the importance of the IPU's role in promoting international peace and security, given the inability of international organisations to resolve conflicts.

HE al-Ghanem drew attention

to the urgent item the Arab Group intends to submit to the General Assembly, calling for an end to the aggression against the Gaza Strip and all occupied Palestinian territories and rejecting the displacement of our brothers and sisters in Palestine. For her part, the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union praised Qatar's efforts for conflicts resolution through mediation and diplomatic means, appreciating the Shura Council's stances in this regard. (QNA)

The 'Hour and Hour' programme celebrates Eid at the Pearl

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Under the theme "You made us enjoy our Eid" the "Hour and Hour" programme, in co-operation with United Development Company and the Youth Department of Al-Sailiya Sports Club, organised an Eid al-Fitr event at Porto Arabia-Pearl Island.

The event was attended by a large crowd, and visitors enjoyed a variety of heritage, cultural, and artistic activities that reflected the joy and atmosphere of Eid. The event was attended by Erika Bernhard, ambassador of Austria; Lancin-Anne Toure, former ambassador of Guinea; Fabien Chauvin, representative of the French Language in the World, Qatar Branch, and President of the Francophone Chamber in Qatar; and Farhan Sheikh al-Sayed, founder and patron of Arts, Fashion, and Cultural Diplomacy, Founder and Member of the Executive Committee of the Doha Ambassadors Football Club; Rodica Grigorita, wife of the ambassador of Moldova to Qatar; Kristina Libaric, a diplomat from North Macedonia and Dr



Tamani al-Yafei

Mervat Ibrahim, Qatar's ambassador of Peace and CEO of Ready Future, a technology and educational consultancy.

The event, held on the third day of Eid, focused on the social, religious, and heritage aspects of Eid al-Fitr celebrations, in addition to focusing on voluntary work. The event witnessed many distinguished performances, as the programme began with the Qatari Ardha, followed by artistic performances about Eid presented by the students. In addition to the *Spacetoons* songs choral performances and the anime musical piece, the "Think and Answer" cultural competition, also attracted significant audience interaction. The puppet show presented the story *Haya's Embroidered Dress*.



The event included a musical piece titled *The Oud and Violin Melody*, presented by the Music Affairs Center, as well as a unit featuring the characters from the series *Siraj*.

Tamani al-Yafei, CEO of the Hour and Hour programme, expressed her happiness with the event's success, saying: "We were keen to provide a comprehensive experience for this event that blends folk arts, family entertainment, and cultural and interactive activities. In partnership with a number of leading entities in the cultural, artistic and heritage fields."

She added, "Our goal was to revive Eid traditions, focusing on all

its religious, heritage, and social aspects by spreading a festive atmosphere that enhances the spirit of communication among members of the community. We are delighted with the great interaction we witnessed from visitors."

Al-Yafei expressed her pride in co-operating with all participating entities, saying: "We are proud of the great support provided by various institutions and centres to make this event a success. We also appreciate the prominent role played by the Tamm Volunteer Network - Nama Center. I would also like to point out that this is our first collaboration with United Development Company and The



Pearl Island, which opened their doors to us and hosted this event. We thank them for their great support, which contributed to attracting a large number of visitors and adding a special touch to the Eid

celebrations." Al-Yafei expressed her hope that this celebration had brought joy to families and spread happiness in everyone's hearts, and she looked forward to more meaningful events in the future.

Cinema most powerful tool to preserve identity: Qumra Master

Qumra Master, Walter Salles (*Central Station*, *The Motorcycle Diaries*), the acclaimed Brazilian filmmaker whose films have captured the evolving identity of Latin America, said cinema is "an instrument to preserve identity at specific times of our existence and a way to fight against oblivion."

Addressing a full house at the first Masterclass at Qumra, Doha Film Institute's annual talent incubator event, Salles shared personal insights about his journey in cinema — from his passion for documentaries to award-winning features including *I'm Still Here*, which won the Best International Feature Award at the Academy Awards 2025.

Salles said he always strives to incorporate this spirit in his filmmaking, which has led to the dynamic improvisation of his films and working with non-actors who have delivered beyond expectations. Among the first generation of filmmakers in Brazil's return to democracy after a prolonged era of dictatorship, his first feature, *Foreign Land* (1995) was a masterful study on Brazilian political turmoil and displacement. The success of

his second feature, *Central Station*, which won the Golden Bear at the 1998 Berlin Film Festival due to the nurturing he received at Sundance Institute.

Highlighting the importance of cultural institutions like Doha Film Institute in nurturing emerging voices, Salles said that "what DFI does is so important: it allows emerging filmmakers to talk about emerging themes and to actually give name to what has not been named yet."

Apart from intuitive inspirations, Salles underlined the need for authenticity in filmmaking. "It is good to have a written, crystallised and solid script; it is a good incentive for improvisation. Like Jazz, when you have a structure, it is easy to bifurcate from that because you can come back to it."

For *The Motorcycle Diaries*, he said he worked with non-actors and taking the actual journey helped him understand his connection with the wider South American cultural identity. Salles said he tries to avoid too many takes but if there are additional takes, they need to be different from each other. "My ideal way is to unite actors, write for them and



CAO of the Doha Film Institute Abdulla al-Mosallam, Doha Film Institute CEO Fatma al-Remaihi, Qumra Master Walter Salles, Doha Film Institute Artistic Adviser Elia Suleiman and Director of Strategy and Development and Deputy Director Hanaa Issa attend Qumra Master Photocall.

when something vivid evolves, shoot it as a documentary."

Salles' message for young filmmakers was to go beyond the obvious: "When you see everything, that is television. When you're invited to complete an image, then you may be in cinema. When there is something left to find, and you're invited to complete the dialogue, then you are in cinema."

Salles also discussed his recent

work, *I'm Still Here*, which draws on personal memories of Brazil during the military dictatorship. "There are many layers of memory in the film," adding that "the film becomes the presence of absence; in every single frame in the film there is a lot of empty space," alluding its theme of personal tragedy that befalls a family whose life has been a form of resilience and resistance against the dictatorship.



Walter Salles attends Qumra Masterclass.

A producer of several feature films by emerging young talents, Salles said cinema is linked to the first artistic expressions — the cave paintings.

"All around the world, there was this desire to reproduce life, to capture the sense of specific groups of people living in specific geographies. We carry something of that primal desire in those cave paintings, which finds existence in cinema."

He left the audience with a powerful message about the responsi-

bility of cinema amidst injustices and attempts to erase collective memories. "Cinema is a way to construct memory to fight against erasing it — and accumulation of memory is identity in motion — whether you shoot it with an iPhone or make a feature film" — calling the process and the art "an extraordinary tool of resistance."

The session, moderated by Richard Pena, featured clips from Salles' works, including *Foreign Land*, *Central Station*, *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *I'm Still Here*.



A young boy salvages some wood amid the devastation in the yard of a school, a day after it was hit by an Israeli strike, in the Al-Tuffah neighbourhood of Gaza City.

Over 350 children detained in Israeli prisons: report

QNA
Ramallah

Palestinian prisoner advocacy organisations revealed that Israeli occupation forces are detaining over 350 Palestinian children, including more than 100 held under administrative detention without trial.

In a joint report issued yesterday by the Commission of Detainees' Affairs, the Palestinian Prisoner Society, and Addameer Prisoner Support and Human

Rights Association, marking Palestinian Child's Day, the organisations highlighted significant developments in the plight of detained children since the onset of the genocide.

Arrest campaigns have intensified, with at least 1,200 cases recorded in the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem. In Gaza, the exact number of detained children remains unknown due to enforced disappearances and challenges in monitoring detainees.

The report noted that legal teams have managed to visit

several child detainees in Israeli prisons, including Ofer, Megiddo, and Damon, despite severe restrictions. Testimonies collected during these visits revealed the brutal treatment children endure, including systematic torture, starvation, and medical neglect.

The report also documented systematic crimes by Israeli prison authorities, such as physical abuse, food deprivation, and neglect, which recently led to the death of a child detainee since the genocide began in October 2023.

Officials discuss south Lebanon with visiting US envoy

AFP
Beirut

Senior Lebanese officials said yesterday's talks with visiting US deputy special envoy for the Middle East Morgan Ortagus were positive, focusing on south Lebanon amid a fragile truce between Israel and Hezbollah.

President Joseph Aoun and Ortagus discussed "south Lebanon, the work of the international monitoring committee and the Israeli withdrawal" from Lebanese territory, a statement from the presidency said, characterising the talks as constructive.

The US chairs a committee, which also includes France, that is tasked with overseeing the ceasefire that ended more than a year of hostilities including two months of all-out war between Israel and Hezbollah.

Prime Minister Nawaf Salam's office, in a statement, also said the discussions with the envoy were "positive".

Ortagus's second visit to Lebanon comes as Israel continues



A handout photo provided by the Lebanese Presidency yesterday, shows Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun meeting with US Deputy Special Envoy for the Middle East Morgan Ortagus (centre) at the Presidential Palace in Baabda.

to carry out strikes in Lebanon despite a November 27 ceasefire with Hezbollah, and as its troops remain in several points in the country's south.

Under the truce, Hezbollah was to redeploy its forces north of the Litani River, about 30 kilometres from the Israeli border, and dismantle any remaining military infrastructure in the south. Israel was due to complete its withdrawal from Lebanon by February 18 after missing a January deadline, but it has kept troops in five places it deems "strategic". Lebanon's

army has been deploying in areas the Israeli military has withdrawn from.

Ortagus and Salam discussed the Lebanese army's work in implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended a 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah and formed the basis of the November truce, his office said. The resolution says Lebanese troops and UN peacekeepers should be the only forces in south Lebanon, and called for the disarmament of all non-state armed groups.

Iran says wants dialogue 'on equal footing' with US

AFP
Tehran

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said yesterday his country was willing to engage in dialogue with the United States as equals, but without clarifying whether Tehran would participate in direct talks.

It came after US President Donald Trump, who has called on Tehran to hold direct negotiations on its nuclear programme, threatened to bomb Iran if diplomacy fails. Iran says it is ready to engage in dialogue, but refuses to hold direct talks under threats and pressure.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran wants

dialogue on equal footing," Pezeshkian said during a meeting, according to the presidency's website. On Thursday, Trump said he would prefer to hold "direct talks" with Iran.

"I think it goes faster and you understand the other side a lot better than if you go through intermediaries," the US president argued. But yesterday, Pezeshkian asked: "If you want negotiations, then what is the point of threatening?"

"Today, America is not only humiliating Iran, but also the world," Pezeshkian added, in an apparent reference to recent policies adopted by Trump, including imposing tariffs on imports.

Western countries, led by the United States, have for decades accused Tehran

of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

Iran rejects the allegation and maintains that its nuclear activities exist solely for civilian purposes.

Yesterday Hossein Salami, head of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the ideological arm of Iran's military, said the country was "ready" for war.

"We are not worried about war at all. We will not be the initiators of war, but we are ready for any war," the official IRNA news agency reported him as saying. In 2015, Iran reached a landmark deal with the permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely the United States, France, China, Russia, and the United Kingdom, as well as Germany, to regulate its nuclear activities

Palestinian paramedic says he saw Israeli troops firing on emergency vehicles

Reuters
Cairo

A Palestinian paramedic who was present at an incident in which 15 of his colleagues were killed in southern Gaza last month said he saw Israeli troops firing at emergency vehicles that he later saw stained with blood.

After several days of uncertainty about the whereabouts of the paramedics, Red Crescent and UN officials found the bodies of the 15 emergency and aid workers buried in a mass grave in southern Gaza, accusing Israeli forces of killing them. Another worker is still missing.

Munther Abed, a volunteer for the Palestinian Red Crescent, said he was responding to a call with two colleagues near Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip on March 23 when he was detained by the Israeli soldiers shortly before they opened fire on other emergency vehicles.

He said he had not been able to see exactly what happened when the soldiers opened fire. But his account corresponds with assertions by officials from the Palestinian Red Crescent and the UN that the emergency workers from the Red Cross, Red Crescent, UN and Palestinian Civil Emergency service were targeted by Israeli troops.

The Israeli military has opened an investigation into the incident, which by its account occurred when unmarked vehicles approached an Israeli position in the dark without lights or special markings and without previous co-ordination, factors it said had made the vehicles' advance appear suspicious.

The military said the soldiers who opened fire had killed a number of Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters who were travelling in vehicles marked with the Palestinian Red Crescent signs.

The Palestinian Red Crescent

describes Abed as "the lone survivor" of the incident, with the fate of the missing paramedic still unclear.

Abed said he and colleagues had received a call to go out to help wounded people at around dawn following an air strike in the Al-Hashasheen area in Rafah, close to the border with Egypt.

"We moved right away, it was me and two other colleagues. As soon as we arrived there, we came under fire and they detained us," he told Reuters by phone from his house in Khan Younis, referring to shooting by Israeli soldiers.

After he was detained, he said he lost sight of his two colleagues.

As he was standing near the soldiers, he said he saw other emergency vehicles approaching the Israeli soldiers' position.

"I could see the vehicle of the Civil Emergency. The soldiers began shooting at the vehicles, they fired heavily," he said. "It was dark and I couldn't see what happened to the people there, but they (the soldiers) fired heavily. They asked me to duck down and they were firing heavily. I felt as if the bullets were hitting me personally." Yesterday, the Red Crescent published a video obtained from the cellphone of a paramedic found buried in the mass grave.

Filmed from inside a moving vehicle, it appears to show a clearly marked convoy of ambulances and a fire truck driving at dawn with their red lights flashing. After they stop by a vehicle that had veered off the road, two rescue workers and another man can be seen before a volley of gunshots is heard.

Reuters was able to verify the location of the video near the Tal Al-Sultan area west of Rafah city in Rafah governorate.

The Israeli military said in response to a request for comment about the video that the event

on March 23, 2025, was under thorough examination.

"All claims, including the documentation circulating about the incident, will be thoroughly and deeply examined to understand the sequence of events and the handling of the situation," it said.

It was only after daybreak that Abed, who remained held at the location where he was initially detained, was able to get a clearer picture of what had happened.

"With the first light of the day, things become clearer, I saw the vehicles of the Civil Emergency and the Red Crescent, the doors of all the vehicles were open and there was blood on the vehicles," he said.

He said he saw a bulldozer dig four holes in the sandy ground before crushing the wrecked vehicles and burying them.

"At that time I had no clue about the fate of my colleagues," he said.

Abed said he was held in detention by Israeli forces for about 15 hours during which time he was interrogated and beaten. He said he saw the aid worker who is still missing, detained by Israeli soldiers.

"They asked many personal questions too about me and my family," he said. "I felt I was about to die." Eventually he said the soldiers made some checks on him before they decided to release him.

Nebal Farsakh, spokesperson of the Palestinian Red Crescent confirmed that Abed was working for the organisation as a volunteer and was in Rafah that day with the mission.

"He is the lone survivor, the two colleagues who were with him were killed. There is another colleague who is still missing," Farsakh told Reuters.

"He had no clue at that moment whether his colleagues were martyred or were wounded and saved."

Tunisia dismantles migrant camps

Reuters
Tunis

Tunisian authorities have dismantled makeshift camps housing 7,000 sub-Saharan African migrants and begun forcibly deporting some of them, a senior official told Reuters yesterday, as the country grapples with an unprecedented migrant crisis.

Houssem Eddine Jebabli, an official in the National Guard, told Reuters a number of migrants were arrested for violence during the ongoing operation. He said their forced repatriation began Friday night and the authorities are also seeking to voluntarily repatriate thousands more.

He said the number forcibly deported was significant, without specifying how many, and that bladed weapons, including knives and swords, were seized.

Tunisia's government said about 20,000 of migrants live in tents in forests in southern towns, such as Amra and Jbeni-ana, after authorities prevented them from travelling across the Mediterranean.

Migrants have frequently clashed with local residents, who



Tunisian police dismantle a camp for undocumented migrants from sub-Saharan Africa at Al-Amra on the outskirts of the Tunisian port city of Sfax, yesterday.

want them deported from their area. Local human rights groups have criticised the authorities, accusing them of racist rhetoric, incitement against migrants and condemning a crackdown that led to the imprisonment of activists who helped African migrants. President Kais Saied said in 2023 the arrival of thousands of illegal migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries was a "conspiracy to change the coun-

try's demographic make up".

That prompted the African Union to condemn what it called Tunisia's "hate speech" against migrants, an allegation Saied said was unfair.

Tunisia has earned praise from Italian authorities in recent months for its progress in stemming the flow of thousands of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa who are trying to reach Europe in boats.

Iranians brave rain



Iranians ride a motorcycle on a rainy day in Tehran.

Burundi closes site hosting 45,000 refugees from DR Congo

AFP
Nairobi

Burundi has shut down a transit site sheltering tens of thousands of refugees who have fled violence in neighbouring eastern DR Congo, witnesses and a local official told AFP yesterday.

According to the United Nations, Rugombo Stadium has been hosting more than 45,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the M23 armed group has been on the offensive for months.

In their advance M23 fighters have seized vast swathes of the DRC's mineral-rich yet restive east, including areas along Burundi's western border, triggering fears of a regional war.

The UN estimates that about 70,000 refugees have fled the fighting to Burundi since January in the "largest refugee influx in decades", with a local official calling the situation at the Rugombo Stadium "untenable".

With the rising numbers in Rugombo, Burundian authorities and the UN's refugee agency UNHCR

have been conducting relocations to other campsites including the Rutana refugee camp.

Some witnesses have said that the eviction was forceful and they received evacuation threats.

"There was a vehicle that drove through all the streets of Rugombo saying that the refugees had to present themselves to be taken to the Rutana refugee camp, and that anyone seen in Rugombo after that date would be considered a rebel and would be treated as such," a Congolese refugee speaking on condition of anonymity said.

However some have resisted the move, while others would prefer to return home, according to anonymous refugee sources at the camp.

Rugombo Stadium is located about five to 10 kilometres from the DRC border, while Rutana lies approximately 270 kilometres from Bukavu, a city near the DRC-Burundi border under M23 control.

Last week, authorities stormed the Rugombo Stadium alongside hundreds of police officers and military personnel to enforce

the closure and ensure the camp was emptied, the anonymous Congolese refugee said.

"The majority of the refugees refused to go to the refugee camp because they had heard that the refugees were being badly treated and had received no assistance," another refugee said, adding that some "saw it fit to swim across the Rusizi river" to go back home.

A local official said that the Rugombo Stadium was overcrowded and the refugees needed to be moved further away from the border with the DRC.

"The situation had become untenable, with... refugees crammed into Rugombo stadium and spilling out of it," the administrative manager said.

Last week, the World Food Programme said the number of people in need of food aid in Burundi had risen to 120,000, forcing the UN agency to cut rations in half to accommodate the influx.

The local official confirmed that some refugees had been transferred to Rutana and that Rugombo Stadium "is now empty of any refugees".

'Done everything' to bring Sahel trio back to Ecowas: Senegal president

AFP
Dakar

Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye said Friday he had "done everything possible" to bring junta-led Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger back into west Africa's Ecowas regional group, to no avail.

The three Sahel countries quit the Economic Community of West African States at the beginning of the year, accusing the bloc of being subservient to France and failing in the fight against militancy.

The breakaway countries have formed their own Alliance of Sahel States (AES), turning away from former colonial power France and pivoting towards Russia.

In July last year, Faye was appointed by Ecowas as a mediator towards the three Sahel countries now led by juntas which seized power in recent coups. "I pleaded for people

to come together around a table and talk, to preserve the chances of maintaining a strong subregional organisation," Faye told local media during a marathon four-hour interview.

"But the fact remains that these countries, like others, are sovereign. They are free to make their own choices.

"All we owe them is to respect their will, knowing that we have done everything possible to reintegrate them" into Ecowas, he said. As for the new relationship between Senegal and former colonial power France, Faye insisted that Paris "remains an important partner for Senegal on all levels".

Senegal is negotiating the departure of French troops from its territory by the end of this year. "It happens that at a certain point in its history, a country decides to redirect its trajectory. And that's what happened with the French military presence in the country," said Faye.

Protesters seek justice for abuse victims



Protesters hold banners and chant slogans as they march during a protest against the abuse of women and children in Matatiele, yesterday. A spark of protests and a wave of national outrage reignited this week, with demonstrators demanding justice for a 7-year-old girl allegedly assaulted in October 2024 at Bergview College in Matatiele, South Africa. The case has highlighted ongoing concerns about gender-based violence in the region.

Despair and sadness follow death of Malian musical great Amadou

AFP
Bamako

Friends, family and fans flocked in mourning to the home of Malian music star Amadou Bagayoko yesterday a day after he died aged 70, AFP reporters saw.

One half of the husband-and-wife duo Amadou & Mariam, the Grammy-nominated blind guitarist and singer died on Friday following an illness.

His wife Mariam Doumbia, who is also blind, described to AFP her late husband's last moments.

"I took his hand and tried to make some movements with it, but it didn't move," she said.

"I said: 'Amadou, don't do this, speak to Mariam! I kept saying 'Amadou, Amadou...' but he didn't speak any more."

After he was taken to hospital, "I asked the doctor to check him," Mariam added.

He did and subsequently "told us that he was gone".

"I thought that, if Amadou went just like that, then me, I'm alone. I was alone and I will remain alone in life," Mariam added.

Well-wishers flocked to the couple's home to pay their respects and express their sympathy with the family.



File photo of Amadou Bagayoko.

the tributes to Amadou in a post on Instagram, saying: "We will always be together... With you, wherever you go," with a photo of him and the duo.

"Mariam, Sam, the whole family, your pain is my pain. I love you," he added.

Young Malian singer Sidiki Diabate lamented "another immense loss for Malian music".

Congolese singer Fally Ipupa, who was due to work with Amadou & Mariam, wrote on Facebook that he "still cannot believe that you are gone".

After meeting in 1976, when Amadou was 21 and Mariam 18, the pair discovered they had similar tastes in music. They began touring together from the 1980s, mixing traditional west African instruments like the kora and balafon with the Pink Floyd and James Brown records from their youth.

Their 2004 album *Dimanche a Bamako* (Sunday in Bamako) brought them worldwide success backed up by the title track. They became one of Africa's best-selling and most beloved pairs, playing alongside the likes of Damon Albarn of Blur and Gorillaz and Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour – a childhood idol. The duo went on to play at festivals including Glastonbury in England, share bills with Coldplay, U2 and Stevie Wonder, and play for Barack Obama at the concert marking the US president's Nobel Peace Prize award.

In war-scarred Central African Republic, ballet keeps ethnic heritage alive

AFP
Bangui

The dancers shake their hips, kicking their feet to the beat of the age-old "dance of the caterpillars", typically performed in the south where the insects are gathered for food.

Three times a week the National Ballet rehearses traditional dances of the many ethnic groups making up the Central African Republic (CAR).

"The creations they ask of us are based on the particularities of each ethnicity. I'm Banda and I have to suggest dance steps from the Banda ethnic group," Sidoane Kolema, 43, said.

They aim to preserve the heritage of the CAR, a mosaic of ethnic groups that is scarred by decades of conflict and instability and is among the world's poorest countries.

From behind the scenes, 26-year-old Intelligentsia Oualou began singing in Gbanu, the language of her native southwestern Ombella-M'poko region.

To the jingle of bells and rhythmic thud of the drum and xylophone-like balafon, the spinning silhouettes of the other dancers soon appeared across the dilapidated stage, set up on waste ground in the capital Bangui.

"All my relatives are artists and I've dreamed of being an artist" too, said Oualou.

She is one of 62 dancers in the National Artistic Ensemble, created by CAR President Faustin Archange Touadera in 2021.

"Promoting our cultures means going to the hinterlands to find the different dance steps of the Central African Republic in order to create a show that is diverse," National Ballet choreographer Ludovic Mboumolomako, 55, said.

He spent three weeks living among the Pygmies in their ancestral forests in the south in order to enrich his choreography with their dances, songs and ways of living.

The National Ballet archives movements, sounds and rites that were the



Dancers from the National Artistic Ensemble rehearse in Bangui.

hallmark of traditional village communities to preserve them "for future generations", Culture Minister Ngola Ramadan said.

"The aim is to collect, preserve and pass on," she added.

The company is often called upon to perform the ancestral dances in public at political gatherings, inaugurations and official ceremonies.

In front of officials or at festivals, they dance in costumes of raffia skirts topped with pearl belts and patterned wax-print fabrics.

"We need to raise awareness among young people... by dancing the different dances of our different ethnic groups in front of everyone. Tomorrow, if we are no longer here, it will be up to them to take over," Kolema said.

The dancers were even recently integrated into the civil service, just like the actors and musicians who also belong to the National Artistic Ensemble.

One of the upsides is that the dancers

"have, not a subsidy, but a salary", the minister said. National Ballet director Esaie Gonissere acknowledged that he was over the moon at the development as "it was our most pressing wish".

Kevin Bemon, 44, said he had been able to put his former "difficult" life dancing at neighbourhood wakes behind him thanks to the monthly salary of 76,000 CFA francs (\$124) – just over twice the minimum wage in the CAR.

The ballet company is now gearing up for its show during the World Expo universal exhibition in Osaka, Japan, which begins this month.

For a decade until 2013, the CAR was wracked by civil wars and intercommunal conflict and although the violence has lost intensity since 2018, tensions persist.

"Traditional dance has brought us together. After the recent wars, different ethnic groups were divided. Thanks to dance, we've become children of the same family," Oualou said.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Sl. No.	Tender No.	Subject	Tender Fees	Closing Date
1	AT/C/1217/25	Comprehensive Maintenance of Kone Elevators for 5 Years	500.00	20.04.2025
2	AT/C/1218/25	Staff Transportation Buses for 3 Years	500.00	20.04.2025
3	AT/C/1219/25	Laundry and dry cleaning outsource service for 2 Years	500.00	20.04.2025
4	AT/C/1220/25	Supply & Delivery of Stewarding, Housekeeping & Laundry chemicals on call-off basis for 2 Years	500.00	20.04.2025
5	AT/C/1221/25	Supply & Delivery of Paper and disposable packing materials on call-off basis for 2 Years	500.00	20.04.2025
6	AT/C/1222/25	Supply of Casual Cleaning Labors for 3 Years	500.00	20.04.2025
7	AT/C/1223/25	Supply of Casual Kitchen Cooks for 3 Years	500.00	20.04.2025
8	AT/C/1224/25	Supply & Delivery of fresh fruits & vegetables for 1 Year	500.00	20.04.2025
9	AT/C/1225/25	Supply & Delivery of fresh local fish for 1 Year	300.00	20.04.2025
10	AT/C/1226/25	Supply & Delivery of various food & beverage items for 1 Year	500.00	20.04.2025
11	AT/C/1227/25	Staff Medical Insurance for 1 Year	500.00	20.04.2025

The tender documents are available for collection from the Finance Department (Tel.: 44465612) of The Torch Doha upon presentation of a formal letter of authorization on Company letterhead, copy of the Commercial Registration and a non-refundable fee as specified above.

The closing time will be 12.00 noon on the closing date mentioned above, any offer arriving thereafter will not be considered.

Tenders are to be submitted in duplicate in a sealed envelope (**Technical and Commercial envelopes seperately**) addressed to The Chairman, General Tender Committee, The Torch Doha and deposit in the tender box available at The Torch Doha Purchasing Office located in Al Waab Street, Aspire Zone.



US Supreme Court lets Trump cut teacher training grants in DEI-related case

By Andrew Chung
Reuters

The US Supreme Court has allowed Donald Trump's administration to proceed with millions of dollars of cuts to teacher training grants – part of his crackdown on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives – handing the Republican president his first victory at the nation's highest judicial body since he returned to office in January.

The court decided 5-4 to put on hold Boston-based US District Judge Myong Joun's March 10 order requiring the Department of Education to reinstate in eight Democratic-led states funding for grants under two teacher training programmes while a legal challenge by the states continues.

Conservative Chief Justice John Roberts and the court's three liberal justices dissented from the decision.

The Supreme Court has a 6-3 conservative majority.

The three justices who Trump appointed during his first presidential term sided with him in the decision.

The brief and unsigned opinion from the court said that the administration is "likely to succeed in showing the district court lacked jurisdiction to order the payment of money", as occurred in this case.

The decision marked an early win for Trump after the court previously declined to let him immediately fire a US watchdog agency head or withhold payment to foreign aid groups for past work.

The eight states – California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Wisconsin – sued after the Department of Education announced on February 17 that it had cut \$600mn in teacher training funds that were promoting what it called "divisive ideologies" including DEI initiatives.

Joun decided that the administration likely violated a US law called the Administrative Procedure Act governing federal agency actions given that the Department of Education abruptly terminated grants

awarded under programmes authorised by Congress without providing individualised analyses of the programmes.

The Teacher Quality Partnership and Supporting Effective Educator grant programmes were established to help support institutions that recruit and train educators in a bid to address critical teacher shortages, especially in rural and underserved communities.

The Republican president and officials in his administration have accused various judges who have issued rulings impeding his policies of overstepping their authority.

The Justice Department told the Supreme Court in its request that in this case and others, federal judges are impermissibly micromanaging the government's spending decisions.

US Attorney-General Pamela Bondi, a Trump appointee, said that Wednesday's decision "marks a significant victory for President Trump and the rule of law".

"This Supreme Court ruling vindicates what the Department of Justice has been

arguing for months: local district judges do not have the jurisdiction to seize control of taxpayer dollars, force the government to pay out billions, or unilaterally halt President Trump's policy agenda," she said. "Department of Justice attorneys will continue fighting to protect the executive branch from gross judicial overreach."

Grant recipients received a standardised letter notifying them that the Department of Education does not support programmes or organisations that promote DEI "or any other initiatives that unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex, national origin or another protected characteristic".

Without an order to restore the funding, "dozens of programmes upon which public schools, public universities, students, teachers and faculty rely will be gutted", Joun, an appointee of Democratic former president Joe Biden, wrote in his temporary restraining order.

In its decision on Wednesday, the Supreme Court suggested that the challenge should have been brought in a different

judicial body, the Court of Federal Claims, which specialises in money damages claims against the government.

Liberal Justice Elena Kagan said in a dissent that the reasoning on that issue presented in the decision "is at the least under-developed, and very possibly wrong".

"It is a mistake for the court to grant this emergency application," Kagan wrote. "Nowhere in its papers does the government defend the legality of cancelling the education grants at issue here."

Fellow liberal Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson said she saw no reason to doubt Joun's findings.

"The harms that will result from permitting the department to reinstate these terminations are directly contrary to Congress's goals in enacting the (programmes) and in entrusting the department with their implementation," Jackson wrote.

The Boston-based 1st US Circuit Court of Appeals on March 21 declined to pause Joun's order.

The judge on March 24 had extended the order.

Anti-Trump rallies draw thousands

Reuters/AFP
Washington

Thousands of protesters gathered in Washington, DC, and across the United States yesterday, part of some 1,200 demonstrations that were expected to form the largest single day of protest against President Donald Trump and his billionaire ally Elon Musk since they launched a rapid-fire effort to overhaul government and expand presidential authority.

People streamed onto the expanse of grass surrounding the Washington Monument under gloomy skies and light rain.

Organisers told Reuters that more than 20,000 people were expected to attend a rally at the National Mall.

The protests handed Trump's opponents an opportunity to demonstrate their displeasure en masse in response to Trump's raft of executive orders.

Some 150 activist groups had signed up to participate, according to the event's website.

Protests were planned in all 50 states plus Canada and Mexico.

Terry Klein, a retired biomedical scientist from Princeton, New Jersey, was among those who gathered by the stage beneath the Washington Monument.

She said that she drove down to attend the rally to protest Trump's policies on "everything from immigration to the DOGE stuff to the tariffs this week, to education. I mean, our whole country is under attack, all of our institutions, all the things that make America what it is".

Jane Ellen Saums, 66, said she was dismayed to see the Trump administration dismantling America's long-standing democratic institutions.

"It's extremely concerning to see what is happening to our government, and all of the checks and balances that have been put in place that are being totally run over – everything from the environment to personal rights," said the real estate worker who showed up at the protest dressed as Mother Nature, wrapped in ivy and holding a globe.

The crowd around the memorial continued to build throughout the day.

Some carried Ukrainian flags and others wore Palestinian keffiyeh scarves and carried "Free Palestine" signs, while Democrats from the US House of Representatives blasted Trump's policies on stage.

Wayne Hoffman, 73, a retired money manager from West Cape May, New Jersey, said he was concerned about Trump's economic policies, including his widespread use of tariffs.

"It's going to cost the farmers in the red states. It's going to cost people their jobs – certainly their 401ks. People have lost tens



Protesters gather for the 'Hands Off' rally on the National Mall in Washington, DC. - AFP/Reuters



of thousands of dollars," Hoffman said.

"They've woken up a sleeping giant, and they haven't seen nothing yet," activist Graylan Hagler, 71, told the gathering crowd. "We will not sit down, we will not be quiet, and we will not go away."

Trump spent the day in Florida, playing a round of golf at his club in Jupiter before returning to his Mar-a-Lago compound in the afternoon.

With Trump's blessing, Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) team has scythed through the US government, eliminating more than 200,000 jobs from the 2.3mn federal workforce.

At times, the effort has been haphazard and forced the recall of needed specialists.

On Friday, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) began laying off more than 20,000 workers, as much as 25% of its ranks (**see report on Page 6**).

Several hundred people gathered yesterday outside the headquarters of the Social Security Administration, a top DOGE target, near Bal-

timore to protest against cuts to the agency which delivers benefits to the elderly and disabled.

The mood was angry and defiant, after the agency recently announced cuts of 7,000 staff and the ending of phone services to millions of claimants.

Members of the DOGE have been inside the building for weeks. Many in the crowd of mostly retirees held handmade signs, including "Where Has My Country Gone?", "FIRE DOGE!", "Send Musk to Mars," and "Hands off Social Security!"

Linda Falcao, who turns 65 in two months, told the crowd that she had been paying into the Social Security fund since the age of 16.

"I'm terrified, I'm angry, I'm pissed, I'm bewildered this could happen to the United States," she said. "I do love America and I'm heartbroken. I need my money. I want my money. I want my benefits!"

In response, the crowd chanted: "It's our money!"

White House assistant press secretary Liz Huston disputed

the protesters' charge that Trump aimed to cut Social Security and Medicaid.

"President Trump's position is clear: he will always protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid for eligible beneficiaries," Huston said in an e-mail. "Meanwhile, the Democrats' stance is giving Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare benefits to illegal aliens, which will bankrupt these programmes and crush American seniors."

Much of Trump's agenda has been restrained by lawsuits contending he has overstepped his authority with attempts to fire civil servants, deport immigrants and reverse gender minority rights.

Trump returned to office on January 20 with a stream of executive orders and other measures critics say are aligned with an agenda outlined by Project 2025, a deeply conservative political initiative to reshape government and consolidate presidential authority.

His supporters have applauded Trump's audacity as necessary to disrupt entrenched liberal interests.

Hours before the protests were due to kick off in the United States, hundreds of anti-Trump Americans living in Europe gathered in Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris and London to voice opposition to Trump's sweeping makeover of US foreign and domestic policies.

Yesterday's demonstrations could offer a temperature reading of just how hot voters' feelings are.

A Women's March protest shortly after Trump's first election in 2016 drew an estimated half-million people to Washington; advance estimates for yesterday's turnout have been far smaller.

As Trump continues aggressively shaking things up in Washington and beyond, his approval rating has fallen to its lowest since taking office, according to recent polling.

However, despite pushback around the globe to his sweeping imposition of tariffs, and bubbling resentment from many Americans, the White House has dismissed the protests, and the Republican president has given no sign of relenting.

"My policies will never change," he said on Friday.

Trump tells Americans: 'Hang tough, it won't be easy, but we will win'

US President Donald Trump doubled down yesterday on sweeping tariffs he unleashed on countries around the world, warning Americans of pain ahead, but promising historic investment and prosperity.

The comments came as Trump's widest-ranging trade measures took effect in a move that could trigger retaliation and escalating economic tensions, with the British and French leaders saying that "nothing should be off the table" in response.

Trump, acknowledging global turbulence, urged Americans to be patient.

"We have been the dumb and helpless 'whipping post,' but not any longer. We are bringing back jobs and businesses like never before," he wrote on Truth Social.

"This is an economic revolution, and we will win," the Republican president added. "Hang tough, it won't be easy, but the end result will be historic."

A 10% "baseline" tariff came into place just after midnight, hitting most US imports except goods from Mexico and Canada, as Trump invoked emergency economic powers.

However, in a potential sign of disagreement between Trump and close adviser Elon Musk, the tech billionaire said yesterday that he hoped the US and Europe could move eventually toward a "zero-tariff situation" (**see accompanying report below**).

The EU, Japan and China are among around 60 trading partners set to face even higher rates on April 9.

Trump's steep 34% tariff on Chinese goods, set to kick in next week, triggered Beijing's announcement of a 34% tariff on US products from April 10.

Beijing also said it would sue Washington at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and restrict exports of rare earth elements used in medical and electronics technology.

"China has been hit much harder than the USA, not even close," Trump said in his post. "They, and many other nations, have treated us unsustainably badly" – **AFP**

Musk says he hopes for 'zero tariffs' between US and Europe

US tech-billionaire Elon Musk said yesterday that he hoped in future to see complete freedom of trade between the United States and Europe, speaking days after US President Donald Trump announced tariffs on trading partners.

Musk spoke via video-link at a congress in Florence of Italy's right-wing, co-ruling League Party.

"At the end of the day, I hope it's agreed that both Europe and the United States should move ideally, in my view, to a zero tariff situation, effectively creating a free trade zone between Europe and North America," Musk said.

Interviewed by League leader Matteo Salvini, Musk said he hoped to see greater freedom of movement between Europe and the US.

"If people wish to work in Europe or wish to work in North America, they should be allowed to do so in my view," he said, adding this "has certainly been my advice to the president" – **Reuters**

Junior officer appointed to oversee US Foreign Service: sources

The Trump administration has appointed a national security lawyer who entered the foreign service just four years ago as the top official overseeing the State Department's global workforce, according to sources familiar with the matter and an internal e-mail seen by Reuters.

The hiring of Lew Olowski to run the department's Global Talent Management Bureau comes as President Donald Trump shrinks the federal workforce and looks to revamp the US diplomatic corps to ensure a dedicated implementation of his "America First" policies.

Olowski served as a senior counsellor at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) under the first Trump administration.

He was named the Senior Bureau Official at the Department's Global Talent Management Bureau, officials said.

Olowski, who entered the foreign service in 2021, will temporarily fill a position traditionally occupied by veteran foreign service officers, including ambassadors, typically with decades of experience.

His appointment sent shockwaves across the State Department workforce and drew an objection from the American Foreign Service Association, which represents foreign service officers, saying that it was "deeply concerning" to appoint Olowski and compared the move to putting a junior military officer in charge of the Pentagon's personnel system.

"Placing an untenured, entry-level officer who has only served one complete overseas tour into this critical role, even in an acting capacity, not only disregards that tradition but also sends a clear message about the value this administration places on experience

and professional progression," the association said in a statement.

It was not immediately clear when the administration was planning to nominate a director-general for the Foreign Service, which is a Senate-confirmed position.

In an internal e-mail to some State Department staff, Olowski's predecessor Catherine Rodriguez, a former ambassador who had led the Global Talent Management Bureau since the start of the Trump administration, described the past few months as a "profound moment of transition" and urged staff to welcome Olowski, who will take up his new role starting next week.

At least one diplomat has threatened to resign over the appointment.

Kent Longsdon, a career diplomat and a former ambassador to Moldova who served as the principal deputy assistant secretary

in the bureau that Olowski would be leading, said he would quit in protest in a meeting on Thursday at the State Department, two US officials familiar with the conversation said.

Longsdon referred any queries to the State Department.

"We are not going to comment on internal personnel matters," a State Department spokesperson said when asked about Olowski's appointment.

The State Department's nearly 70,000 global workforce is bracing for potential job cuts and closures of US overseas missions as Trump presses ahead with an effort to cut the federal workforce.

In February, Trump issued an executive order directing US Secretary of State Marco Rubio to revamp the foreign service to ensure "faithful and effective implementation" of Trump's foreign policy agenda. – **Reuters**

LA county agrees to \$4bn payout

AFP
Los Angeles

Los Angeles County has agreed to pay \$4bn to settle thousands of abuse claims dating back decades, it said on Friday, in what looks set to be the largest-ever such settlement.

The agreement, which must still be approved by the board of supervisors, is intended to compensate almost 7,000 people who were subjected to abuse while in juvenile facilities and children's homes in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

"On behalf of the county, I apologise wholeheartedly to everyone who was harmed by these reprehensible acts," County chief executive Fesia Davenport said. "The historic scope of this settlement makes clear that we are committed to helping the survivors recover and rebuild their lives – and to making and enforcing the systemic changes needed to keep young people safe."

A 2020 state law gave victims of childhood sexual abuse an extended window to take legal action, long after the usual statute of limitation had lapsed.

Thousands of adults came forward with horrifying stories of systematic abuse they had suffered in juvenile detention facilities.

Many more claimed they were the victims of predatory staff at the now-shuttered MacLaren Children's Centre, a home for foster children.

Attorneys for the victims called it a "house of horrors" and an investigation found no background checks had been carried out on staff there for decades.

News of the proposed settlement was bittersweet for victims.

"I'm in total shock," Shirley Bodkin, 58, who recalled being drugged, beaten and abused in bathtubs and closets at MacLaren, told the *Los Angeles Times*. "I've been waiting all these years for this outcome."

MaryAlice Ashbrook, 65, who was abused at MacLaren in the 1960s, said hearing the news "felt like my heart had a door and it slammed shut".

"I've gone to great lengths to block this out, and still, I deal with reoccurring nightmares."

The enormous sum dwarfs previous agreements for victims of abuse, including the \$2.46bn that the Boy Scouts of America agreed to pay to youngsters abused while in their care.

Officials warned that the payout would have "a significant impact" for years to come on the finances of the county – America's largest by population, with almost 10mn residents and an annual budget of around \$49bn.

"The County's plan to pay for the settlement includes cash from reserve funds, issuance of judgment obligation bonds and proposed cuts in departmental budgets," a statement said. "The financing will require annual payments totalling hundreds of millions of dollars through 2030 and substantial continuing annual payments through fiscal year 2050-51."

IRS starts laying off 20,000 workers

The US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) began making sweeping cuts to its workforce on Friday, the agency's leadership said in an e-mail to staff on Friday, and among the first to go will be employees of its civil rights office.

Reuters previously reported that more than 20,000 staff would be cut, which a source familiar with Friday's announcement confirmed, saying that 20%-25% of the tax-collecting agency's workforce would be targeted.

The start of the layoffs and the civil rights office's elimination were first reported by the *Washington Post*.

The cuts are part of a major overhaul of the federal workforce that has already cost more than 200,000 workers their jobs.

President Donald Trump has tasked billionaire Elon Musk with leading the reshaping and downsizing of the government.

"The IRS has begun implementing a Reduction in Force (RIF) that will result in staffing cuts across multiple offices and job categories," an internal human resources e-mail sent to all staff said on Friday.

The e-mail said 75% of the agency's civil rights office, previously called the office of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), will be cut and its remaining employees will move under a separate office.

Trump has passed executive orders aimed at dismantling DEI initiatives that he has labelled discriminatory.

Civil rights groups have condemned the actions, saying DEI measures help in addressing historical and generational inequity.

The e-mail said the mass layoffs would take place in phases. – **Reuters**

Judge orders return of wrongly deported Maryland man

A US judge ruled on Friday that the Trump administration must return a Maryland man who was wrongly deported to El Salvador back to the United States within three days, the latest legal setback for the administration's hardline deportation policies.

The US has already acknowledged Kilmar Abrego Garcia – a Salvadoran migrant who lived in the US legally with a work permit – was deported in error as part of three planeloads of migrants flown out last month over alleged ties to violent gangs.

However, the administration has argued that it has no legal authority to bring him back to the country, though Abrego Garcia's lawyers dispute that.

"They put him there, they can bring him back," Andrew Rossman, lawyer at prominent law firm Quinn Emanuel that joined Abrego Garcia's legal team on Friday, .

After questioning government lawyers, US District Judge Paula Xinis ruled at a Greenbelt, Maryland, court hearing that the government must take steps to bring him back to the United States no later than 11.59pm tomorrow (April 7).

The Justice Department will appeal the order to the Richmond-based 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals, according to a court filing after the hearing.

In a statement, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said that Xinis should contact President Nayib Bukele of El Salvador "because we are unaware of the judge having jurisdiction or authority over the country of El Salvador".

In a court filing on early yesterday, the US Justice Department called the judge's order "indefensible" and urged the appeals court to immediately pause the ruling.

The US said Abrego Garcia "has no legal right or basis to be in the United States at all" and that "the public interest obviously disfavours his return, let alone a slapdash one conducted as the result of judicial fiat".

Earlier, at the hearing on Friday, Abrego Garcia's lawyer Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg told the judge that there was no legal basis for the deportation.

"They admit they had no legal authorisation to remove him to El Salvador," Moshenberg said. "The public interest lies in the government following the law."

Erez Reuveni, a lawyer for the government, conceded that Abrego Garcia should not have been removed.

"That is not in dispute," Reuveni said.

In an unusual exchange, Xinis grilled Reuveni on why the US couldn't get Abrego Garcia back – to which Reuveni said he had asked US government officials that question without getting a satisfactory answer himself.

"The absence of evidence speaks for itself," Reuveni said.

The case is the latest flashpoint in the Trump administration's crackdown on immigration, which has raised constitutional questions and drawn the rebuke of a judge in Washington who is weighing whether US officials violated a court

order temporarily blocking the deportation of alleged Venezuelan gang members under an 18th-century law.

Trump on March 15 invoked the 1798 Alien Enemies Act to rapidly deport alleged members of the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua.

The administration said it sent two flights to El Salvador that day carrying deportees processed under the rarely used wartime statute and a third flight carrying people deported under other rules.

Abrego Garcia was wrongfully placed on the third flight despite an October 2019 judicial order granting him protection from deportation, a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) official has said in a court filing.

Abrego Garcia was stopped and detained by ICE officers on March 12 and questioned about his alleged gang affiliation.

The government asserted in his earlier immigration dispute in 2019 that Abrego Garcia was a member of the gang MS-13, which he has denied.

His lawyers, who also represent his wife and five-year-old child in the US, in a court filing said the US had failed to take any voluntary steps "to rectify what they themselves describe as an error".

Abrego Garcia's wife, who attended Friday's hearing, as well as his child, are US citizens.

The Trump administration has also sent military troops to the US border and reassigned federal agents to focus on immigration enforcement amid ramped up arrests and deportation efforts. – **AFP/Reuters**

Lula admits that there is 'still a lot to do' for Indigenous Brazilians

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has admitted that his government "still has a lot to do" for Indigenous communities battling for survival in the Amazon rainforest.

Lula, who will host this year's UN climate change conference in the Amazon city of Belem in November, made the remarks during a visit to the village of the Amazon's most famous resident and campaigner, Chief Raoni Metuktire.

Brazil's left-wing leader, who has made Amazon protection a key plank of his presidency, praised the "important role" played by Indigenous communities in the fight against climate change during his visit to the Capoto-Jarina Indigenous Territory in Mato Grosso state.

The meeting with Raoni, who has travelled the world to highlight the plight of the Amazon rainforest, comes days before thousands of Indigenous Brazilians gather in the capital Brasilia for a rally.

On returning to power in 2023, Lula resumed designating chunks of Amazon land as protected Indigenous territory, a process that had been halted by his far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro.

Indigenous leaders complain that the process has been too slow, however.

Official data shows that demarcated Indigenous territories, where deforestation is a crime, are far less susceptible to land clearance for agriculture and illegal mining.

Raoni also used the meeting to urge Lula to halt an offshore oil project at the mouth of the Amazon River which the left-wing president is pushing.



This handout picture released by the Brazilian Presidency shows Lula with Indigenous leader of the Kayapo people Raoni Metuktire during a meeting at the Piaracu village in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil. – **AFP**

Lula argues that extracting the oil is key to the growth of Latin America's biggest economy.

Indigenous communities fear that the project will cause irreversible damage to the rainforest and pollute rivers.

Climate campaigners meanwhile argue that it will push up Brazil's carbon footprint at a time of unprecedented warming, which scientists say fuelled devastating wildfires in the Amazon last year.

"I know that you are thinking of the oil that is under the sea," Raoni told Lula. "But if things remain the same, we can protect the environment, with less pollution and warming."

The project in the offshore area, known as the Equatorial Margin, is awaiting the green light from Brazil's environmental protection agency.

Bare beach blues



A man watches the sea in the almost empty Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro. Areas of the states of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo are under special alert due to heavy rainfall, with significant volumes that could exceed 100mm in 24 hours, and wind gusts of around 100kph. The National Meteorological Institute (INMET) issued warnings for these regions with a degree of severity 'great danger (red)'. – **AFP**

Mexico reports first human case of H5N1 bird flu

Mexico has detected its first human case of H5N1 avian influenza, also known as bird flu, the health ministry said on Friday.

The infection was confirmed on Tuesday in a three-year-old girl living in the northern state of Durango, who remains hospitalised in serious condition.

"So far there is no evidence of sustained person-to-

person transmission," the health ministry said, adding that the World Health Organisation (WHO) considers the public health risks of the virus to the general population to be low.

A particularly severe variant of the H5N1 strain has been spreading around the world in animals since 2020, causing lethal outbreaks in commercial poultry and sporadic infections in other species from alpacas to house

cats. Last year, it was detected in cows for the first time.

Durango's economy is heavily reliant on agriculture, primarily its cattle industry.

Last year, the WHO reported Mexico's first laboratory-confirmed human case of infection with the A(H5N2) bird flu in a person who had no known exposure to animals and later died of chronic illness. – **Reuters**

Texas opens investigation into WK Kellogg over health claims

The state of Texas said yesterday that it opened a probe into WK Kellogg, saying the breakfast cereal maker could be violating state laws by advertising its products as "healthy".

The office of state Attorney-General Ken Paxton said in a statement that some of the company's breakfast cereals – which include Froot Loops, Apple Jacks and Frosted Flakes – "are filled with petroleum-based

artificial food colourings that have been linked to hyperactivity, obesity" and other health problems.

Paxton's office said that while the company had removed artificial food colourings

in Canada and Europe, but it did not do so in the United States.

"In no world should foods that include these dyes be advertised as healthy," he said in the statement. – **Reuters**

US sends erroneous e-mail ordering Ukrainians to leave

Reuters
Washington

Multiple Ukrainians legally in the United States under a humanitarian programme received an e-mail this week telling them that their status had been revoked and they had seven days to leave the country or the "federal government will find you".

A Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spokesperson said on Friday that the e-mail had been sent in error and that the Ukrainian parole programme created after the 2022 Russian invasion of that country had not been terminated.

It was not clear how many Ukrainians received the e-mail.

Reuters reported last month that the Trump administration was planning to revoke temporary legal status for some 240,000 Ukrainians who fled the conflict with Russia.

Such a move would be a reversal of the welcome Ukrainians received under president Joe Biden's administration.

"If you do not depart the United States immediately you will be subject to potential law enforcement actions that will result in your removal from the United States," the Thursday e-mail read. "Again, DHS is terminating your parole. Do not attempt to remain in the United States."

The Department of Homeland Security sent a follow-up note on Friday, informing them that the order was in error and that "the terms of your parole as originally issued remain unchanged at this time".

One Ukrainian parolee, who asked that her name not be used for fear of retribution from the US government, said that she "couldn't breathe normally and was uncontrollably crying" upon receiving the e-mail.

The woman said she had renewed her immigration status last August and had been told that it was valid for another two years, and she racked her brain trying to figure out what she had done wrong to be booted from the United States.

She could not think of a reason, saying: "I don't have as much as a parking ticket, don't post on social media."

Philippines says suspected spy confessions in China ‘scripted’

AFP
Manila

The Philippines said yesterday the supposed confessions of three Filipinos arrested by China for alleged espionage appear to have been “scripted” and urged Beijing to respect their rights.

Manila’s reaction came two days after Beijing said it had “de-

stroyed” an intelligence network set up by a Philippine espionage agency and had arrested three Filipino spies.

The espionage dispute comes as the two countries confront each other over disputed territory in the South China Sea and as tensions rise over the Philippines’ security ties with ally the United States.

There have also been several arrests in the Philippines this year of Chinese citizens accused of spy-

ing on military camps and vessels. A report by Chinese state broadcaster CCTV on Thursday included what appeared to be a recorded confession by a Philippine national it said had been identified as one of the suspected spies.

The CCTV report said the man had lived in China for a long time and had been found spying near military facilities. However, the National Security Council (NSC) in Manila said the supposed con-

fessions “appear to be scripted, strongly suggesting that they were not made freely”.

The arrests “can be seen as retaliation for the series of legitimate arrests of Chinese agents and accomplices”, it said in a statement. The NSC said the three unidentified Filipinos were among 50 former recipients of scholarships offered by China’s Hainan National University. “They are ordinary Filipino citizens with no military

training who merely went to China at the invitation of the Chinese government to study,” it said.

“They are law-abiding citizens with no criminal records and were vetted and screened by the Chinese government prior to their arrival there.”

It urged Beijing to “respect their rights and afford them every opportunity to clear their names in the same way that the rights of Chinese nationals are respected

here in the Philippines”. The NSC also said the spy agency mentioned by Chinese media as having recruited one of the suspects did not exist. The Philippine foreign affairs department said on Friday it was “providing all necessary assistance, including appropriate legal support”. Beijing’s embassy in Manila issued a travel warning to its citizens last week about frequent “harassment” from Philippine law enforcement agencies.

Netflix crime documentary’s *Con Mum* charged with fraud in Singapore

AFP
Singapore

A British woman from the hit Netflix crime documentary *Con Mum*, about her allegedly scamming her renowned pastry chef son, was charged with fraud in a Singapore court yesterday, according to documents seen by AFP. Dionne Marie Hanna, 84, was charged with five counts of fraud involving three people, the documents show. In the documentary film released on March 25, Hanna upends pastry chef Graham Hornigold’s life when she e-mails him and claims she is his biological mother.

She allegedly scams Hornigold as they reconnect, conning him of hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to the film.

A DNA test at the end of the documentary shows Hanna is indeed his biological mother.

She appeared in court Saturday via videolink and was seen lying in a bed at Singapore’s Tan Tock Seng Hospital, local broadcaster Channel News Asia reported.

It was not immediately clear why she was in hospital.

According to court documents, one of the charges involved her allegedly telling a man in Singapore, identified as Paiman Bin Supangat, this year that she was from the Brunei royal family. She had told him she had terminal cancer and that she wanted to pass her wealth to him and his son.

The Singapore police in a statement on Friday said they had received several reports from alleged victims after the documentary was released on Netflix. Police said preliminary investigations showed Hanna was believed to be involved in at least five cases of cheating with losses amounting to more than \$200,000.

“As part of the arrangement to receive monies for the investment and inheritance, the victims were asked to transfer money for legal fees and opening of overseas bank accounts,” police said. “The victims believed that her investment and release of inheritance to be genuine and made several transfers to her.”

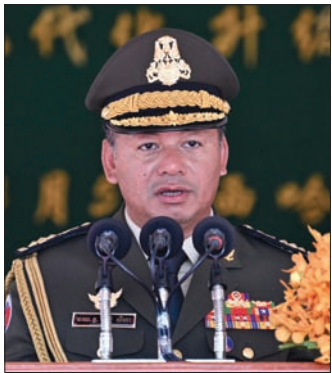
If found guilty of fraud, Hanna could face fines and be imprisoned for up to 20 years. Her next court hearing is on April 11.

Cambodia hails inauguration of naval base renovated by China

AFP
Ream, Cambodia

Cambodia’s leader Hun Manet said yesterday there was “nothing to hide” as he inaugurated a naval base renovated in recent years by China, after Washington had voiced concern over Beijing’s role in the upgrades.

The United States has said the Ream Naval Base, located off Cambodia’s southern coast, could give China a key strategic position in the Gulf of Thailand near the disputed South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety.



Cambodia’s Defence Minister Tea Seiha speaks during the inauguration ceremony.

Cambodian senior officials have repeatedly denied that the base is for use by any single foreign power, following US media reports in 2022 saying that the new facilities at Ream were being built for the exclusive use of the Chinese navy.

Military representatives from various nations attended a ceremony on Saturday marking the inauguration of the renovated Ream base, with Cambodia rolling out the red carpet for a delegation from China’s People’s Liberation Army. Prime Minister Hun Manet hailed the opening of the upgraded port at the event, where Cambodian and Chinese flags were flown.

“We hold the live inauguration today because we want both Cambodian people, and people and all forces around the world to stop casting doubt about it,” he said in a speech.

“From today Cambodia will welcome all friends to hold joint exercises in the Ream base. We have nothing to hide at all,” he added.

Hun Manet promised that the new and improved facility would not be for Beijing’s “exclusive” use and that ships from other countries would be allowed to dock. The ceremony also featured remarks from Cao Qingfeng, a Chinese senior military official, who said the port symbolised the “iron-clad friendship” between the two nations and would “inject new momentum into regional security”.

He added that the base would be used for joint military exercises, including the annual Golden Dragon drills in May. Cambodia has long been one of China’s staunchest allies in Southeast Asia, and Beijing has extended its influence over Phnom Penh in recent years.

Under former leader Hun Sen – Prime Minister Hun Manet’s father – China poured billions of dollars into infrastructure investments, while Washington’s relationship with Phnom Penh has deteriorated in recent years.

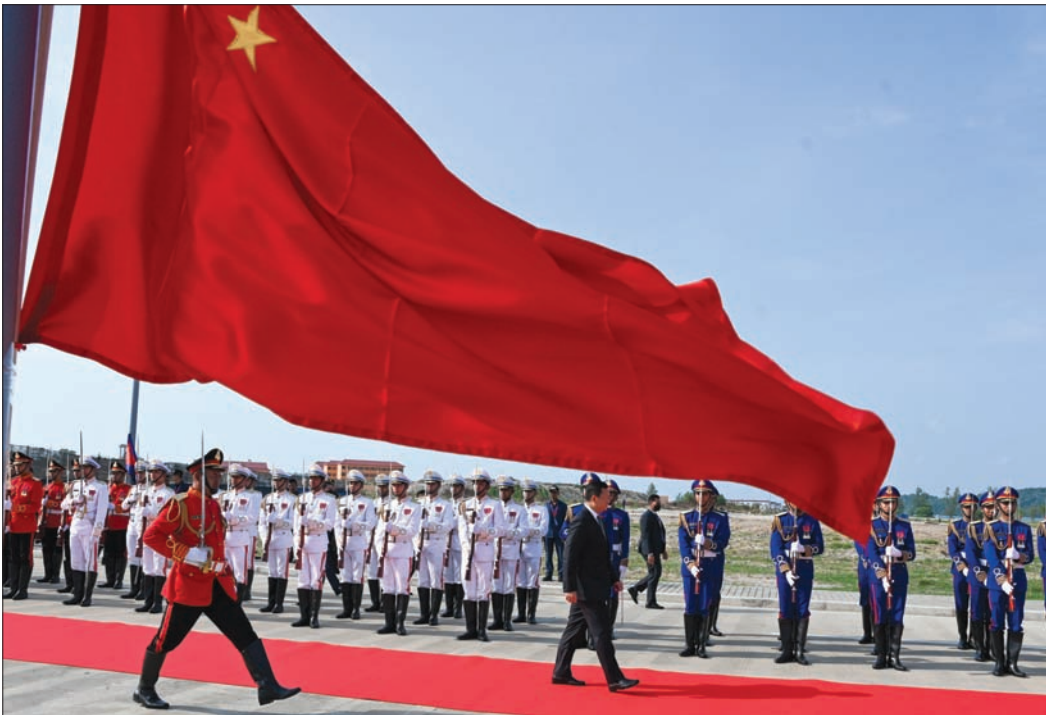
Hun Manet said Saturday that Chinese President Xi Jinping will visit Cambodia this month, confirming previously reported plans of such a trip.

Beijing has since 2022 been contributing to a revamp of the Ream Naval Base, which was originally built partly using US funds. Western concerns about the base go back as far as 2019, when The Wall Street Journal reported on a secret draft deal allowing China to dock warships there.

In late 2023, Chinese warships first docked at the 363-m (1,190-foot) pier, located on Cambodia’s sole coastline in the south of the country between Thailand and Vietnam.

Cambodia is also expected to receive two warships from China to improve its defence capabilities.

In December, a US warship docked in nearby Sihanoukville in the first American military port



Cambodia’s Prime Minister Hun Manet walks past honour guards during the inauguration ceremony of the modernised infrastructure at the Ream Naval Base in Preah Sihanouk province yesterday.



Cambodian soldiers travel on a speedboat near a Chinese warship docked at the Ream Naval Base in Preah Sihanouk province.

call in eight years. That was followed in February by the visit of a senior US army commander to Cambodia, featuring a meeting with Hun Manet in a trip intended to “expand bilateral defence ties”.

Last month, Cambodia said a Japanese warship would be the first to dock at the Ream base.

6.9-magnitude quake hits off Papua New Guinea coast: USGS

A strong 6.9-magnitude earthquake struck yesterday morning off the coast of Papua New Guinea’s New Britain Island, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) said. The shallow quake, at a depth of 10km, triggered a tsunami warning which was later downgraded by the US Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre. “Based on all available data the tsunami threat from this earthquake has now passed,” the centre said, adding that “no tsunami was observed” at the nearest monitoring site. The earthquake struck at 6:04am local time (2004 GMT) and was centred about 194km southeast of the nearest major town Kimbe.

Marolyn Simbiken, a receptionist at Kimbe’s Liamo Reef Resort, said so far she had not seen any damage. “We did feel the earthquake here,” she told AFP. “But there’s not big damage. Nothing was damaged here and there was no evacuation.”

Walindi Plantation Resort worker Barbara Aibilo she felt a “slight shake”. Several smaller quakes, with preliminary magnitudes ranging from 4.9-5.3, struck afterwards near the same patch of sea, according to the USGS. Earthquakes are common in Papua New Guinea, which sits on top of the seismic “Ring of Fire” - an arc of intense tectonic activity that stretches through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. (AFP)

UN calls for Myanmar support as quake death toll reaches 3,354

Visiting UN aid chief calls destruction ‘staggering’; Three USAID workers fired while in quake zone: former official; Relief group says bombing by military has been continuing

Reuters
Bangkok

The United Nations called for the world to rally behind quake-hit Myanmar on Saturday as the death toll rose to 3,354, while a former USAID official said a US aid team had received notice they were losing their jobs after arriving in the disaster zone.

In addition to those killed by the March 28 earthquake, 4,850 people were injured and another 220 are missing, state media said.

During a visit to Myanmar’s second-biggest city, Mandalay, which was near the epicentre of the 7.7-magnitude quake, United Nations aid chief Tom Fletcher appealed for international support. “The destruction is staggering. Lives lost. Homes destroyed. Livelihoods shattered. But the resilience is incredible,” he said in a



Officers unloading sacks of aid donated by India upon its arrival at the Thilawa Port along the Yangon river.

post on X. “The world must rally behind the people of Myanmar.”

Myanmar’s neighbours, such as China, India and southeast Asian nations, are among those that dispatched relief supplies and rescuers to aid the recovery effort in quake-hit areas that are home to about 28 million people over the past week. The United States, which was until recently the world’s top humanitarian donor, had pledged at least \$9mn to Myanmar to support earthquake-affected communities, but current and former US officials say the dismantling of its foreign aid program has affected its response.

Three US Agency for International Development workers who had travelled to Myanmar after the quake were told they were being let go, Marcia Wong, a former senior

USAID official, told Reuters. “This team is working incredibly hard, focussed on getting humanitarian aid to those in need. To get news of your imminent termination - how can that not be demoralising?” said Wong.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said on Friday the junta was restricting aid supplies to quake-hit areas where communities did not back its rule. The UN office also said it was investigating 53 reported attacks by the junta against opponents, including air strikes, of which 16 were after the ceasefire was declared on Wednesday.

A junta spokesman did not respond to calls seeking comment.

Free Burma Rangers, a relief group, told Reuters yesterday that the military had dropped bombs in



People sort through the rubble of a collapsed building in Mandalay.

Karenni and southern Shan states on Thursday and Friday despite the ceasefire announcement, killing at least five people. The victims included civilians, according to the group’s founder, David Eubank, who said there had been at least seven such military attacks since the ceasefire.

The leader of the military government, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, reaffirmed to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi the junta’s plans to hold “free and fair” elections in December when the two met in Bangkok, Myanmar state media said yesterday.

Min Aung Hlaing made the rare trip to attend a summit of South and Southeast Asian nations on Friday, where he also met separately with the leaders of Thailand, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

Modi called for the post-quake ceasefire in Myanmar’s civil war to be made permanent, and said the elections needed to be “inclusive and credible”, an Indian foreign affairs spokesperson said on Friday. Critics have derided the planned election as a sham to keep the generals in power through proxies.

Since overthrowing the government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, the military has struggled to run Myanmar, leaving the economy and basic services, including healthcare, in tatters, a situation exacerbated by the earthquake. The civil war that followed the coup has displaced more than 3mn people, with widespread food insecurity and more than a third of the population in need of humanitarian assistance, the UN says.



Anti-Trump protests in Britain



Demonstrators attend a protest against US President Donald Trump's administration and Trump's adviser and Tesla CEO Elon Musk, at Trafalgar Square in London.



Jaguar Land Rover to pause shipments to US over tariffs

Reuters
London

Jaguar Land Rover will pause shipments of its Britain-made cars to the United States for a month, it said yesterday, as it considers how to mitigate the cost of President Donald Trump's 25% tariff.

Jaguar Land Rover, which is owned by India's Tata Motors, confirmed the temporary export suspension after the *Times* newspaper reported the plan. "As we work to address the new trading terms with our business partners,

we are taking some short-term actions, including a shipment pause in April, as we develop our mid- to longer-term plans," JLR said in an e-mailed statement.

Britain's car industry, which employs 200,000 people directly, is highly exposed to the new tariffs. The United States is the second-biggest importer of British-made cars after the European Union, with nearly a 20% share, data from industry body SMMT shows. Jaguar Land Rover, one of Britain's biggest producers by volume, said in its statement that the US was an important market for its luxury brands. It sells

400,000 Range Rover Sports, Defenders and other models annually and exports to the US account for almost a quarter of sales. The US 25% tariff on imported cars and light trucks took effect on April 3, the day after Trump announced tariffs on other goods from countries across the globe. Britain has said it is focused on trying to secure a trade deal with Washington.

The *Times* said that Jaguar Land Rover is thought to have a couple of months' supply of cars already in the US, which will not be subject to the new tariffs.

UK comedian Russell Brand charged in assault cases

Reuters
London

British police said they charged actor-comedian Russell Brand on Friday with rape and multiple counts of assault in cases relating to four separate women between 1999 and 2005. Brand, who was once one of Britain's most high-profile broadcasters and is the former husband of US pop singer Katy Perry, denied the allegations when they first emerged in 2023.

He started his message by describing the law being used as "a

kind of weapon". Brand is due to appear in court for a first hearing on May 2, police said. In the 2000s, he was a regular on British screens, known for his flamboyant style and appearance. He worked for the BBC and starred in a number of films including *Get Him to the Greek* before marrying Perry in 2010. They divorced 14 months later.

By the early 2020s he had faded from mainstream culture, appearing primarily on his internet channel where he airs his views on US politics and free speech. In September 2023, he returned to the headlines when the 'Sunday

Times' newspaper and Channel 4 TV's documentary show *Dispatches* reported the rape allegations.

They said four women had accused Brand of sexual assaults, including a rape, between 2006 and 2013. London's Met police opened an investigation some weeks later. Brand said then he "absolutely refuted" the allegations. The police said their investigation was still open. "Detectives ask anyone who has been affected by this case, or anyone who has any information, to come forward and speak with police," the police statement said.

Indian PM clinches defence, energy deals during Lanka visit

AFP
Colombo

India secured defence and energy deals with neighbouring Sri Lanka yesterday during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit, seen as a move to counter rival China's growing influence in the region. Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake rolled out the red carpet for Modi and conferred on him the country's highest civilian honour for "the deep personal friendship" shown to the smaller neighbour.

"We believe that our security interests are aligned," Modi said during a televised ceremony from Dissanayake's office in the capital. "Our security is interdependent and interconnected."

A five-year defence co-operation agreement provides training of Sri Lankan military personnel in India as well as information and technology sharing. Dissanayake applauded what he called "India's rise as a world power, not just a regional power."

"I have reiterated our position to Prime Minister Modi that Sri Lankan territory will not be allowed to be used by anyone to undermine India's security," he added. India has previously objected to Chinese submarines and research vessels which have called at the main seaport in Colombo. Sri Lanka has not allowed Chinese submarines to dock since 2014, after India raised concerns over two such visits. Last year, Colombo



India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar looks on before the welcoming ceremony at Independence square in Colombo.

imposed a ban on foreign research vessels following New Delhi's accusations that Chinese ships were being used to spy on India. Yesterday, Dissanayake welcomed Modi - the first foreign dignitary to visit Colombo since the leftist leader swept to power last year - with a 19-gun salute.

The two leaders also celebrated the start of construction of a 120-megawatt solar power project, developed as a joint venture between the two nations. The solar plant, located in the island's northeastern Trincomalee district, had been stalled for years but was reinvigorated with New Delhi's backing.

Modi's visit comes as Colombo grapples with the competing interests of New Delhi and Beijing. India has become concerned about

Dissanayake's first foreign visit was to New Delhi in December, but he followed it with a visit to Beijing in January, underscoring Sri Lanka's delicate balancing act

China's influence in Sri Lanka, which it sees as falling within its sphere of interest. Dissanayake's first foreign visit was to New Delhi in December, but he followed it with a visit to Beijing in January, underscoring Sri Lanka's delicate balancing act.

China has emerged as Sri Lanka's largest single bilateral creditor, accounting for more than half of its \$14bn bilateral debt at the time the island defaulted on its sovereign debt in 2022. Beijing was also the first to restructure its loans to Sri Lanka, a move that helped pave the



Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake attends the ceremonial reception of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Independence Square in Colombo yesterday.

way for the island to emerge from its worst economic meltdown.

In January, Colombo announced it had signed an agreement with a Chinese state-owned company to invest \$3.7bn in an oil refinery in the island's south.

The deal would mark Sri Lanka's largest single foreign investment and is seen as crucial for its economic recovery.

Modi's visit to Sri Lanka followed a summit in Thailand and a string of meetings with leaders of neighbouring nations as he sought to shore up India's regional ties.

On the sidelines of the Bangkok BIMSTEC meeting - the grouping of seven nations on the Bay of Bengal - Modi held a rare face-to-face meeting with Myanmar's junta chief, Min Aung Hlaing.

He also held talks on Friday with the interim leader of Bangladesh, Muhammad Yunus - the first such meeting since a revolution in Dhaka ousted New Delhi's long-time ally Sheikh Hasina and sent relations into a tailspin.

India had been the biggest benefactor of Hasina's government, and her overthrow prompted Yunus to make his first state visit last month to China. Modi also met on Friday in Bangkok with his Nepali counterpart, K P Sharma Oli - their first meeting since Oli returned to power last year - as well as Tshering Tobgay of Bhutan.

India, UAE to develop Sri Lanka energy hub

Reuters
Colombo

India and the United Arab Emirates agreed to develop an energy hub in Sri Lanka, India's foreign ministry said yesterday, as New Delhi's competition with China grows in the Indian Ocean island nation.

The three nations signed the pact for the hub during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sri Lanka, the first by a global leader since Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake took office in September. New Delhi and Colombo have worked to deepen ties as India's southern neighbour recovers from a severe financial crisis triggered in 2022, during which India provided \$4bn in financial assistance.

Yesterday's agreement boosts New Delhi's competition with China, whose state energy firm Sinopec has signed a deal to build a \$3.2bn oil refinery in Sri Lanka's southern port city of Hambantota. The energy hub in the strategically important city of Trincomalee, a natural harbour in the Sri Lanka's east, will involve construction of a multi-product pipeline and may include using a World War II tank farm partly held by the Sri Lankan subsidiary of Indian Oil Corp, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told reporters in Colombo.

"The UAE is a strategic partner for India in the energy space and therefore was an ideal partner for this exercise that is being done for the first time in the region," Misri said. "The exact contours of UAE's role will be elaborated once the business to business discussions kick off."

The three nations will next choose business entities that will consider the financing and feasibility of projects for the hub, he said. Modi also inaugurated a \$100mn solar power project, a joint venture between Ceylon Electricity Board and India's National Thermal Power Corp.

India and Sri Lanka also concluded their debt restructuring process, Foreign Secretary Misri said.

Sri Lanka owes about \$1.36bn in loans to EXIM Bank of India and State Bank of India, according to Sri Lanka Finance Ministry data.

Garment producer Bangladesh holds crisis talks on US tariffs

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh's interim leader called an emergency meeting on Saturday after textile leaders in the world's second-largest garment manufacturing nation said US tariffs were a "massive blow" to the key industry.

Textile and garment production accounts for about 80% of exports in the South Asian country, and the industry has been rebuilding after

it was hard hit in a revolution that toppled the government last year.

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday slapped punishing new tariffs of 37% on Bangladesh, hiking duties from the previous 16% on cotton and 32% on polyester products.

Bangladesh exports \$8.4bn of garments annually to the United States, according to data from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the national trade body.

That totals around 20% of

Bangladesh exports \$8.4bn of garments annually to the United States, according to data from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, the national trade body

Bangladesh's total ready-made garments exports. "Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has convened an emergency meeting... to discuss the US tariff issue," a government statement read, with the meeting to take place late Saturday in the capital Dhaka. Top experts, advisers and officials will attend, it added.

competitive markets - this is going to be a massive blow for our industry," he said.

Several garment factories produce clothing for the US market alone.

Anwar Hossain, administrator of the BGMEA, has told AFP that the industry was "not ready" for the tariff impact. Bangladesh, the second-largest producer after China, manufactures garments for global brands - including for US firms such as Gap Inc, Tommy Hilfinger and Levi Strauss.

Bangladesh's tax authority, the National Board of Revenue, is also expected to meet to review the fallout from the tariffs. Rakibul Alam Chowdhury, chairman of RDM Group, a major manufacturer with an estimated \$25mn turnover, said on Thursday that the industry would lose trade.

"Buyers will go to other cost-

Vital European defence startups still facing hurdles

AFP
Paris

Opportunities and investment have surged for European defence startups since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, industry players say, with shifts by governments and investors shaking up a sector long a byword for ponderous development.

Research published in February by the Nato Innovation Fund (NIF) and market analytics firm Dealroom found that venture capital going into European "defence, security and resilience" startups leapt 30% in the two years to 2024, reaching \$5.2bn.

That reflected a shift already under way before Russia's full-scale assault in early 2022 as "underlying technologies" began to be adapted for battlefield use, NIF partner Patrick Schneider-Sikorsky told AFP.

He named "additive manufacturing,

AI, RF (radio frequency) technologies, battery technologies" as ingredients already attracting investment before "sheer necessity" supercharged their use and evolution on Ukrainian battlefields.

But the urgent need to develop state-of-the-art battlefield tech – a constantly moving target in the crucible of Ukraine – continues to run into hurdles.

Among the most stubborn is getting investors – from sovereign wealth funds and public banks to pension funds or family offices of wealthy individuals – to pump cash into defence, which is often lumped in with "sin stocks".

One company that has run into this problem is German startup Donaustahl, which has rapidly evolved from making accessories for sports pistol shooting to developing armed drones.

Although it attracted widespread interest at last year's Berlin air and space trade fair, "Donaustahl, as a weapons company, has just been shut out from financing and the capital markets so far,"

founder Stefan Thumann told AFP.

It was "just like gambling and drugs", he complained.

While Thumann said he is now in talks with prospective investors, he also took the rare step of going directly to fans of his company, and via a social media presence, to raise cash by issuing digital bonds.

Getting around restrictions on defence or so-called "dual-use" technologies – those with both civilian and military applications – would require revising existing agreements on how funds can deploy investors' cash, or setting up altogether new funds, NIF's Schneider-Sikorsky said.

There have been some signs of movement from public institutions.

The European Investment Bank agreed last year to remove a requirement that "dual-use" companies it finances make at least 50% of revenue from civilian customers.

Looking from east to west among Eu-

ropean governments, "you do see this very distinct gradient of appetites from more offensive things to more defensive things, from a tech perspective," said Jack Wang, UK managing director for venture capital company Project A.

For instance, Russia-neighbouring Estonia last year announced the creation of a €50mn (\$54.1mn) fund to invest in both defence and dual-use tech.

Pia Santavirta, chief executive of Finland's public investment fund Tesi, last month named "defence tech" among "future growth sectors" it was eyeing.

And private investors are scenting opportunity from the hundreds of billions in potential spending trailed especially by Berlin and Brussels in recent weeks, with Germany amending its constitution to enable more borrowing to fund defence.

On the other end of the chain from investment is the end customer, where defence startups are confronted with military procurement systems used to

taking years over deals.

"Most VC (venture capital) funds have got used to investing in software to sell to small businesses or consumers," Project A's Wang said, expecting their backing to "convert to revenue... within one-and-a-half, two years".

"The military sales cycle doesn't operate like that".

"Both cultures are going to have to change," said NIF's Schneider-Sikorsky.

Defence ministries may in future "have a defence tech company that is almost on contract with the military to produce and continuously upgrade capabilities, as opposed to just selling a bit of hardware that's going to be stockpiled," he added.

"Some countries just need to get away from their specific gold-trimmed solutions," Donaustahl chief Thumann urged.

"We don't have the time... I hope the German army will modernise its procurement system and do away with some super-complicated hurdles in tendering that leave small firms out in the cold."

Zelensky disappointed with US reaction to missile strike

Reuters
Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday expressed disappointment in the US embassy's response to a Russian missile strike that killed 18 people, including nine children, in Zelensky's hometown of Kryvyi Rih.

Zelensky, who has been cautious about openly criticising Washington since an uneasy White House meeting with President Donald Trump in February, wrote on social media site X that several embassies in Kyiv had condemned Friday's attack and singled out Russia for carrying it out.

He noted that the message from the US embassy made no reference to Russia in condemning the attack.

"Unfortunately, the response from the US embassy is surprisingly disappointing - such a strong country, such a strong people, and yet such a weak reaction," Zelensky wrote in English.

"They are afraid to even say the word 'Russian' when speaking

about the missile that murdered children."

Later, in his nightly video address, Zelensky praised those who "speak the truth clearly and directly" about the attack.

"Staying silent about the fact that it is Russia killing children with ballistic missiles is wrong and dangerous," he said. "It only encourages the criminals in Moscow to continue the war and ignore diplomacy. Weakness has never ended a war."

US Ambassador Bridget Brink, writing on X about the strike, said: "Horried that tonight a ballistic missile struck near a playground and restaurant in Kryvyi Rih. More than 50 people injured and 16 killed, including 6 children. This is why the war must end."

Under President Trump, the United States has moved to improve relations with Russia, a shift from the approach of his predecessor, Joe Biden.

Zelensky has made efforts to smooth over relations with Trump since the Oval Office altercation and praised US efforts to work towards a settlement of the three-year-old war with Russia.

Hundreds of protesters turn out in European cities against Trump

Reuters
Frankfurt/Berlin

Hundreds of people protested in European cities yesterday against US President Donald Trump and his adviser Elon Musk, following a bruising week for financial markets after Trump unveiled sweeping global tariffs.

In the German city of Frankfurt, the "Hands Off!" demonstration was organised by Democrats Abroad, the official organisation of the Democratic Party for US citizens living overseas.

In Berlin, protesting in front of a Tesla showroom, demonstrators held placards calling on fellow Americans living in Germany to protest for "an end to the chaos" at home.

Gathering at Frankfurt's Opernplatz, members of the overseas Democrats group demanded the resignation of the US president, with placard slogans reading "Restore Democracy", "Hands off our personal data" and "The world is tired of your bullshit Donald, be gone!"

In Berlin, slogans directed at

Musk read "Shut up Elon, no one voted for you," and a dog wore a sign that said "Dogs against DOGE," referring to the Department of Government Efficiency run by senior adviser Musk, an initiative of the second Trump administration to reduce federal spending waste, fraud and abuse.

In the French capital of Paris, about 200 people, mostly American, gathered on the Place de la République to protest against Trump. Some gave speeches to denounce the president, with protesters waving banners ranging from "Resist Tyrant", "Rule of Law" "Feminists for Freedom not fascism" and "Save Democracy". One sang and played the Bob Dylan song Masters of War.

Protests against Trump and Musk were also held in other European cities, including London and Lisbon.

In the British capital, a few hundred people gathered in Trafalgar Square, holding signs saying "Proud American Ashamed" and "WTAF America?" The crowd chanted "Hands off Canada", "Hands off Greenland" and "Hands off Ukraine" while listening to speeches criticising Trump.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during his meetings with French Chief of the Defence Staff General Thierry Burkhard and British Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Tony Radakin in Kyiv yesterday. (AFP)

Zelensky hails progress in talks with French, UK military chiefs

AFP
Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday hailed "tangible progress" after meeting British and French military chiefs in Kyiv to discuss strengthening the Ukrainian army and ways to support the war-torn country after any end to hostilities with Russia.

British Chief of the Defence Staff Tony Radakin and his French counterpart Thierry Burkhard on Friday held talks with Zelensky, Ukrainian commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky and Defence Minister Rustem Umerov.

Zelensky wrote on social media yesterday: "There is tangible progress and the first details on how the security contingent of

partners can be deployed," without giving details.

French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer are spearheading European efforts to send what they call a "reassurance force" to Ukraine after any end to the war sparked by Russia's invasion in 2022.

"We continue our discussions on long-term support for the Ukrainian people," Macron said yesterday on X.

"First, for their army, which is – and will remain – their first line of defence; and second, on a possible reassurance force, deployed behind the line of contact to deter any renewed Russian aggression."

Zelensky thanked "the UK and France for their leadership", saying "it is this kind of joint work, when everyone is focused on a

strong result, that helps to bring a reliable and lasting peace to Ukraine."

He said the allies are "making efforts to ensure security in Ukraine and reliable security guarantees".

Ukraine has said Russia does not want a ceasefire, which the United States is attempting to bring about.

The visit to Kyiv by the French and British military chiefs came on the same day that a Russian ballistic missile strike on Zelensky's home city of Kryvyi Rig killed 18 people, among them nine children, authorities said.

Zelensky said Friday evening: "We are discussing presence on the ground, in the sky and at sea. We are also discussing air defence. And some other sensitive things," without elaborating.

"We will be meeting at the level of our military every week. Our partners already have a lot of understanding of what Ukraine needs," he added.

Burkhard, the chief of staff of France's armed forces, said yesterday they had discussed "reassurance options" to be provided by an international coalition.

"Together, we want to guarantee a lasting and solid peace in Ukraine, an essential condition for the security of the European continent," he said on X.

The goal of the joint trip was to "maintain determined support" for the Ukrainian army which would allow it to continue to fight against Russian forces, he added.

Another goal was to "define a long-term strategy for the reconstruction and transformation of the army", he added.

‘No-one to return to’: Afghans fear Pak deportation

Benazir Raufi stands alone in her restaurant, her staff and customers too afraid to visit after Pakistan's government announced it was cancelling the residence permits of hundreds of thousands of Afghans.

Islamabad announced at the start of March that 800,000 Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) would be cancelled – the second phase of a deportation programme which has already forced 800,000 undocumented Afghans across the border.

"If I'm deported, it will destroy me. Either my heart will stop, or I'll take my own life," 45-year-old Raufi, who was 13 years old when her family fled civil war in Afghanistan in the 1990s, told AFP. "Pakistan gave us our smile and now those smiles are being taken away."

Ten Afghan women who worked for her have refused to leave home after the restaurant in Rawalpindi was raided by police – facing deportation to a country where women are banned from studying, certain jobs and visiting some public places like parks.

"I have no-one to return to. The Taliban won't accept us," Raufi added, her voice cracking. The government's deadline for ACC holders to leave voluntarily has been pushed back to April, but harassment by authorities has been underway for months, according to activists. Those born in Pakistan, married to Pakistanis, or living for decades in the country are among those to have their government residence permits cancelled.

The deportation campaign comes as political ties between the neighbouring governments have soured over Pakistan's rapidly deteriorating security situation along the border. Last year was the deadliest year in almost a decade in Pakistan,



Afghan Citizen Cards holder Benazir Raufi standing outside her restaurant in Rawalpindi. (AFP)

with more than 1,600 people killed in attacks – nearly half of them security forces personnel – according to the Islamabad-based Center for Research and Security Studies. Pakistan accuses the Taliban government of failing to root out militants sheltering on Afghan soil, a charge the Taliban government denies. The Taliban government has repeatedly called for the "dignified" return of Afghans to their country, with Prime Minister Hassan Akhund urging countries hosting Afghans not to force them out. "I have freedom (in Pakistan) – I can visit the park, and my daughter can go to school," Dua Safay, who fled when the Taliban government returned to power in 2021. "There's no future for me or my daughter in Afghanistan," added Safay, whose real name has been changed.

Some 600,000 Afghans have crossed the border into Pakistan since the Taliban government implemented their austere version of Islamic law.

"They will be sent back to a country where conditions are extremely harsh, especially for women and children," according to Moniza Kakar, a Pakistan-based human rights lawyer. "These people fled to escape persecution.

Forcing them back into that fire is a violation of international law." Millions of Afghans have travelled to Pakistan over the past four decades, fleeing successive conflicts including the Soviet invasion, a civil war and the post-9/11 US-led occupation.

The ethnic Pashtun belt of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which borders Afghanistan shares close cultural and linguistic ties with Afghan Pashtuns.

Around 1.3mn Afghans with resident cards issued by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) are allowed to remain in the country but have been banned from the cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

"Over 1,000 people have been moved to detention centres in the past three to four days, while thousands are leaving voluntarily all over Pakistan," Kakar added.

Many families fear being mistreated or extorted for money by the authorities if they are detained, or of being separated from relatives. "If I have to go, I'll go in tears, with a broken heart," said 43-year-old Naimatullah, who was born in Pakistan and has never been to Afghanistan. "They (people) won't even see me as an Afghan – they'll call me Pakistani. I am a nobody." After the deadline, Samiullah, who was born in an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan and is married to a Pakistani woman, will be considered an illegal foreigner.

"My wife will not be able to go with me, my daughters are from here. It is a constant struggle. I can't get caught," the 29-year-old told AFP.

CHAIRMAN
Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor
K T Chacko

 P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar

 editor@gulf-times.com

 44350478 (News),

 44466404 (Sport),

 44466636 (Home delivery)

 44350474

 facebook.com/gulftimes

 twitter.com/gulftimes_Qatar

 instagram.com/gulftimes

 youtube.com/GulftimesVideos

GULF**TIMES**

Tariff war carries far-reaching consequences for global economy

A global tariff war would carry significant consequences for international trade and the outlook for global economic growth. Key multilateral institutions, including the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have already expressed serious concern over the imposition of higher - than - expected reciprocal tariffs by the United States.

According to the WTO, these measures could result in a contraction of approximately 1% in global merchandise trade volumes this year. The resulting uncertainty and reduction in global trade are expected to weigh heavily on economic growth across both developed and emerging markets.

Export - dependent sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing are particularly vulnerable, facing the prospect of widespread job losses. While some domestic industries may receive short - term protection, such measures often lead to long - term inefficiencies and higher costs.

Economists around the world warn that these tariff hikes could destabilise the existing trade order and potentially ignite a prolonged conflict among major trading blocs, including the United States, China, and the European Union. The US decision to extend tariffs to nearly 60 countries is expected to further suppress global trade volumes.

Initial WTO projections indicate that the US tariff measures implemented on April 2 – alongside those introduced earlier this year – could lead to a downward revision of nearly four percentage points in global trade growth.

A global tariff war could shrink trade by 1% and seriously threaten global economic stability

WTO Director - General Ngozi Okonjo - Iweala emphasised that the organisation is closely monitoring developments and engaging with member states on the possible economic ramifications.

“Recent announcements carry serious implications for global trade and growth prospects,” she stated.

“Our preliminary estimates suggest that these measures, combined with others introduced this year, may lead to an overall contraction of around 1% in global merchandise trade – representing a downward revision of nearly four percentage points from earlier forecasts.”

She also cautioned that escalating trade tensions could lead to retaliatory tariffs, compounding the decline in global trade. Despite these challenges, she noted that the majority of global trade continues to be conducted under the WTO’s Most - Favoured - Nation (MFN) rules, although this share has decreased from 80% to 74% since the start of the year. Okonjo - Iweala urged WTO members to engage constructively to avoid further deterioration in the global trading environment.

“The WTO was created to provide a platform for dialogue during precisely these types of crises,” she said, “to prevent trade disputes from escalating and to uphold a stable, rules - based global trading system.”

Similarly, the IMF has raised alarms over the macroeconomic risks posed by the US tariffs.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva remarked, “We are still assessing the full implications of the announced tariff measures, but they clearly pose a substantial risk to the global outlook at a time of already sluggish growth. We urge the United States and its trading partners to work constructively to reduce trade tensions and global uncertainty.”

Tariff wars inherently disrupt international commerce by making imports more expensive, thereby hurting both exporters and importers. Given the global nature of supply chains, tariffs also raise production costs and delay cross - border manufacturing processes. These effects often translate into higher consumer prices and inflationary pressure. Moreover, businesses tend to postpone investment and expansion plans in the face of trade policy uncertainty.

Financial markets typically react negatively to trade tensions, resulting in equity selloffs and capital outflows. Emerging markets, in particular, are exposed to heightened currency volatility during such periods.

A global tariff war poses substantial threat to the integrity of the international trading system, with far - reaching consequences for economic stability, business confidence, and geopolitical co - operation.

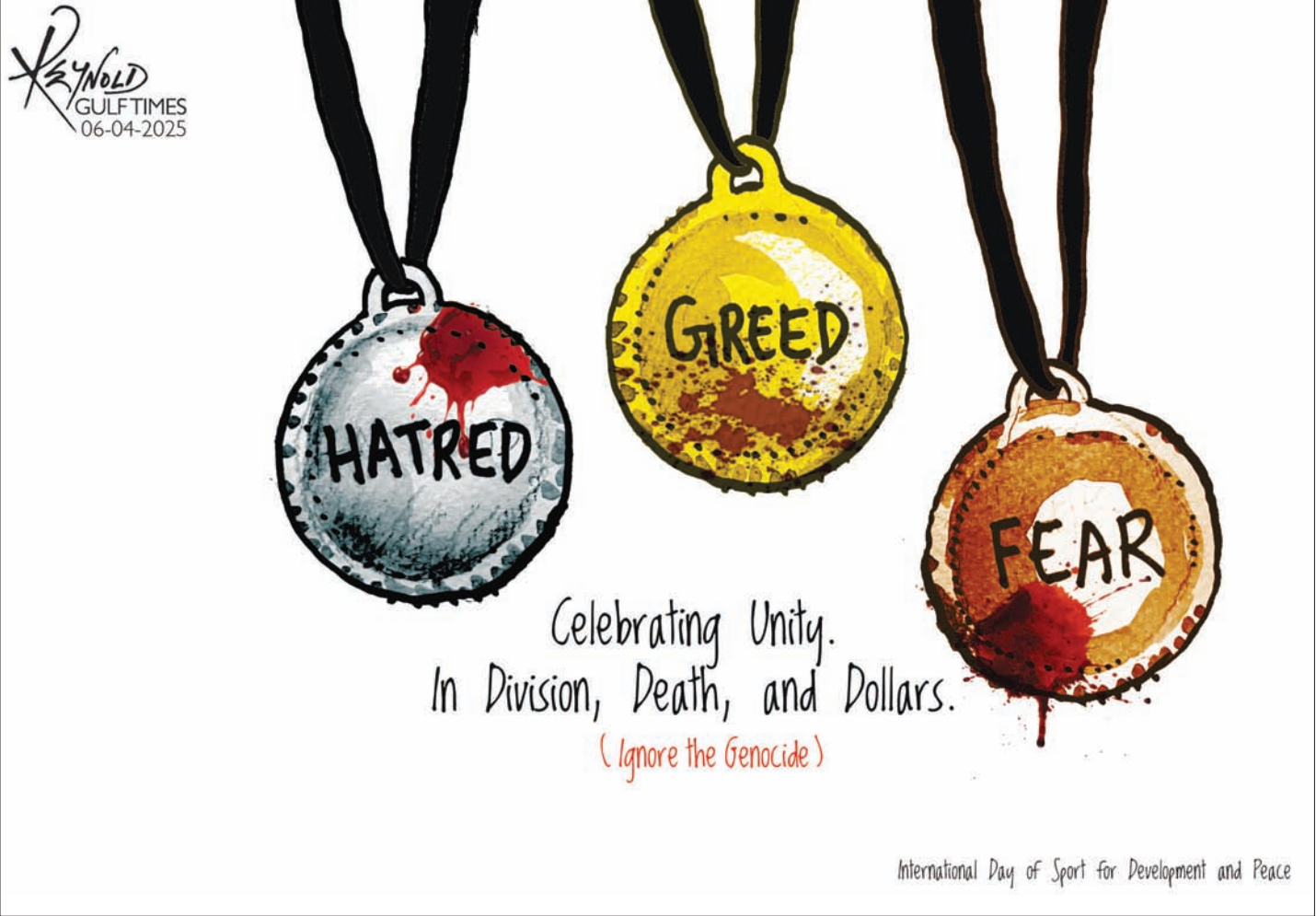
To Advertise
 gtadv@gulf-times.com

Display
 44466621
 44418811

Classified
 44466609  44418811
 gtcad@gulf-times.com

Subscription
 circulation@gulf-times.com

© 2025 Gulf Times. All rights reserved



Trump administration is pointing spy satellites at US border

**Two spy agencies tasked with border surveillance in crackdown**

**Experts question if satellite imagery of US soil will be collected**

**Defence contractors in talks to enhance border security with tech**

By Marisa Taylor, Jeffrey Dastin
Washington

The Trump administration has directed two intelligence agencies to train their satellite surveillance capabilities on the US - Mexico border region as part of a sweeping crackdown on illegal immigration and drug cartels.

The National Geospatial - Intelligence Agency (NGA) and the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), which are part of the Department of Defense, oversee spy satellites and analyse imagery for the Pentagon and other intelligence organisations.

Their engagement, coupled with troop deployments, shows increasing militarisation of the southern border, where President Donald Trump has declared a national emergency.

Reuters could not determine whether the effort, which has not been previously reported, would gather imagery of US territory.

Asked by Reuters about their roles in border surveillance, the NGA said it had created a task force to coordinate its “support to the US border mission,” while the NRO said it was partnering with the intelligence community and Pentagon “to secure US borders.”

Their participation is in response to sweeping executive actions by Trump aimed at stopping unauthorised border

trafficking and crossings, as well as deporting those in the United States illegally - estimated to be up to 14mn people.

The White House and Defence Department did not respond to a request for comment. Trump made immigration enforcement a central part of his campaign that catapulted him to the presidency on January 20.

While the government has deployed artificial intelligence (AI) and drone surveillance at the border for years, the latest initiative seeks to expand the use of military capabilities generally built for conflict overseas.

The government could use AI to identify objects or persons of interest by sifting through satellite images and other data feeds, much like the Defence Department can do on the battlefield, said two sources familiar with the initiative.

Though Reuters could not determine the exact scope of this effort, the new focus on the border could force the administration to grapple with safeguards against collecting intelligence on Americans, three experts said. While laws generally restrict US spy agencies from surveilling citizens and other legal residents, they allow immigration authorities to conduct physical searches “within a reasonable distance from any external boundary of the United States.” Regulations have defined this as 100 air miles from the border - an

area including cities such as San Diego and El Paso.

“If they follow the law, these agencies should only collect on the other side of the border in foreign territory,” said Paul Rosenzweig, a lawyer who specialises in national security and privacy law. “But how they implement that, and if they do, are legitimate oversight questions.”

A spokesperson for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the government’s lead unit for integrating spy efforts, told Reuters that all intelligence activities are “legal and authorised” and conducted “in a manner that protects the civil liberties and privacy of US persons.”

The NGA and NRO declined to detail what they are collecting and whether such surveillance could include US territory, citing the need to protect operational details. The NGA works on a wide array of efforts including mapping features of the Earth and informing commanders of the exact location of US forces and adversaries.

Reuters could not ascertain whether any other US intelligence agencies would be involved in the effort. The Central Intelligence Agency has no role in domestic immigration enforcement. “Once foreign criminals are inside the United States, they are not within the purview of the CIA,” a third source said.

The Trump administration has elevated border security in its ranking of national intelligence priorities, allowing the government to direct more resources to it, one of the sources said.

In a separate annual threat assessment released last month, the US intelligence community ranked transnational criminals such as drug - trafficking organisations among top national security threats - listed above those posed by North Korea, Iran and other foreign adversaries.

In addition, the National Security Council, an interagency group that advises the president on a range of defence and foreign policy matters, has received daily briefings on immigration detentions numbers, including the arrest of unaccompanied children, according to internal government documents reviewed by Reuters.

Multiple defence contractors - new and legacy ones alike - are in talks with various government agencies to aid the border - security work, building on existing deals they have, said the two sources aware of the initiative.

The contractors’ work would require navigating legal boundaries, including creating security policies to prevent unlawful checks on Americans, the sources said.

Industry software also could connect sensor towers to satellite and drone video feeds showing at - risk areas, and then AI could flag leads to authorities, these sources said.

A “digital wall” to augment the border’s physical one would be the goal, said one of the sources. For instance, data analytics provider Palantir powers the so - called Maven Smart System for the Pentagon, via contracts it won last year valued at about \$580mn. Maven pulls together data and uses AI to speed up target identification for intelligence analysts. Palantir has long worked with the Department of Homeland Security as well.

Anduril, a defence tech startup, designs sensor towers and related software. Last fall, the company announced it had deployed 300 autonomous versions of these towers for US Customs and Border Protection, detecting and tracking objects of interest through radar and other technology.

In recent months, Palantir, Anduril, Elon Musk’s SpaceX and other newer contractors have discussed a consortium to jointly bid for US defence deals and outcompete the Beltway’s legacy players, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Palantir and Anduril spokespeople declined to comment. SpaceX did not respond to a request for comment.

- Reuters



US President Donald Trump gestures, before boarding Air Force One as he departs for Florida at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. (Reuters file photo)



Uzbek president underscores historic opportunity for prosperity in region

The upcoming Central Asia-EU summit in Samarkand marks the first-ever gathering of all five Central Asian leaders and the EU, a turning point aimed at forging a long-term strategic partnership. The summit will culminate in the Samarkand Declaration

The upcoming summit in Samarkand will be truly historic as it will bring together for the first time the leaders of the five Central Asian countries and the EU in one place, Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev said in an interview with Euronews.

The Central Asia-EU summit in the historic Uzbekistan city of Samarkand marks a significant development in the relationship between Central Asia and the European Union.

This meeting comes at a time of global geopolitical instability, economic risks and climate challenges, which in turn means there is a need for new forms of international co-operation.

The summit aims to strengthen economic partnerships: with trade between Central Asia and the EU quadrupling over the past seven years, the summit seeks to build on this momentum and look for greater interregional co-operation while addressing joint challenges.

Euronews spoke to Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev about the summit's goals and expectations, and the historical ties and shared interests between the two regions.

Euronews: In recent years, the world has been changing rapidly: geopolitical instability, growing economic risks, climate challenges - all this requires new formats of international co-operation. In this context, the Central Asia-EU summit in Samarkand looks like a turning point in the relations between the two. Why is it now that interaction is reaching a new level?

Shavkat Mirziyoyev: Our regions are linked by deep historical roots, coinciding interests, and a common desire for close partnership. We have a clear vision of the agenda of interaction with the European Union, based on almost thirty years of co-operation.

Our partnership with the European Union is a two-way relationship from which both sides should benefit.

The Central Asia-European Union format of co-operation is a unique platform of interaction and is unparalleled in its scale and institutional scope. The European Union, which unites 27 states, including the three G7 countries (Germany, France and Italy), is the largest integration association building systemic interaction with Central Asia at the interregional level.

Co-operation with the EU covers a wide range of areas - from the economy and investment to sustainable development, security and digital transformation - and is based on long-term strategic priorities.

We regularly meet with our European colleagues. Visits to the region by leaders of the world's leading countries have become noticeably more frequent. Uzbekistan has established a strategic partnership with Italy, Hungary and France. Germany and the Central Asian countries have become regional strategic partners.

Today, the EU is consistently developing trade and investment ties with the Central Asian states.

Over the past seven years, the trade turnover between Central Asian countries and the EU has quadrupled, amounting to €54bn. We are pleased to see the growing interest of European businesses in the opportunities for trade and investment interaction with Uzbekistan and other countries of the region.

The positive processes observed in the region are increasing interest in Central Asia, turning the region into an important partner of world powers and leading states at the geopolitically important crossroads of the main routes between East and West, North and South. This is reflected in the "CA Plus" formats, which allow maintaining an open dialogue, creating favorable conditions for mutually beneficial co-operation of all stakeholders.

Under these conditions, the establishment of a strategic partnership between the countries of our region and the European Union during the summit in Samarkand will open new areas in the development of interregional co-operation and interconnectivity.

Euronews: Could you tell us more about the choice of Samarkand for holding the summit? What kind of symbolic value does it have in terms of dialogue and opportunities?

Mirziyoyev: Samarkand is a city that has been a centre of trade, science and diplomacy for centuries. Its glory was built on its ability to unite cultures, peoples and ideas. Today, it is once again becoming a platform where Europe and Central Asia can discuss the key challenges of our time.

Samarkand occupies a special place in the centuries-old history of international relations of the peoples living in the vast area of Central and South Asia and the Middle East. It was from here that Amir Temur, the ruler of Maverannahr more than six centuries ago, was in active contact with European monarchs to ensure

free and safe trade.

At present, Samarkand is restoring its special role in international life, preserving and multiplying the historical political and diplomatic heritage of the country in a new, broader format.

Historically, the world from Samarkand is seen as one and indivisible, not divided. This is the essence of a unique phenomenon - the "Samarkand spirit", based on which a fundamentally new format of international interaction is being constructed.

Euronews: How would you characterise the key changes that took place in the region in the past years, and what priorities do you set during the period of Uzbekistan's chairmanship in the Central Asian Five?

Mirziyoyev: First of all, I would like to emphasise that Central Asia is the top priority in Uzbekistan's foreign policy due to a number of factors. First, if we look at the political map of the modern world, it will become obvious that the overwhelming majority of armed conflicts, confrontations and outbreaks of violence take place between neighboring states. This applies to the Middle East, the post-Soviet space, South Asia, Africa and other regions of the world.

Unfortunately, Central Asia has not become an exception.

In different periods there have been armed clashes, the situation has been complicated by unresolved territorial disputes, water and energy problems, transportation and communication issues, as well as security challenges.

All this could not continue indefinitely. Contradictions were escalating, disagreements were deepening, and the emerging uneasy situation posed a serious threat to the security of the region.

Realising this situation, we made a strategic decision to build constructive, good-neighbourly and mutually beneficial relations with neighbouring states step by step in Central Asia. This approach is based on mutual trust and respect, consideration and recognition of common interests.

Central Asia has undergone a profound transformation in recent years and has acquired a new identity as a space of constructive dialogue, trust and comprehensive co-operation. This has become possible due to the common political will of the leaders of our countries, and today we can confidently speak about the irreversibility of this process.

When in 2017 at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly Uzbekistan came up with the initiative to hold consultative meetings, we proceeded from a simple but important idea: no external partners would be able to help us build peace, stability and prosperity in the region if we ourselves do not start with a trusting and candid dialogue.

This process has proven to be effective. Today we are resolving the most complex issues at the negotiating table, coordinating joint initiatives and moving forward confidently.

This year, the 7th Consultative Meeting will be held in Tashkent. At such meetings we do not just discuss the agenda and "reconcile our clocks", but make concrete decisions that change the face of the region. One of the brightest recent examples is the complete settlement of the issue of delimitation of the state border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This is a breakthrough that the parties have been working towards for many years.

To stimulate trade, border trade zones are being created, joint investment funds are being launched, and major infrastructure and industrial projects are being implemented.

Central Asia is becoming an important link in global transportation chains. We are actively developing the Trans-Caspian and Trans-Afghan transport corridors, which will allow our countries to expand access to key global markets.

Thus, Central Asia is no longer on the margins of history, but is turning into a dynamically developing region that is shaping its own strategic agenda. Political consolidation, the achieved high level of trust and joint economic initiatives in the region have created new opportunities for sustainable development.

During its chairmanship of the Central Asian Five, Uzbekistan will pay special attention to three key areas: strengthening regional security, deepening economic integration and environmental sustainability. We are facing a historic chance to make our region not only sustainable but also prosperous. I am convinced that by joint efforts we will be able to realise this potential.

Euronews: What reforms carried out in Uzbekistan stimulate the strengthening of economic partnership with the European Union, and what measures on the EU side can bring the links with Central Asia to a new level?



Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

Mirziyoyev: In Uzbekistan, we are consistently creating a favourable business environment, developing market institutions, and improving the investment climate. Key steps in this direction include the introduction of a "one-stop-shop" system for foreign investors, the liberalisation of the foreign exchange market, and the reduction of the tax burden on businesses.

As a result, our country's economic co-operation with the European Union has shown positive dynamics. In 2024, Uzbekistan's trade turnover with EU countries reached \$6.4bn, increasing by 5.2% compared to the previous year.

More than 1,000 enterprises with European capital now operate in Uzbekistan, and the total volume of investment projects amounts to €30bn. We anticipate that the signing of the Enhanced Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (EPCA) with the EU will open new opportunities for strengthening trade and investment ties.

We are ready to supply the EU market with a greater volume of high-quality, environmentally friendly products that meet the highest European standards. In the modern world, the development of efficient transport and logistics corridors is becoming increasingly important, and Central Asia can serve not only as a "bridge" between Europe and Asia but also as an active participant in global economic processes.

In this context, we propose aligning the EU's Global Gateway strategy with key transport projects in our region, as well as jointly developing an Action Plan to advance the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor. This will drive investment growth, infrastructure development, and the introduction of innovative technologies. To elevate economic interconnectedness to a qualitatively new level, it is essential to further simplify trade procedures, improve access for Central Asian goods to European markets, and harmonise technical standards and certification processes. A crucial role is played by attracting European businesses to participate in infrastructure projects, developing the digital economy, and fostering innovation-driven co-operation.

We also support the activation of financial assistance mechanisms, including through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, and other international financial institutions. Creating favourable conditions for the growth of small and medium-sized businesses in the region, with the participation of European partners, will help strengthen economic resilience and improve the standard of living for the population.

Euronews: Central Asia is one of the few regions with significant reserves of energy resources and vast potential for the development of renewable energy. What role can your region play in ensuring Europe's energy stability, especially considering recent trends toward renewable energy sources?

Mirziyoyev: Central Asia can become a reliable partner, capable not only of ensuring stable energy supply but also of making a significant contribution to global decarbonisation.

A major area of co-operation lies in the ongoing project, involving Central Asian countries, to create a Green Strategic Corridor through the Caspian and Black Seas to Europe. The implementation of this initiative will lay a solid foundation for our mutually beneficial energy connectivity.

An important institutional platform for co-operation in renewable energy could be the establishment of a Central Asia-EU Clean Energy Partnership. This initiative would facilitate collaboration on the production of green hydrogen, ammonia, and biofuels as sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels.

Currently, Uzbekistan and other countries in the region are actively expanding their renewable energy capacity. The implementation of green energy and climate projects will also support the development of a carbon credit market in Central Asia.

This mechanism will enable enterprises to attract investment in clean technologies while serving as a platform for international co-operation in carbon trading.

In addition to the 14 newly commissioned solar and wind power plants, we plan to implement more than 50 similar projects with a total capacity of 24,000 megawatts.

Over the next five years, we aim to

increase the share of renewable energy sources to 54%. This will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 16mn tons and contribute to Uzbekistan's early fulfilment of its commitment to cut emissions by 35% under the Paris Agreement.

Another important focus is the modernisation of energy systems, which will enhance efficiency and reduce the carbon footprint.

Euronews: How do you assess the prospects of discussing security issues at the upcoming summit? What co-operation areas between Central Asia and the EU are of particular interest to you?

Mirziyoyev: We are witnessing a profound transformation of the international relations system. The world is undergoing large-scale changes, the consequences of which remain difficult to predict.

Ensuring regional security has always been and remains one of the highest priorities for the countries of Central Asia. That is why, in 2023, we set the goal of bringing a new agenda for Central Asia-EU co-operation in this field to expert discussions.

We recognise that our region and the European Union face common security threats and challenges, including the fight against terrorism, extremism, and transnational crime, such as drug trafficking. In this regard, co-operation with the European Union in the field of security is one of the key areas of our partnership.

Given current realities, we believe it is essential not only to continue collaboration within existing programs but also to develop new initiatives aimed at countering cyber threats and extremism.

Euronews: Afghanistan remains a key focus of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. While many countries refrain from engaging with the interim government and integrating Afghanistan into regional and international co-operation, Uzbekistan actively interacts with its southern neighbour. What drives Uzbekistan's approach to Afghanistan, and what are the prospects for maintaining the high intensity of co-operation between our countries on this issue?

Mirziyoyev: Uzbekistan's approach to Afghanistan has always been pragmatic and strategically oriented toward the long term. We have never isolated or turned away from our neighbour.

We have always believed that Afghanistan's development is impossible without constructive engagement with neighbouring countries, including Uzbekistan as its closest and most important partner.

It must be acknowledged that many who initially disagreed with our policy on Afghanistan are now compelled to recognise its correctness and inevitability.

We were convinced that the previous regime in Afghanistan would not be able to maintain power due to several factors - its inability to establish full control over the country's territory, its unwillingness to engage in dialogue with the opposition, its lack of intent to form an inclusive government, and widespread corruption that permeated all levels of the former administration.

The current leadership has managed to stabilise the situation in Afghanistan and redirect its resources toward infrastructure development, including airports, domestic railway networks, and water and energy facilities, as well as toward reducing opium cultivation.

According to UN data, following the Taliban's 2023 ban on drug sales, opium cultivation in Afghanistan has decreased by 95%. Efforts are also being made to support rural communities and promote alternative agriculture to build a future for Afghanistan free from opium dependency.

In today's context, Afghanistan should be viewed through the lens of emerging strategic opportunities. It is critically important to integrate Afghanistan into global economic processes, including through the implementation of infrastructure projects on its territory.

In this context, we are ready to work together with the European Union and other international partners to jointly promote a positive agenda and initiatives that will help Afghanistan not only to overcome the current crises but also to develop in the long term. The primary task at this stage, in our view, is to continue to

provide assistance to Afghanistan in the field of education.

I am convinced that stabilising the situation in Afghanistan and its reconstruction are in the common interests of the Central Asian countries and the European Union.

Euronews: How can Central Asia and the EU jointly address climate threats and what are the opportunities for partnership?

Mirziyoyev: Climate change is a challenge that can no longer be ignored. Central Asia faces droughts, glacier melt, and water shortages, while Europe is experiencing extreme heat, wildfires, and ecosystem changes.

As one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change, Central Asia recognises its responsibility and is ready to work with Europe on long-term solutions.

A key priority for us is advancing the green agenda in Central Asia. At the upcoming Samarkand Summit, we plan to present the Regional Green Development Concept, which aims to lay a solid foundation for effective regional partnerships in sustainable natural resource management and the adoption of green technologies.

We propose developing a Green Partnership between the EU and Central Asia, where we can join efforts to finance projects on renewable energy, ecosystem restoration, and digital climate monitoring.

Water conservation is another critical area where we see significant opportunities for partnership with the European Union, from modernising irrigation infrastructure to joint glacier monitoring and the introduction of advanced water-saving technologies. We also look forward to expanding co-operation with the EU, including through the adoption of European best practices in public-private partnerships.

Ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation are also key priorities. We have already launched the Green Belt of Central Asia - a large-scale afforestation program aimed at restoring degraded lands, including in the Aral Sea region. We see great potential for collaboration with the EU in this field.

Additionally, we are committed to improving environmental education and advancing scientific research. Last year, we established the region's first Green University, which can serve as an effective platform for joint research and the implementation of innovative solutions.

Euronews: Could you please share your expectations of the upcoming meeting at the highest level? What results would you like to see at the summit's end?

Mirziyoyev: The upcoming summit will be truly historic as it will bring together for the first time the leaders of the five Central Asian countries and the EU in one place.

We expect that the upcoming summit will be an important milestone in the development of relations between Central Asia and the EU. In recent years, our interaction has reached a qualitatively new level. We are counting on the deepening of political dialogue and the development of new mechanisms of interaction, which will make our co-operation more systematic and oriented towards long-term goals.

An important item on the agenda will be the discussion of interregional co-operation, especially in such areas as economy, trade, energy and transportation.

One of the key results of the summit will be the signing of the Samarkand Declaration, which will reflect the common aspiration of the parties to establish a strategic partnership.

This declaration will not only consolidate the agreements reached, but will also lay the foundation for deepening ties between our regions. We hope to reach concrete agreements on expanding investment co-operation, implementing joint infrastructure projects, supporting innovation and digital solutions.

Of course, many questions will be answered following the results of the summit. However, we can already say that this meeting will be a step towards creating a sustainable, mutually beneficial partnership between the European Union and Central Asia, based on common interests, trust and the desire for joint development.

Euronews: If you had an opportunity to send one message to the European leaders and their citizens, what would it be?

Mirziyoyev: I would like to take this opportunity to address our European partners.

Central Asia is open for dialogue and increased interaction. We advocate constructive co-operation based on the principles of mutual benefit and trust in the interests of sustainable development and improving the well-being of our people.

We highly appreciate the European Union's support for our aspirations for the region's openness, prosperity and strengthening of its subjectivity. It is particularly important that the EU shares our goal of transforming Central Asia into a united and dynamic region, ready for open and equal partnership with all stakeholders.

The upcoming summit will be an important milestone in our relations. We are convinced that the outcomes of the meeting in Samarkand will open up new prospects for further co-operation.



MoI personnel to take part in security coverage of match between Man City, Man United

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Internal Security Force (Le-khwiya) are set to participate in the security coverage of today's match between Manchester City (Man City) and Manchester United (Man United), as part of the English Premier League competition.

In a statement yesterday, the MoI highlighted that the participation is intended to share expertise and benefit from the talents that Qatar's security personnel have acquired in the areas of securing sporting and mega events.

It indicated that the participation aims to reinforce international co-operation, demonstrating the consistent successes of Qatar's security forces, which have garnered broad global commendation.

The ministry added that this participation demonstrates Qatar's stature as a reliable partner in the security field and underscores the advancement of Qatari aptitude in managing security operations based on the latest international standards. – QNA





Lusail Sky Festival concludes with dazzling displays

The three-day Lusail Sky Festival, unveiled by Visit Qatar in collaboration with Qatari Diar, concluded yesterday at Lusail City. The event featured aerial performances and contrails by Europe's top-notch pilots. Throughout the festival, spectators enjoyed a spectacular series of open-air activities, including skydiving demonstrations, nightly synchronised laser and fireworks displays with music and light effects, and a drone show featuring over 3,000 illuminated drones and 150 pyrotechnic-equipped aircraft, creating captivating nighttime imagery. In between the aerial performances, visitors were also treated to dances, mini parade, and roving installations, as well as an exhibition showcasing classic airplanes. **PICTURES:** Thajudheen

