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**BUSINESS** | Page 1

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HE al-Misnad noted that Qatar commends the significant efforts exerted by international partners in supporting the Sudanese people, especially UN agencies, humanitarian and relief organizations, donors, and bilateral and charitable funds, who contribute to alleviating the suffering of the local population affected by the conflict. **To Page 2**





## Minister opens Qatar Culture Days in Azerbaijan



HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani inaugurated Qatar Culture Days in Azerbaijan yesterday. Present at the inauguration were Minister of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan Adil Karimli and ambassador of the State of Qatar in Baku Mohammed bin Hamad al-Hajri. The event beefs up the Qatar-Azerbaijan co-operation and cultural exchange. Assistant Undersecretary for Cultural Affairs Dr Ghanem bin Mubarak al-Ali said it is part of cultural diplomatic relations to foster rapprochement among peoples and that it highlights Qatari arts, culture, and heritage. The opening included a musical performance featuring Qatari folk songs in a style blending authenticity and innovation. The performances featured interactive screens that highlighted Qatar's rich past and prosperous present. **(QNA)**

## Culture minister meets Azerbaijani counterpart



HE the Minister of Culture Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Thani met in Baku yesterday with Minister of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan Adil Karimli, on the sidelines of the Qatari Cultural Week in Azerbaijan. During the meeting, they discussed aspects of joint co-operation between the two countries in the cultural fields and ways to support and develop them. **(QNA)**

## Al-Misnad meets Sudanese health minister



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad met yesterday in Port Sudan with Acting Federal Minister of Health of the Republic of the Sudan Dr Haitham Mohamed Ibrahim. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations and explored ways to support and develop them. Discussions also addressed the humanitarian situation and strengthened collaboration in areas of humanitarian aid, medical support, and health projects, in addition to other topics of mutual interest. **(QNA)**

# Qatar delegation explores Lebanon's education landscape in working visit

**QNA**  
Beirut

HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid AlKhater paid an official working visit to Lebanon, accompanied by a high-level educational delegation. The visit aimed to explore the Lebanese experience in developing education, particularly in curriculum design, and to discuss ways to enhance educational co-operation between the two countries.

During the visit, HE the Minister and the accompanying delegation met with Lebanese Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Rima Karami, and the team of experts responsible for preparing and developing school curricula at the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education. The meeting was attended by ambassador of Qatar

Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani.

The meeting dealt with discussing co-operation relations between the two countries in the fields of education and higher education and discussed ways to support and strengthen them. It also included a detailed presentation on Lebanon's education system, its vision, components, evolution, strengths, success factors, and the quality of its outcomes.

HE AlKhater praised Lebanon's educational experience across its various sectors, particularly the scientific methods and approaches used in curriculum development. She also commended the Lebanese Ministry of Education's efforts in supporting students' mental health, emphasising the importance of education as a key driver for societal transformation globally.

HE AlKhater stressed the importance of exchanging exper-



tise and best practices within the framework of existing agreements between the two countries and the need to further develop them, especially in the areas of curricula, scholarships, scientific research, and cultural exchange. She highlighted the importance of renewing learning resources to keep pace with the rapid changes in the world

of knowledge and emphasised the need to promote and teach the Arabic language.

On the sidelines of the visit, HE the Minister also met with Lebanon's Minister of Culture Dr Ghasan Salameh to discuss cultural co-operation and its future prospects, particularly in the field of arts and their role in cultural and educa-



tional development. During the meeting, she affirmed Lebanon's distinguished cultural history and its leading role in the Arab world's cultural and educational movement, stressing the importance of enhancing bilateral cultural co-operation in this regard.

In a related context, HE AlKhater also met with the Grand Mufti of

Lebanon His Eminence Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian. The meeting addressed areas of co-operation with religious educational institutions and explored ways to strengthen this collaboration. HE AlKhater reaffirmed Qatar's firm and long-standing position in supporting the brotherly Lebanese people under all circumstances.

## Q Life's second Roblox campaign welcomes 15.9mn visitors

THE second instalment of Q Life's ground-breaking campaign to showcase Qatar in the metaverse achieved an impressive 15.9mn visits across two new immersive Roblox experiences – Qatar Adventure and Souq Waqif, the International Media Office (IMO) announced yesterday.

The eight-week campaign, which ran from November 28, 2024 to February 28, 2025, attracted users from all corners of the globe, firmly establishing the experience as one of the most successful nation-branding campaigns ever to take place in the metaverse.

The second edition of Qatar Adventure built on and surpassed the success of the first edition, achieving a 76% increase in total visits and drawing 12.9mn visits from 10.7mn unique users who collectively spent over 2mn hours inside the experience – an unprecedented figure in the world of brand marketing.

Users explored iconic Qatari landmarks including the Lusail International Circuit, Meryal

Waterpark, and Katara Towers, with Hamad International Airport standing out as the most visited location.

More than 3.8mn minigames were completed by players across the locations, from scoring penalty kicks at Lusail Stadium to a Luggage Rush Simulator at HIA, while 7.7mn interactions with in-game characters reflected the high level of player immersion and roleplay.

In parallel, Q Life's Souq Waqif UGC store – the first permanent Middle Eastern storefront on Roblox that remains available to users – attracted over 3mn visits. At Souq Waqif users downloaded over 3.5mn traditional Arabic garments and enjoyed 5.2mn servings of Qatar's national dish, Machboos.

A sentiment survey conducted in-game revealed the campaign's powerful impact on perceptions with an overwhelming 92.7% of respondents saying they would consider visiting Qatar in the next 12 months, while 80.1% would recommend it to their friends. The second phase of Qa-



tar Adventure was a partnership between Q Life, a cultural platform under the Qatar's IMO, and developer Century Games.

The success of the initiative highlights Qatar's growing

leadership in the digital cultural space. Through innovative use of immersive technology, Q Life has once again showcased the country's diverse offerings – from its warm hospitality and culinary

heritage to its world-class infrastructure and family-friendly attractions – building new bridges of understanding between Qatar and the world, the statement added.

## Minister affirms Qatar's support to Sudan

From Page 1

She called on the international community to provide further urgent support and sufficient funding for humanitarian response projects in Sudan.

She highlighted that Qatar has been keen to provide all forms of support and humanitarian assistance, including co-sponsoring the High-Level Pledging Conference to support the humanitarian response for Sudan and the region in 2023, launching an air bridge to deliver humanitarian aid, and evacuating Sudanese residents from Qatar.

Qatari humanitarian organisations continue to provide support and implement projects across various humanitarian sectors to address the negative impacts of the conflict.

HE al-Misnad announced that \$10mn will be allocated to the Women in Conflict Zones Initiative to support and empower "our sisters in Sudan socially and psychologically".



# Bangladesh Independence, National Day marked in Doha

On the occasion of 54th anniversary of Independence and National Day of Bangladesh, ambassador Md Nazrul Islam hosted a reception in Doha. Qatar's Minister of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs HE Ghanem bin Shaheen bin Ghanem al-Ghanem was the guest of honour.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of Protocol director ambassador Ibrahim Fakhro and dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Eritrean ambassador Ali Ibrahim Ahmed were the special guests. A number of diplomats, senior officials, noted businessmen and select members of the Bangladesh

community were also present at the event.

The reception started with the playing of National Anthems of Qatar and Bangladesh. HE al-Ghanem and ambassador Fakhro joined the Bangladesh envoy in cutting a ceremonial cake.

In his remarks, ambassador Islam paid homage to the freedom fighters and martyrs who made supreme sacrifice for the independence in 1971. He also recalled with gratitude the contribution of the countries who supported and recognised the independent Bangladesh.

The envoy thanked His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin

Hamad al-Thani and Qatar Government for the support to the Bangladeshi expatriates in Qatar and highlighted the key areas of bilateral co-operation.

He continued that bilateral relations span a broad range of sectors, including economic and technical co-operation, trade and investment, employment of Bangladeshi workforce in Qatar, energy and defence co-operation, education, tourism, culture and sports, and human resource development. He expressed his hope that the forthcoming visit of the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh Dr Muhammad Yunus to Qatar this month would help take

the bilateral relations to the next level.

Ambassador Islam also briefly discussed the relevance of an unprecedented movement led by the youth and students in 2024 in Bangladesh. He highlighted the reform initiatives of the interim government under the leadership of Dr Yunus who is leading Bangladesh towards the path of democracy and development after the historic revolution of the students and the general people.

Bangladesh's glorious history, rich heritage, and culture were presented through an exhibition of traditional Bangladesh products on the sidelines of the event.



# Women in Academia Network launched

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) took a significant step towards advancing female leadership in higher education and research with the launch of its Women in Academia Network (WiAN) yesterday.

The announcement was made by HBKU's College of Science and Engineering associate professor and WiA Committee (WiAC) chair, Dr Luluwah al-Fagih, at the university's inaugural Forum for Women in Academia, held in Education City. According to HBKU, WiAN aims to foster a supportive community for female academics and specialists in Qatar, providing opportunities for networking, mentorship, and leadership training. This initiative is spearheaded by WiAC and is dedicated to developing female leaders and professionals within Qatar's academic sector.

In her presentation, al-Fagih highlighted WiAN's vision, as she cited its upcoming activities, including seminars on academic career advancement, professional development workshops, and collaborative opportunities. The first event is scheduled for May.

Al-Fagih also underlined HBKU's commitment to replicating



The event featured a panel discussion on "The Role of Women in Driving Academic Research and Innovation".  
**PICTURES:** Thajudheen

the successes of international initiatives such as the Athena Swan Charter in the UK and the Advance Programme in the US), which have improved gender balance in higher education and increased female representation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields.

She noted that the WiA initiative has received the full support of Qatar Foundation (QF) Chairperson Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser and HBKU president Dr Ahmad M Hasnah. According to al-Fagih, the WiA initiative is structured in three phases: fact-finding to identify reasons for

under-representation of women in academia; creating a targeted action plan with specific interventions and key performance indicators; and implementing the action plan through the WiAC.

She said preliminary data collected by the WiAC reveals that HBKU is performing well in terms of gender balance in student admissions, with female students often outnumbering male students, particularly in STEM fields. Job offers also show a promising trend, with 69% going to women and 20% to men. However, qualitative data highlighted challenges such as demanding job requirements, poor

work-life balance, travel restrictions, and a lack of mentorship and leadership training opportunities.

To address these challenges, al-Fagih said WiAN will focus on generic interventions like mentorship schemes and leadership coaching, as well as targeted interventions such as fellowship programmes for local female PhD graduates, minor policy changes, and improved access to resources. 'Institutional nudges', such as increasing the visibility of a wider variety of female academics, are also planned.

The forum also featured a virtual presentation by Unesco associ-



Dr Ahmad M Hasnah



Dr Luluwah al-Fagih.

ate project officer Lora Gailly, on "Closing the Gender Gap in Science". She pointed to the combination of societal factors and systematic barriers contributing to the gender gap, including stereotypes, lack of role models, and unsupportive work environments.

Gailly outlined Unesco's call to action in addressing such issues, which includes dismantling gender stereotypes, opening educational pathways for girls in science, and creating empowering workplaces.

A panel discussion on "The Role of Women in Driving Academic Research and Innovation", moderated by HBKU College of Law dean Dr Susan L Karamanian, featured Al Mujadilah Centre and Mosque for Women executive director Dr

Sohaira Siddiqui, HBKU's College of Public Policy assistant professor Dr Asmaa al-Fadala, and HBKU's College of Humanities and Social Sciences professor Dr Fatima Sadiqi. Sadiqi recounted her path to becoming a leading academic linguist in Morocco and founding the nation's first centre for women's studies and research. Al-Fadala underscored the transformative power of education and the value of collaboration. Siddiqui, whose research covers Islamic legal theory, colonialism, and gender issues, discussed how her own research journey in Islamic studies shaped her perspective, highlighting the crucial role of research in driving innovation.

## President of Arab Military Sports Federation re-elected

The General Assembly of the Arab Military Sports Federation, currently convening in its 39th session in Doha under the patronage of HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani, has re-elected Brigadier General Dr Youssef Dossmal al-Kuwari as President of the Federation for a second term extending to 2028.

The meeting was chaired by Brigadier General Dr al-Kuwari, who is also the President of Qatari Military Sports Federation, with the participation of 19 member states of the Arab Military Sports Federation. The General Assembly session included elections for the presidency and Executive Committee membership for the 2025-2028 term, in addition to discussing items on the agenda and the plan to organise Arab military championships and events for the same period.

Attending the meeting were Vice-President of the Arab Military Sports Federation Major



General Staff Mohamed Ez-zazy al-Assal, Tarek Abdelsalam, Minister Plenipotentiary and Secretary-General of the Federation and Director of the Military Department at the Arab League, Head of the Military Sports Division at the Arab League Counselor Mohamed al-Amin al-Dah, representatives of member states of the Federation, and several officers from the Qatari Armed Forces.

Brigadier General Dr al-Kuwari praised the great success achieved by the General Assembly during the session, which took place in

an ideal atmosphere and included the discussion of numerous topics related to the development of Arab military sports. He affirmed that the meeting comes as part of Qatar's distinguished hosting of all events held in Doha.

He added that the Arab Federation has seen significant growth and diversification in its competitions recently, with rising technical standards. The Federation is currently preparing its calendar for the new 2025-2028 cycle, which spans the next four years. He pointed out that the Federation seeks to further develop Arab military sports in collaboration with all member federations.

For his part, Major General al-Assal praised the positive atmosphere during the General Assembly, noting that the elections were conducted in complete confidentiality and that the results were satisfactory to all. He also mentioned that Egypt will host the 25th Military Equestrian World Championship in May, with 20 countries having confirmed their participation so far.

## Three-day flash sale at Hilton Salwa Resort

Hilton Salwa Beach Resort & Villas has announced a flash sale from April 20 to 22, offering 33% off on room and villa rates, including breakfast and waterpark access, for stays until October 23. The rates start at QR805 on weekdays and QR1,075 on weekends, a statement said.

Hilton Salwa Beach Resort & Villas has 3.5km of pristine coastline at an hour's drive from Doha. Desert Falls Water & Adventure Park has over 19 attractions and 30 thrilling rides.

Every Wednesday starting May 7, 2025, is the exclusive Ladies Day experience at Desert Falls, from 3pm to 9pm, and free for resort guests.

The first-ever man-made canyoning course in the Middle East features 17 pools, 10 slides, and 26 cliff jumps.

The highlights include dolphin watching cruise, and signature dining at some of the region's top restaurants, including



Dante Cucina Italiana, Levantine, Miss Wong, Souk Kitchen, The League Sports Bar & Restaurant, Nesma Lounge, and South Bay with contemporary Arabic cuisine to authentic Italian and vibrant Asian flavours.

The attractions of private beachfront villas with butler service include private pool, lush garden, plus a rooftop terrace. Rejuvenating luxury treatments at eforea Spa ranges from Hydra-

Facial and massages to Hammam rituals and Rebalance therapies.

The Kids Club offers several activities along with the mascots Lenny, Sami, and Sandy. The state-of-the-art sports academy, features football pitches, basketball, netball, tennis courts, and more.

Bookings can be made at [www.salwabeachresort.qa](http://www.salwabeachresort.qa) or by calling +974 4423 6666, the statement added.

## Gaza hospitals facing critical medication shortages: official

QNA  
Gaza

The Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza warned that the shortage of medicines and medical supplies in hospitals has reached unprecedented and critical levels due to the ongoing Israeli blockade and aggression on Gaza Strip.

Assistant Undersecretary of Ministry of Health in Gaza, Dr Maher Shamieh, told Qatar News Agency (QNA) yesterday that the closure of border crossings to medical supplies and medicines is exacerbating the crisis, adding catastrophic challenges to providing healthcare to the increasing number of patients and injured people due to continued airstrikes targeting civilians.

He confirmed that 42% of vaccinations for children are unavailable in Gaza, and that the Israeli occupation is preventing the entry of polio vaccines, which means the collapse of efforts that lasted for the past seven months to combat the epidemic. He

**Dr Shamieh pointed out that operating rooms, intensive care units, and emergency departments are functioning with depleted stocks of life-saving medicines and medical supplies**

also highlighted that the disruption of water lines increases health and environmental risks, including spread of diarrhoea and skin diseases.

Dr Shamieh pointed out that operating rooms, intensive care units, and emergency departments are functioning with depleted stocks of life-saving medicines and medical supplies.

He explained that 37% of essential medicines, 59% of medical consumables, 54% of cancer and blood disease medications, 40% of primary care medicines, and 51% of maternal and child health medicines are out of stock.

He stated that 80,000 diabetic patients and 110,000 hypertensive patients are without medications in primary care centres, and the medicines for surgeries, intensive care, and emergency departments are ex-

hausted to unprecedented levels as the genocide continues."

He also explained that due to the ongoing power outages, vital hospital departments are relying on generators, which are at risk of stopping due to a shortage of fuel and spare parts, with most of them being damaged.

The Assistant Undersecretary emphasised that Gaza's patients and injured people are deprived of diagnostic imaging services because the occupation destroyed CT scan and MRI machines. Additionally, 13,000 patients and injured individuals have been denied specialised treatment outside Gaza since Rafah crossing was closed after it was seized and occupied by the Israeli army about a year ago.

He further noted that the closure of crossings and the prevention of food supplies threaten the lives of more than 2mn Palestinians, particularly children, with malnutrition and anaemia. Dr Shamieh also mentioned that the Israeli army recently intensified its targeting of medical and emergency teams. Ambulance crews and humanitarian teams are operating within a direct targeting zone

while performing rescue missions for the wounded. He stressed that these alarming circumstances are placing an enormous burden on healthcare providers and require urgent action to protect the healthcare system from further targeting and ensure necessary medical supplies are provided to enable medical teams to care for patients and the injured.

The Ministry of Health's Undersecretary made an urgent call to replenish drug stocks in hospitals and primary care centres in Gaza, as shortage has reached critical levels due to the Israeli blockade. Gaza's health sector is facing a severe crisis due to the blockade preventing the entry of medicines and medical supplies, the continuous targeting of medical staff through killing or arrest, and the destruction of major hospitals in Gaza Strip.

The recent war crime committed by the Israeli army, which executed 15 members of Palestinian Red Crescent and Civil Defence crews in Rafah, highlighted the deliberate targeting of medical teams by the occupation to prevent them from carrying out their humanitarian duties.

## Qatar officially applies to be HCCH member



Qatar applied yesterday to be a Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) member.

Ambassador of Qatar to the Netherlands Dr Mutlaq bin Majid al-Qahtani presented the request during a ceremony at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, depository of the HCCH Conventions. In attendance were senior officials and Qatari Embassy staffers.

Dr al-Qahtani said Qatar views the accession as a key step in boosting international legal co-operation to further support peace, consolidate justice, and foster economic development. He stressed the HCCH's pivotal role in building bridges of legal co-operation among nations since its inception in 1893. **(QNA)**





## ‘Path’ exhibition in Syria



Visitors walk through the ‘Path’ exhibition held in an unfinished building, originally built by the wife of ousted president Bashar al-Assad, in Damascus.



# Fifty years on, Lebanon’s civil war fighters working for reconciliation

AFP  
Beirut

Near the front lines where they once battled each other, former fighters in Lebanon’s civil war now gather to bear the same message, half a century after the devastating conflict erupted: never again. The war killed 150,000 people, destroyed the country and left an indelible mark on the Lebanese psyche.

Years after it ended in 1990, some buildings in the freewheeling capital remain riddled with bullet holes, and 17,000 people who went missing were never found. “It was a useless war,” said Georges Mazraani, a Christian who took up arms in Beirut’s working-class neighbourhood of Ain al-Remmaneh, where the conflict started.

The Christian district is separated from the Muslim neighbourhood of Shiyah by just one street that went on to become a key front line. On April 13, 1975, members of the right-wing Christian Phalange militia machine-gunned a bus of Palestinians, leaving 27 dead, hours after assailants opened fire outside a nearby church, killing one of theirs. The incident that ignited the war remains seared in Lebanon’s memory.

The country had been on a knife-edge, with Palestinian fighters, and their Lebanese leftist and Muslim allies preparing for a confrontation against Christian groups, who were doing the same. For 15 years, a country once known as “the Switzerland of the Middle East” was ravaged by war along sectarian lines, with alliances shifting year after year with warlords building and breaking loyalties.

And while the civil war ended in 1990, Lebanon has never recovered its former glory, remaining until 2005 under Syrian control, and with part of the country under Israeli occupation for two decades. Now grey, Mazraani was just 21 when he and other young men in his neighbourhood took

up arms. He later went on to command hundreds of fighters.

“I lost 17 years of my life and 14 family members,” he said, now 71 and ill.

Near him plaques commemorating the “martyrs” of the Christian “resistance” adorn street corners. Today, “some people are encouraging civil war in Lebanon”, Mazraani said.

“They should be quiet and open up to reconciliation, so we can be finished with this problem.”

With Mazraani is Nassim Assaad, who fought for the Lebanese Communist Party, a one-time foe. “It’s the poor” on both sides “who paid the price,” not the militia leaders, said Assaad, who was 18 when the war began. He and Mazraani are now part of Fighters for Peace, which brings together former enemies for peace-building activities including community outreach and awareness-raising at schools and universities.

Assaad said many people were worried about a possible return to civil war in the country still reeling from a recent conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. “Today, the circumstances are even more conducive for it than in 1975,” he said.

The key issue dividing Lebanon today is the arsenal of Hezbollah, the only group which refused to surrender its weapons to the state after the civil war ended. In Shiyah, the fighters of old have disappeared. Israel’s 1982 invasion and siege of Beirut dislodged Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and his fighters, while the leftist presence was replaced by Hezbollah.

The civil war ended with the Saudi-brokered Taif agreement, which established a new power-sharing system between Lebanon’s religious sects. An amnesty for war crimes left victims and their families without justice, and the country has chosen collective amnesia in order to move on. “We must go back over our experience of war and ask for forgiveness in order to reach a real reconciliation,” said Ziad Saab, president of Fighters for Peace.



Christian Phalangist Party veteran fighter Joseph al-Asmar points to a bullet-riddled building on the former Green Line area in Ain Al Remmaneh district in Beirut’s southern suburbs.

tion,” said Ziad Saab, president of Fighters for Peace.

The power-sharing system was meant to be temporary, but in practice has enshrined the control of some former warlords, who swapped their military fatigues for suits, or their family members. Still today, periodic violence shakes the fragile balance.

In the town of Souk al-Gharb, overlooking Beirut, former fighters from different backgrounds walk through grass covering the old front line to an abandoned bunker. The strategic town saw ferocious battles during the Mountain War between Christians and Druze that began in the wake of the Israeli invasion.

“When I walk here, I’m afraid – not of mines, but because the ground is stained with the blood of my comrades,” said Soud Bou Shebl, 60, who fought with Christian militia the Lebanese Forces.

Karam al-Aridi, 63, who led

## Hezbollah ready for talks with Lebanese government on defence strategy, MP says

Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah said on Thursday the group is ready to enter talks with the Lebanese government on a national defence strategy, with the focus on ensuring the removal of Israeli troops from Lebanon’s territory.

US-backed President Joseph Aoun, who pledged to establish a state monopoly on the control of arms when he took office in January, is set to start talks with Hezbollah about its weapons arsenal, three Lebanese political sources told Reuters.

One of the world’s most heavily armed non-state groups, Hezbollah emerged severely weakened from the 2024 conflict with Israel, which was triggered by the Gaza war.

The group suffered heavy losses including the killing of its top leaders and thousands of its fighters.

In a televised speech, Fadlallah said: “We have expressed our readiness for dialogue to find a defense strategy for Lebanon.” He said any meaningful discussions should focus on confronting Israeli “aggressions” and removing Israeli forces from southern Lebanon.

“We are in constant contact with President Aoun. When he calls for dialogue and sets national foundations for it, we are ready,” he added.

Israel, which sent ground troops into south Lebanon during the war, has largely withdrawn, although it decided in February not to leave five hilltop positions. It said it intended eventually to hand them over to Lebanese troops once it was sure the security situation allowed.



Christian Phalangist Party veteran fighters Joseph al-Asmar (left) and Naji Boutros greet each other as they revisit the Notre Dame Du Salut Church in Ain Al Remmaneh district in Beirut’s southern suburbs.

Druze fighters from the Progressive Socialist Party, said “war only causes death and problems”, saying his village of Baysur alone lost 140

men. “We must learn the lessons of the past,” he said. “No party must feel stronger than another, otherwise our country will be lost.”

## Syria Kurds say struck deal with Damascus on battleground dam

AFP  
Beirut

The Kurdish authorities in northeastern Syria have struck a deal with the central government on running a key dam they captured with US support, a Kurdish source said yesterday.

“An agreement has been reached between the autonomous administration and the Syrian government for the management of the Tishrin Dam” on the Euphrates River, the source told AFP.

Under the agreement, Kurdish-led fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces will pull back from the dam which they captured from the Islamic State group in late 2015, the source said. Fighters loyal to the new government in Damascus established after the December overthrow of longtime strongman Bashar al-Assad will take over security and a joint ad-

## Under the agreement, Kurdish-led fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces will pull back from the dam which they captured from the Islamic State group in late 2015

ministration will run the dam.

The dam is one of several on the Euphrates and its tributaries in Syria that play a key role in the nation’s economy by providing it with water for irrigation and hydro-electric power.

It was a key battleground in the civil war that broke out in 2011, falling first to rebels and then to IS before being captured by the SDF.

The Kurdish source said the dam deal was the latest step in implementing a March agreement with Damascus to integrate the institutions of the autonomous Kurdish administration into those of the central government.

The deal already saw Kurdish fighters withdraw from two Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods of the main northern city of Aleppo earlier this month.

It has also seen a reduction in the presence of pro-Turkiye fighters in the historically Kurdish-majority northwestern region of Afrin.

There was no immediate word from the Damascus government on the dam deal. The Observatory said the new joint committee would supervise the necessary repairs to the dam.

It said some Kurdish security agents would take part in the new security teams for the dam, alongside agents of the central government.

## Tesla opens first showroom in Saudi

AFP  
Riyadh

The Tesla electric vehicle company owned by billionaire Elon Musk yesterday opened its first showroom in Saudi Arabia – where hybrid cars are still not a common sight. The opening in the capital Riyadh comes with Tesla sales dropping and showrooms in the United States being attacked over work by the controversial Musk, the world’s richest person, for the US government.

Saudi Arabia is a key regional ally of Washington, and US President Donald Trump forged close ties during his first term with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has promised to inject \$600bn into US trade and investments.

However, demand for electric vehicles is relatively low in Saudi Arabia, the world’s largest oil exporter which enjoys bargain-basement fuel prices, with a litre costing just 2.33 riyals (\$0.62). Cheap fuel and prolonged periods of extreme heat in the vast desert

## A lack of charging infrastructure and the country’s vast size mean that many Saudi drivers will view EVs as suitable for shorter trips

country means big oil-consuming cars reign supreme.

Saudi economist Mohammed al-Qahtani welcomed Tesla’s move, but urged even more.

“We do not want a showroom; we want a factory,” he said. “We want to be part of the production process, not just of consumption.”

A lack of charging infrastructure and the country’s vast size mean that many Saudi drivers will view EVs as suitable for shorter trips, rather than as replacements for conventional vehicles. About 950km separate the capital from second city Jeddah – more than the maximum range of most electric car batteries.

According to data platform Statista, Saudi Arabia has just 101 charging stations, compared with 261 in the much smaller neighbouring United Arab Emirates. Although the Saudi EV market remains small, it tripled last year to nearly 800 cars, according to business news outlet Al-Iqtisadiyah.

Authorities are seeking to diversify the economy, which relies heavily on oil exports, aiming to install 5,000 electric vehicle chargers by 2030. Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund, PIF, now controls 60% of luxury electric vehicle company Lucid.

It has also secured a deal with South Korea’s Hyundai to establish a plant in the kingdom for both EVs and petrol-powered cars. Additionally, Saudi EV brand CEER, launched in 2022, plans to start production in 2025.

A vehicle from Lucid, which opened a factory in Jeddah in 2023 after a billion-dollar Saudi investment, costs \$92,000. Last May, Chinese company BYD opened a showroom in Riyadh, selling more affordable electric cars.





## Magical moment



In one of the last days of winter, two gulls glide through the Doha sky, to the backdrop of ethereal rays of light, fluffy clouds and blue sky. **PICTURE:** Gulf Times news editor Bonnie James (Instagram: the.explorer7).

# IIS begins new academic year



Ideal Indian School (IIS) began the new academic year 2025-26 on Tuesday by welcoming both morning and evening session students. The day began with students arriving in their formal uniforms, eager to reunite with friends and meet their new teachers. The school has introduced several new initiatives aimed at enhancing the learning experience, including the recruitment of teaching faculty, modernised infrastructure, innovative teaching methodologies and expanded extracurricular programmes. These developments reflect IIS's ongoing commitment to holistic education and student development, a statement added.



## DPS-MIS student wins math honour



DPS Modern Indian School student Krishnapranavan Ramesh (class XII C) won a silver medal in the Southeast Asian Mathematical Olympiad (SEAMO) 2024 for being among the top 20% of the thousands of students who participated from 20 countries. SEAMO is formulated based on the Ministry of Education of Singapore's 21st Century Core Competencies. It places strong emphasis on creative and inventive thinking as opposed to technical mathematical skills. Principal Asna Nafees congratulated Krishnapranavan.

## Marwa Qatar holds Eid celebration



Marwa Qatar members celebrated Eid with their families and friends at Al Wakra.





TRADE WAR

Beijing bites back at US tariffs by curbing Hollywood imports

China yesterday said it would immediately restrict imports of Hollywood films in retaliation for President Donald Trump's escalation of US tariffs on imported Chinese goods. After three decades during which China annually imported 10 Hollywood movies, its National Film Administration said Trump's increase of tariffs on Chinese imports would further sour domestic demand for US cinema in China after years of decline. "We will follow market rules, respect the audience's choices, and moderately reduce the number of American films imported," the NFA said. Hollywood films account for only 5% of the overall box office receipts in China's market.

STANCE

Australia snubs China offer to 'join hands' to fight US tariffs

Australia yesterday declined Beijing's proposal to work together to counter US tariffs, saying instead it would continue to diversify its trade and lower its reliance on China, its largest trading partner. "We are not going to be holding hands with China in respect of any contest that is going on in the world," Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles told Sky News, referring to the Chinese ambassador's proposal for countries to "join hands" on trade. He said Australia would build its economic resilience by strengthening trade ties with the European Union, Indonesia, India, Britain and the Middle East.

POLITICS

New Zealand rejects push to redefine founding treaty

A Maori folk song rang through New Zealand's parliament yesterday after lawmakers voted to defeat a bill that many feared would erode Indigenous rights. The contentious "Treaty Principles Bill" sought to redefine the principles of New Zealand's founding document, signed between Maori chiefs and British representatives in 1840. Many critics saw it as an attempt to wind back the special rights given to the country's 900,000-strong Maori population. Parliament voted down the bill yesterday, with 112 opposed and only 11 in favour. Moments after the final result was read, people in the chamber burst into a Maori folk song celebrating nationhood and unity.

EVENT

World's first humanoid robot half marathon postponed

Beijing has postponed a half marathon originally scheduled for Sunday in which humanoid robots will race alongside human runners, a milestone designed to showcase China's advances in a frontier industry the country is intent on dominating. The 2025 Beijing Yizhuang Half Marathon was postponed to April 19 due to forecasts of very strong winds for this weekend, according to the event's organisers. While they did not say whether the conditions were more of a danger to robot or human runners, humanoid robots are likely to be more at risk of tipping over in windy weather due to the lack of training data for the scenario, according to experts.

# AUKUS nuclear submarine sale to Australia faces new doubts

Reuters  
Perth

The sale of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia under the AUKUS treaty faces new doubts as US President Donald Trump's tariffs take hold, and amid concern in Washington that providing the subs to Canberra may reduce deterrence to China.

Whether the US can boost submarine production to meet US Navy targets is key to whether Australia can buy three Virginia-class submarines starting in 2032, Defence Minister Richard Marles said last month, after talks with his US counterpart, Pete Hegseth.

Australia faces a previously unreported 2025 deadline to pay the US\$2bn to assist with improving its submarine shipyards. The Trump administration has asked for more funding, Marles said in March.

Consternation is growing in Washington that Australia's reluctance to even discuss using the attack submarines against China means that transferring them out of the US fleet to Australia would hurt deterrence efforts in the Indo Pacific, according to experts and documents.

"If you want to deter conflict,

in peacetime you need to talk about using it in wartime and we haven't seen a willingness yet on the part of the Australians, government or officials, to make that kind of threat," said former US Navy strategist Bryan Clark, director of the Center for Defense Concepts and Technology at the Hudson Institute, who is advising the Australian Defence Force on force design.

In a previously unreported recent multilateral war game simulating a response by US allies to a Chinese blockade of Taiwan, Australian Defence Force commanders did not use nuclear-powered submarines in the South China Sea to attack Chinese targets, instead focusing on protecting Australia's northern approaches with airpower, drones and missiles, said Clark, who ran the exercise.

The distance from China made an airpower and surface fleet approach less risky, and the submarines were instead placed in areas near Australia where enemy ships might transit, Clark said in an online briefing.

These concerns were echoed in a US Congressional Budget Office report in February and testimony on Navy shipbuilding delays in March, in which officials said selling Virginia-class subs out of the

fleet to Australia without replacements was risky because Canberra had not made it clear whether its military would join the US in a conflict over Taiwan.

The question has taken on added urgency, as the US Navy in September set a deadline of 2027 for its forces to be prepared for a conflict with China.

China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Peter Dean, director of foreign policy and defence at the University of Sydney's US Studies Centre, said he would expect Australia and the US to operate submarines in different areas in a regional conflict.

"If it's a Taiwan contingency, the US will be concentrating its forces in the east and South China Sea around Taiwan. Australia may not be directly involved," said Dean, co-author of Australia's Defence Strategic Review, which led the Albanese government to refocus its military in 2023 and prioritise long-range strike missiles.

Australia's priority is to protect its mainland as a forward operating base for US forces, he said.

Clark said nuclear workforce shortages and budget constraints in Australia would most likely delay the submarine sale.

## Asean finance ministers and central bank governors meet in Malaysia



Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim poses for a group photo with the delegates including Asean finance ministers and central bank governors, during the 2025 Asean Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, yesterday.

## New Zealand, Australia speak with EU, others on bolstering free trade

Reuters  
Wellington/Sydney

New Zealand and Australia yesterday said they are each working with other nations on a possible joint response to shore up free trade against a barrage of US tariffs.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon of New Zealand said he had spoken with the leaders of Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia, as well as the head of the European Union's executive about international trade co-operation.

In a speech yesterday, Luxon floated the idea of members of the European Union and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) working together.

Global trade has been upended by US President Donald Trump who announced sweeping tariffs

last week on dozens of countries, which were met by retaliatory tariffs by some of them, triggering massive volatility in markets.

In a stunning reversal on Wednesday, Trump said he would suspend the hefty tariffs he had imposed on most countries for 90 days.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said government ministers had held discussions with Southeast Asian nations, Japan, Korea, India and the EU about a joint response to Trump's tariffs.

"There is a group of countries who see the benefit of free and open and fair trade," she said in an interview with state broadcaster ABC.

In posts to X, Luxon said he held separate phone calls with Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on buttressing rules-based free trade to spur economic growth.

He said he also spoke to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen about "what the EU and New Zealand can do together to support the trade rules that underpin Kiwi (New Zealand) jobs and growth".

New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia are members of the CPTPP, which also includes countries such as Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico and Britain.

"One possibility is that members of the CPTPP and the European Union work together to champion rules-based trade and make specific commitments on how that support plays out in practice," Luxon said earlier in a speech to the Wellington Chamber of Commerce.

## Sydney on alert for escaped boa constrictor

Whether its pounding surf, man-eating crocodiles, or predatory sharks - Australians are used to keeping their eyes peeled when they're near the water.

Now residents of one coastal neighbourhood in Sydney are also being told to watch out for an escaped exotic snake.

Officials said yesterday they had been "alerted to a sighting of a Boa constrictor" slithering around the waterside suburb of Sylvania. "Please do not approach the animal," the department of primary industries for New South Wales (NSW) said in a statement. "If safe to do so, take a photo and contact us so that we can identify and attempt to capture the snake." Video posted to social media showed the girthy critter slowly worming across a waterside footpath next to a beach.

Native to Central and South America, boa constrictors are one of the world's largest species of snake. They have an average length of around 10 feet, and are named for the way in which they squeeze the life out of their prey.

## Closure of gold mining firm sought



Papuan students take part in a demonstration in front of the US embassy in Jakarta yesterday calling for the closure of the Freeport gold mining company, which operates the world's largest gold mine in Papua, and to highlight human rights violations in the Indonesian province.

## Indonesia's Papua rebels kill 17 people in a week

Reuters  
Jakarta

Rebels in Indonesia's Papua region yesterday said they have killed more than 17 people since the weekend, claiming that they were soldiers disguised as gold miners, and police said the insurgents were holding two hostages.

A low-level but increasingly deadly battle for independence has simmered between security forces and rebels in resource-rich Papua ever since it was controversially brought under Indonesian control in a vote overseen by the United Nations in 1969.

Sebby Sambom, a Papuan rebel spokesperson, said in a statement the rebels had killed more than 17 people since April 6, including five on Wednesday, and claimed they were military members disguised as gold miners.

"If the Indonesian government military wants to chase us, please

come to Dekai town, we are in the town," Sebby said, referring to a town in Yahukimo district, where the incident took place.

Frega Wenas, a spokesperson for the country's defence ministry, told reporters that 11 illegal miners were ruthlessly killed in the area and denied they were military officers, adding this was the rebels' propaganda. Separately, police said in a statement yesterday that 35 people in the area were evacuated to another district, while two residents were still being held hostage by the rebels. Frega said the attack was one of the deadliest in recent years. In 2018, a separatist group killed 21 road construction workers in the highland area of Nduga.

Rebels in Papua have in recent years managed to acquire better weapons, taken in raids on army posts or sourced from the black market. They have also abducted foreigners, including a New Zealand pilot who was released after being held for 19 months.

## S Korea presidential front-runner Lee Jae-myung enters leadership race

Reuters  
Seoul

South Korean opposition leader Lee Jae-myung, who is the front-runner in opinion polls to be the country's next leader, yesterday declared his bid for the presidency, promising to fix inequality and spur economic growth.

The presidential election will be held on June 3, after the impeachment of former president Yoon Suk-yeol for his December martial law declaration was upheld on April 4.

In a video released yesterday,

Lee pledged to fix economic polarisation that he said was a key source of social conflict, highlighting how he felt this had exacerbated the recent political turmoil in the wake of Yoon's martial law order.

Lee vowed to drive large-scale investments at the government level in technology and talent development to resuscitate economic growth.

Conservative critics have warned that a return to power by the opposition could undermine the alliance with the US and threaten improved ties with Japan, but Lee proposed a pragmatic approach to diplomacy.

"Realistically speaking, the South Korea-US alliance is important, and South Korea, US, Japan co-operation is important. Within that, the consistent principle is that the national interest of the Republic of Korea is the top priority," Lee said.

A new South Korean leader will likely face the daunting task of negotiating with the US, the country's leading security ally, over tariffs that have cast a cloud over the export-reliant economy.

Lee, 61, lost by the slimmest margin in the country's history when he ran against Yoon in the 2022 presidential election.

But last year, he led his liberal

Democratic Party to a landslide victory in a parliamentary election, and enjoys strong support from liberal voters.

On Wednesday, Lee stepped down as leader of the main opposition party, preparing to switch gears to focus on his election campaign.

A Gallup poll announced on April 4 put Lee as the favourite to become the next president with 34% support, versus 9% for the top conservative contender, 73-year-old former labour minister Kim Moon-soo.

The conservatives have a wide-open presidential field. The ruling People Power Party (PPP) plans to

confirm its candidate through a primary in May.

Han Dong-hoon, a former PPP leader, also said yesterday he was running for president, joining a growing group of potential and declared candidates that includes the mayor of Seoul, Oh Se-hoon, and ruling party member Ahn Cheol-soo.

More hopefuls are expected to join, but so far apart from Lee the field has polled single-digit public support in surveys.

Han was previously a justice minister close to ousted leader Yoon and entered politics in late 2023 but their ties have soured after he backed Yoon's impeach-

ment. Meanwhile, Lee still faces legal uncertainties that could affect his candidacy.

He is on trial for charges ranging from alleged bribery to involvement in a \$1bn property development scandal. Prosecutors have also appealed against a court's decision in March to overturn Lee's guilty verdict on election law violations.

It was unclear if any of the ongoing court cases would present a roadblock to Lee's presidential bid.

In January 2024, Lee survived a knife attack and underwent surgery when he was stabbed in the neck by a man during an event.



# Apple airlifts 600 tonnes of iPhones from India

Reuters  
New Delhi

Tech giant Apple chartered cargo flights to ferry 600 tonnes of iPhones, or as many as 1.5mn, to the US from India, after it stepped up production there in an effort to beat President Donald Trump's tariffs, sources said.

The details of the push provide an insight into the US smartphone company's private strategy to navigate around the Trump tariffs and build up inventory of its popular iPhones in the US, one of its biggest markets.

Analysts have warned that US prices of iPhones could surge, given Apple's high reliance on imports from China, the main manufacturing hub of the devices, which is subject to Trump's highest tariff rate of 125%.

That figure is far in excess of the tariff of 26% on imports from India, but which is now on hold after Trump called a 90-day pause this week that excludes China.

Apple "wanted to beat the tariff," said one of the sources familiar with the planning.

The company lobbied Indian airport authorities to cut to six hours the time needed to clear customs at the Chennai airport in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, down from 30 hours, the source added.

The so-called "green corridor" arrangement at the airport in the Indian manufacturing hub emulated a model Apple uses at some airports in China, the source said.

About six cargo jets with a capacity of 100 tonnes each have flown out since March, one of them this week just as new tariffs kicked in, the source and an Indian government official said.

The packaged weight of an iPhone 14 and its charging cable come to about 350gms (12.35oz), Reuters measurements show, implying the total cargo of 600 tonnes comprised about 1.5mn iPhones, after accounting for some packaging weight.

Apple and India's aviation ministry did not respond to a request for comment. All the sources sought anonymity as the strategy and discussions were private.

Apple sells more than 220mn iPhones a year worldwide, with Counterpoint Research estimating a fifth of total iPhone imports to the US now come from India, and the rest from China.

Trump consistently increased US tariffs on China, to stand at 125% by Wednesday, from 54% earlier. At the 54% tariff rate, the \$1,599 cost of the top-end iPhone 16 Pro Max in the US would have surged to \$2,300, calculations based on projections by Rosenblatt Securities show.

In India, Apple stepped up air shipments to meet its goal of a 20% increase in usual production at iPhone plants, attained by adding workers, and temporarily extending operations at the biggest Foxconn India factory to Sundays, the source added.

Two other direct sources confirmed the Foxconn plant in Chennai now runs on Sundays, which is typically a holiday. The plant turned out 20mn iPhones last year, including the latest iPhone 15 and 16 models.

As Apple diversifies its manufacturing beyond China, it has positioned India for a critical role. Foxconn and Tata, its two main suppliers there, have three factories in all, with two more being built.

Apple spent about eight months to plan and set up the expedited customs clearance in Chennai, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government asked officials to support Apple, one senior Indian official said.

Foxconn shipments from India to the US surged in value to \$770mn in January and \$643mn in February, compared to the range of \$110mn to \$331mn in the prior four months, commercially available customs data shows.

More than 85% of the January and February air shipments of Foxconn were offloaded in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco.

## Mumbai terror attacks' accused reaches India after US extradition

A Pakistani-born Canadian businessman accused of helping to orchestrate the 2008 attacks in Mumbai, one of India's deadliest, arrived in New Delhi yesterday after the US extradited him in the first such transfer in a terrorism case. Tahawwur Rana, 64, a doctor-turned-businessman, was extradited in connection with the November 2008 Mumbai attacks that killed more than 160 people. "The National Investigation Agency yesterday successfully secured the extradition...after years of sustained and concerted efforts to bring the key conspirator...to justice," said NIA, India's anti-terror agency. He was accompanied back by Indian security agencies after his petitions challenging the extradition were rejected by the US Supreme Court.

Rana's extradition is a "great success" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi government's diplomacy, Indian Home Minister Amit Shah said. "It is the responsibility of the Indian government to bring back all those who have abused the land and people of India," he posted on X. India formally sought Rana's custody in June 2020, and President Donald Trump announced Rana's transfer in February this year during a joint press conference with Modi in Washington. Rana was sentenced to 14 years in prison in the US in 2013 for providing support to Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Islamist group that India says was responsible for the 2008 attacks.

"As far as our record indicates, he (Rana) did not even apply for renewal for his Pakistani-origin documents for the last two decades," Shafqat Ali Khan, a spokesperson for Pakistan's foreign ministry, said at a media briefing yesterday. Rana's lawyer has said that Rana was a "good man and got sucked into something." Over the course of three days in November 2008, 10 heavily armed attackers targeted major landmarks across Mumbai, including two luxury hotels, a Jewish centre and the main train station, killing 166 people. India has said the Lashkar-e-Taiba, which the US State Department has designated a terrorist organisation, orchestrated the attacks.

## Anger at hike in gas prices



Activists from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) protest against the recent price hike of Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Hyderabad, India, yesterday.

# India seeks quick US trade deal as Trump tariffs paused

Reuters  
New Delhi

India wants to move quickly on a trade deal with the US, a government official said yesterday, after President Donald Trump's decision to pause reciprocal tariffs on dozens of countries, while hiking levies on China.

India and the US agreed in February to work on the first phase of a trade deal to be concluded late this year, with a view to reaching two-way trade worth \$500bn by 2030.

"India is one of the first nations to start talks over a deal with the US and to have jointly agreed

to a deadline to conclude it," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. India's trade ministry, which is leading the talks with the US, did not immediately comment.

The Indian trade minister said at an event in New Delhi earlier this week that manufacturers in India and the US have suffered from China's unfair trade practices over the years.

India will raise scrutiny on imports to spot any potential dumping of goods, including from China, the official said.

On Wednesday, Trump temporarily lowered duties on trading partners including India, just 24 hours after imposing tariffs that unleashed

the most intense market volatility since the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Shifting the focus back to a bilateral trade war with China, Trump said he would raise to 125% the tariff on imports from China. The US reciprocal tariff on India stands at 10%.

The decision to halt further tariffs is especially a relief for Indian shrimp exporters, the official said, citing an industry that faced a tariff disadvantage compared to competitors like Ecuador.

Nearly \$14bn worth of electronics products and over \$9bn worth of gems and jewellery were also among the sectors impacted by the US tariffs.

## Vijay Mallya loses appeal against UK bankruptcy order

Indian tycoon Vijay Mallya has lost an appeal against a bankruptcy order made by London's High Court over a more than £1bn (\$1.28bn) debt to lenders including the State Bank of India.

Mallya, who lives in Britain, has been embroiled in a long legal battle with lenders - as well as the Indian authorities - following the 2012 collapse of his defunct Kingfisher Airlines.

In 2017, a group of banks obtained a judgment in India worth over £1bn against Mallya, who had guaranteed Kingfisher Airlines' debt.

That ruling was registered in Britain later that year and led to a bankruptcy order being made against Mallya in 2021.

Mallya appealed against the bankruptcy order at a hearing in February, when his lawyers argued the banks had already recovered assets which had effectively settled the debt. But his appeal has been rejected with judge Anthony Mann saying in a written ruling that "the bottom line ... is that the bankruptcy order stands".

## UK royals tour Ravenna on final day of Italy state visit



Britain's King Charles and Queen Camilla tour the city of Ravenna, on the last day of their state visit to Italy, yesterday.

## RBI proposes stricter gold loan guidelines

Reuters  
Mumbai

India's central bank has proposed stricter guidelines for lenders disbursing gold-secured loans, aiming to enhance underwriting processes, improve collateral management and monitor the end-use of such funds.

Banks' gold loans jumped 30% between September and February, sharply outpacing the growth in overall loans that was curtailed by tighter norms for unsecured lending.

That surge in gold loans was despite the central bank's warning in September that it found several irregular practices in the gold loan industry.

Now, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed a raft of guidelines including establishing appropriate single-borrower limits and sectoral limits for lenders' gold loan portfolios, mechanisms to ensure end-use, 75% loan-to-value ratio and standards of gold purity.

Furthermore, lenders can renew or top up gold loans only if the existing loans are not stressed and the permissible loan-to-value ratio has some headroom, the central bank said.

The RBI also said one gold collateral cannot be used for two different loans simultaneously and also barred lenders from issuing loans if the collateral is re-pledged or its ownership is doubtful.

It also made it incumbent on lenders to use a standardised procedure across all its branches to assess the weight and purity of the gold collateral.

It has also mandated that lenders periodically monitor and maintain documentary evidence of how a borrower is using the loaned amount.

Separately, the RBI also said that the pool of stressed assets being securitised by any financial institutions should be homogenous, meaning personal or business loans to individuals and small loans to micro enterprises be kept separate from other types of loans.

# Rats feasting on rubbish lead to health warnings in Birmingham

Reuters  
London

Rats feasting on mounds of rotting rubbish during a refuse collection strike in Britain's second-biggest city have led to warnings of a public health crisis, with no end in sight to the long-running dispute.

Birmingham City Council declared a major incident last month after it clashed with the Unite union over jobs, pay and conditions, prompting refuse workers to go on strike.

Unite is a longtime ally of Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour Party, which holds the majority on the city council, but it has become increasingly critical of government recently.

Starmer's tough stance on the strike has led to a war of words with Unite, one of Britain's biggest unions, and the standoff has led to piles of black bin bags build-

ing up on roadsides throughout the city, with some residents dumping mattresses and furniture on top.

Social media and news reports have been dominated by talk of large rats eating through the rubbish or long queues of traffic as households take their waste to collection sites. Health secretary Wes Streeting said this week he was concerned about the public health situation.

One resident dressed as a giant rat attended a public meeting on

Tuesday to joke that local politicians were helping feed their "rodent" family.

"We can go around and rampage in the streets - it's great," the resident told the Local Democracy Reporting Service, a scheme funded by the BBC to help local news outlets employ journalists.

The council has been forced to find cuts in local spending after it was effectively declared bankrupt in 2023 over its liabilities relating to historic equal pay claims.

Unite says the council removed a job level which it argues will force some of its workers to take a huge pay cut.

The council says it has made a fair offer and no workers should lose any money. It has accused picketing workers of blocking rubbish trucks from leaving depots. By March 31, it said around 17,000 tonnes of waste was uncollected.

The crisis has particularly hit some parts of the city. Clive Chapman, 49, in Balsall

Heath, said few people in his inner city area had access to their own transport to remove rubbish, meaning large rubbish containers were overflowing.

"We're in a part of the city that's been totally neglected," he said. "It's not very good."

The government says it has urged the two sides to find a solution, with Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner telling parliament on Monday it was trying to end the "misery".





# US House votes to curb judges' power

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

The US House of Representatives has passed a bill to limit federal judges' power to oppose President Donald Trump's policies with injunctions, after the White House blasted such hurdles.

The House voted 219-213 along largely party lines in favour of the No Rogue Rulings Act, a bill that top Republican lawmakers have called a priority after numerous judges ruled against Trump's executive orders and policies used to implement his immigration crack-down and government downsizing initiatives.

The bill now goes to the Senate, where it faces long odds of securing the 60 votes needed to become law.

Republicans have only a 53-47 majority in the Senate, where similar legislation to limit nationwide injunctions is pending.

In the Senate, 60 votes are needed to overcome a potential filibuster.

Wednesday's bill would prevent district court judges from issuing rulings with nationwide effects, instead restricting their orders to only the parties in the case at hand.

"We are taking on activist rulings and restoring the balance of power," said Republican Congressman Darrell Issa, who authored the bill.

The White House had on Tuesday backed the text, saying that "activist federal courts are weap-

onising" injunctions "in an attempt to undermine President Trump's legitimate powers".

Many of Trump's executive orders since he began his second term have been challenged in court, with federal judges often suspending them in the belief that the president has overstepped his bounds – including at the expense of Congress.

On Wednesday, federal judges in Texas and New York temporarily blocked expulsions of foreigners under a wartime law dating back to the 18th century.

The Trump administration has used the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to expel alleged members of a Venezuelan gang without due process.

In response to the rulings, the White House has stepped up attacks on the judiciary.

Trump himself called in March for the impeachment of a federal judge who had ordered a halt to a deportation drive – drawing a rare rebuke from the Supreme Court's chief justice John Roberts.

Republican Speaker Mike Johnson has touted it as an alternative to calls by some of Trump's allies in the chamber to impeach judges who block the Republican president's agenda.

"No one single activist judge should be able to issue a nationwide injunction to stop a president's policies," Johnson told Fox News host Sean Hannity on Monday night ahead of the vote.

"That's not the way the framers intended this to work, and we're going to put them back in check."

## Trump targets former officials who criticised him

US President Donald Trump has ordered extraordinary Justice Department investigations into two members of his previous administration, including one he alleged may have committed "treason".

Trump also stripped the former officials – Miles Taylor, who worked in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Christopher Krebs, the former director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) – of their security clearances.

Taylor, while serving in DHS during Trump's first term, penned an Op-Ed piece in the *New York Times* in 2018 under the pseudonym "Anonymous" that excoriated Trump and caused a sensation at the time.

"The root of the problem is the president's amorality," Taylor said, accusing the president of making "half-baked, ill-informed and occasionally reckless decisions".

Taylor went on to reveal his identity after leaving the first Trump administration and wrote another book titled *A Warning*.

White House Staff Secretary Will Scharf accused Taylor during an Oval Office signing

ceremony on Wednesday of leaking classified information while at the DHS and making "outrageous claims both about (the Trump) administration and about others in it".

The presidential memorandum signed by Trump targeting Taylor is "going to order the Department of Justice to investigate his activities to see what else might come up in that context", Scharf said.

Trump, speaking to reporters in the Oval Office, accused Taylor of saying "all sorts of lies, bad things".

"I think it's like a traitor, it's like spying," he said. "We're going to find out whether or not somebody is allowed to do that."

"I think it's a very important case and I think he's guilty of treason if you want to know the truth," Trump said. "But we'll find out."

Taylor reacted to the news on X, writing: "Dissent isn't unlawful. It certainly isn't treasonous. America is headed down a dark path."

Krebs was fired, by tweet, by Trump in November 2020 after the former issued a report saying that there was no credible evidence of fraud in the election won by Democrat Joe Bi-

den and it was the "most secure in American history".

Scharf told Trump that the presidential memorandum on Krebs "instructs your Department of Justice, other aspects of your government, to investigate some of the malign acts that he participated in".

"This guy, Krebs, was saying, 'Oh, the election was great. It was great,'" Trump said. "Well, it's been proven that it was not only not great. It was a very corrupt election."

"So we'll find out whether or not it was a safe election, and if it wasn't, he's got a big price to pay, and he's a bad guy."

Since taking office in January, Trump has targeted a number of former officials he views as his political enemies, stripping them of their government security clearances or their personal security details.

Trump, the first convicted felon to serve in the White House, has also moved to settle scores with several large law companies that represented his political foes in the past or helped bring him to court on civil or criminal charges. – **AFP**

## RFK Jr says government study will reveal cause of autism 'epidemic'

The United States government will identify the cause of autism by September this year, US Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F Kennedy Jr said yesterday.

"At your direction, we are going to know by September. We've launched a massive testing and research effort that's going to involve hundreds of scientists from around the world," Kennedy said at a meeting of President Donald Trump's cabinet. "By September, we will know what has caused the autism epidemic and we'll be able to eliminate those exposures."

Trump in February ordered the creation of a "Make America Healthy Again" Commission made up of Kennedy and other secretaries to look at everything from the rates of autism and asthma in children to how much medicine is being prescribed to them for ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) or other conditions.

Autism diagnoses in the United States have increased significantly since 2000, intensifying public concern.

Scientists have been researching for decades

what genetic or environmental factors might contribute to autism, but the causes of most cases remain unclear.

They say that the major drivers of the increase in US autism rates are an expanded definition that includes more types of behaviours and more widespread awareness and diagnosis.

Kennedy has long promoted a debunked link between vaccines and autism despite scientific evidence to the contrary.

"The autism rates have gone – from our most recent numbers, we think are going to be about one in 31 from one in 10,000 when I was a kid," he said, without offering more detail or citing the source of the figures.

The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently puts the rate of autism in children in the United States at one in 36.

Once a celebrated environmental lawyer who accused climate-change deniers of being traitors, for the past two decades Kennedy has promoted conspiracy theories linking childhood vaccines to autism and even questioning whether germs cause disease. – **Reuters/AFP**

## Trump must face lawsuit from Central Park Five defendants

US President Donald Trump has failed to persuade a federal judge to dismiss a lawsuit accusing him of making defamatory statements about five black and Hispanic men who were wrongly convicted and imprisoned for the 1989 rape of a white jogger in New York's Central Park.

Philadelphia-based US District Judge Wendy Beetlestone ruled yesterday that the men had presented enough evidence for now to pursue their lawsuit accusing Trump of defaming them in comments he made during the 2024 presidential campaign.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court last October by Yusef Saalam, Raymond Santana, Kevin Richardson, Antron Brown and Corey Wise.

The plaintiffs are seeking unspecified monetary damages for reputational and emotional harms as well as punitive damages.

Shanin Specter, lead attorney for the plaintiffs, in a statement yesterday welcomed the judge's ruling and said he and his clients "look forward to discovery, trial and the ultimate vindication of these five fine men".

The White House declined to comment. A lawyer representing Trump in the lawsuit did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

# US ATF deputy director resigns under pressure

Reuters  
Washington

The second-ranking official at the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has resigned after being given the option to leave or be removed, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters yesterday.

Marvin Richardson, a 35-year ATF veteran, resigned on Wednesday as deputy director of the agency, which is tasked with investigating firearm, bomb and arson-related crimes.

Reuters reported on Wednesday that

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Kash Patel had been removed by President Donald Trump's administration as acting ATF director and replaced by Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll.

Richardson had served as ATF deputy director since 2019, and was its acting director from June 2021 through April 2022.

A Justice Department spokesperson declined to comment.

Richardson could not be immediately reached for comment.

Marvin's departure could exacerbate a leadership vacuum at the agency.

Senior Justice Department (DOJ) officials are considering whether to merge the ATF

with the US Drug Enforcement Administration as part of an effort to cut costs.

Patel's abrupt removal as acting ATF director came as a shock to ATF employees.

US officials have not explained the reason for the change, though a DOJ official told Reuters on Wednesday that it was not related to Patel's job performance.

US Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll, who is travelling outside of the United States this week, will continue to hold both roles.

Attorney-General Pam Bondi, who has made gun rights a part of her agenda, has launched a task force to focus on enforcing the Second Amendment of the US Constitution, which protects the right to bear

arms, according to a memo seen by Reuters.

Before Patel was made acting ATF director on February 24, Bondi fired the bureau's former chief counsel, multiple sources told Reuters at the time.

Bondi later appeared on Fox News, where she said without providing evidence that she had fired the ATF lawyer because people at the bureau were "targeting gun owners".

The DOJ has since installed Robert Leider, a law professor at George Mason's Antonin Scalia Law School who clerked for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and specialises in Second Amendment issues.

# Lima grinds to a halt as Peru's transit workers demand action against crime

Reuters  
Lima

Public transportation workers in Peru's capital of Lima went on strike yesterday, stranding tens of thousands of people as they marched to Congress demanding action against a surging crime wave that has led to record number of murders.

The government urged employers and schools to prioritise remote work and classes due to limited transportation and possible clashes between protesters and police.

Murders in Peru spiked in 2024 by more than a third to 2,059 from 1,508 in 2023, government figures showed.

From January to March, homicides rose by 100 year-on-year to 562.

Murders and extortion against transit workers have also risen, with more than a dozen killed this year.

"This has to stop! Sixteen drivers have been killed by hit men this year alone," Martin Valeriano, leader of a transit union in Lima, told reporters during the march.

On Tuesday, three public bus drivers were shot and one was killed in separate incidents by unknown gunmen on motorcycles, according to witnesses and the police.



People try to board a police bus in Lima during a strike called by public transport companies against extortion and lack of security. – **AFP**

The government declared a state of emergency in mid-March to deploy soldiers to help battle street violence after Paul Flores, a famous Cumbia musician, was killed when his tour bus was gunned down by unknown assailants.

During the march to Congress, transit workers flanked by hundreds of police officers carried signs reading: "No more driver deaths" and "Justice for the dead drivers", among others.

Police Chief of Staff General Oscar Arriola said the government has mobilised 13,000 police and

military personnel in Lima and the neighbouring province of Callao to provide security for people travelling to work.

Police have also provided 22 buses to help transport people around the capital.

President Dina Boluarte, whose popularity has fallen to historic lows according to polls, set up a "war room" in March with police, the military and her cabinet to deal with the crime wave, but she has drawn criticism from opposition parties and transit unions as crime continues to rise.

## NIH scientists not allowed to attend conferences

Researchers at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) have been told that they cannot attend scientific conferences and meetings without official permission, even if they pay their own way and go during time off, three current and former NIH scientists told Reuters.

The policy was communicated verbally by managers in at least three of the NIH's 27 institutes and centres but not put into writing, the three sources said.

It covers all scientific meetings including conferences, workshops and investigator meetings even if they are local or free, they said.

"We may not attend a conference even if we pay our own way and use personal leave. Even if we don't use our (NIH) affiliation. What one does on their own time is not anyone else's business," said one currently employed NIH scientist who requested anonymity for fear of reprisal.

Virtual attendance is allowed, the same scientist was told, but not all conferences and events have that option.

The NIH and the Department of Health and Human Services did not respond to requests for comment.

The administration of President Donald Trump issued written guidance on February 26 to NIH staff prohibiting official travel for 30 days, including for scientists participating in conferences to present or learn about scientific data, according to an internal notice seen by Reuters.

The external communications policy was never formally extended but two of the sources say that they were told it remains in place.

NIH scientists say attending conferences helps them determine whether outside researchers are on track with federally-funded studies. – **Reuters**

## US DOJ bars its attorneys from ABA events

The US Department of Justice (DOJ) has barred its attorneys from travelling to or speaking at American Bar Association (ABA) events, in the latest salvo by President Donald Trump's administration against the nation's largest voluntary lawyer group.

US Deputy Attorney-General Todd Blanche in a memo seen by Reuters said the ABA had been engaging in "activist causes" contrary to the department's mission, including by suing to block Trump from cutting funding to foreign aid organisations.

"The Department is actively litigating against the ABA, yet the Department continues to expend taxpayer dollars on ABA events," Blanche wrote.

He said while the ABA is free to "litigate in support of activist causes", he did not want the department to participate in events in their official capacities that might undermine its mission to remain "fair, effective and even-handed".

The ABA had no immediate comment.

DOJ officials have often used ABA events to roll out new policies on corporate enforcement.

Former attorney-general Merrick Garland spoke at the ABA's white-collar conference last year.

However, the Trump administration has criticised the ABA, which has about 150,000 paying members, after the organisation made public statements that the Republican president is threatening the rule of law and for condemning government officials' attacks on judges and law firms.

A White House spokesperson in March dismissed the ABA as a "snooty" organisation of "leftist lawyers".

Federal Trade Commission Chairman Andrew Ferguson in February barred political appointees to the commission from holding leadership positions within the ABA or participating in its events.

The ABA also faces pressure from the Trump administration and other Republicans to end its lawyer and law student diversity and inclusion efforts.

US Attorney-General Pam Bondi in February threatened to revoke the ABA's status as the government-designated accreditor of US law schools. – **Reuters**

## Palin, New York Times to face off in defamation retrial

Sarah Palin and the *New York Times* are headed back to a courtroom where the former Alaska governor and Republican vice-presidential candidate will try convincing a second jury that the newspaper defamed her in an editorial about gun control.

A retrial in Palin's nearly eight-year-old lawsuit is scheduled to begin on Monday in Manhattan federal court.

Palin, 61, who was defeated in her 2008 bid for the nation's second-highest office, lost her first trial

against the *Times* and former editorial page editor James Bennet in 2022.

However, last August, the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan found that the verdict tainted by several rulings by the presiding judge, and ordered a retrial.

The lawsuit stemmed from a June 14, 2017 editorial, *America's Lethal Politics*, that wrongly suggested that Palin may have incited a January 2011 mass shooting in an Arizona parking lot. – **Reuters**



## Global plastic recycling rates ‘stagnant’ at under 10%: study

The amount of plastic being recycled around the world is stagnant at less than 10% with most new plastic still made from fossil fuels, a new study said yesterday.

Researchers from Tsinghua University in China said the rate of recycling had barely budged even as plastic production had exploded, presenting a “pressing global environmental challenge”.

Their findings, published in the journal *Communications Earth & Environment*, come as nations prepare to battle again over a treaty to address plastic pollution after the last round of negotiations failed to broker an agreement.

Plastic has been found in the depths of the remotest oceans and in snow atop the highest mountains, and tiny particles

have been detected in blood and breast milk.

Yet despite growing international concern, there has been “a notable lack of comprehensive analysis of plastics along their supply chain”, wrote Quanyin Tan and colleagues.

To address this, they drew on national statistics, industry reports, and international databases to create the first detailed global analysis of the plastics sector in 2022 from manufacture to disposal.

They found that just 9.5% of the 400mm tonnes of new plastic in 2022 was produced from recycled materials.

“The global recycling rate remained stagnant ... reflecting little improvement from previous years,” wrote the authors.

The rest was produced from fossil fu-

els, predominantly oil and gas, demonstrating “little progress” in addressing environmental concerns related to plastics production.

“The high reliance on fossil-fuel feedstocks for plastics production will further compromise the global efforts to mitigate climate change,” the authors wrote.

Contamination with food and labels made some plastics more difficult to recycle, while the diversity and complexity of additives in materials posed another obstacle.

However, another hindrance is purely economic: it is often cheaper to make new or “virgin” plastic than it is to recycle it.

“This economic barrier discourages investment in recycling infrastructure and technology, perpetuating the cycle of low

recycling rates,” the authors wrote.

They identified the United States, the largest consumer of plastic per capita, as having one of the lowest recycling rates with just 5% reused.

They also noted a “significant shift” in global waste disposal, with landfill in decline and around one-third of plastic waste being incinerated.

Landfill remained the main destination for most plastic waste, accounting for 40% of the global total.

However, burning was “emerging as the most practiced method for managing plastic waste” with the European Union, China and Japan having among the highest incineration rates.

However, the study did not account for “the significant role” of informal waste

disposal schemes, which could affect the overall recycling rate, the study authors noted.

In September, a separate study in *Nature* by researchers from the University of Leeds found that burning plastic in dumps and open fires was as big a problem for the planet as littering.

That study said that burning plastic informally, mostly in poorer countries where no alternatives exist, spread plastic in the environment, worsened air quality, and exposed workers to toxic chemicals.

The authors of the more recent study said they hoped their research would “support the treaty negotiations” for a world-first plastic treaty which resume in August in Geneva after the last round collapsed. – **AFP**

## Russia, US swap prisoners in push for closer ties

The United States has exchanged a sanctions-busting suspect for a ballet dancer held by Russia, the second swap under President Donald Trump as Moscow and Washington push to rebuild ties.

Moscow released a Los Angeles-based ballet dancer convicted in Russia of “treason” over a one-time donation worth around \$50 to a pro-Ukraine charity. Ksenia Karelina holds dual US-Russian nationality.

Washington released Arthur Petrov, a Russian-German national accused of illegally exporting US-made electronics to manufacturers supplying the Russian military.

The exchange took place at an airport in Abu Dhabi, where a dozen people wearing suits were present, video posted by Russia's FSB security service showed.

Trump has sought to reset ties with Moscow since taking office, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine three years ago plunged bilateral relations to their lowest point since the Cold War.

“American Ksenia Karelina is on a plane back home to the United States,” US Secretary of State Marco Rubio wrote on social media platform X. “She was wrongfully detained by Russia for over a year.”

Trump will “continue to work for the release of ALL Americans”, Rubio added.

The FSB video showed Petrov seated on a plane after he was freed, telling an unseen interviewer that he had not slept for

two days but otherwise had no complaints.

Petrov, arrested in Cyprus in 2023 and extradited to the United States, was facing 20 years in a US jail for violating export controls.

Karelina, 33, was serving a 12-year prison sentence for having donated around \$50 to a pro-Ukraine charity.

She was arrested in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg in January 2024 while on a trip to visit her family and charged with “treason”.

In mid-February, following a call between Putin and Trump, Russia released Kalob Wayne Byers, a 28-year-old US citizen arrested at a Moscow airport for transporting cannabis gummy sweets.

Washington and Moscow also exchanged US teacher Marc Fogel for Russian computer expert Alexander Vinnik in early February.

The largest US-Russia prisoner exchange since the end of the Cold War took place on August 1, 2024.

It involved the release of journalists, including *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, and dissidents held in Russia in exchange for alleged Russian spies held in the West.

Several American citizens remain incarcerated in Russia.

Washington has accused Moscow of using them as bargaining chips to secure the release of Russians held in the United States. – **AFP**

## Countries must do more to resolve conflicts: ICRC chief

States must do more to resolve the world's crises as budget cuts force aid agencies to scale back their operations, a top Red Cross official said yesterday.

His comments came in the wake of drastic cuts to international aid funding by a number of countries, particularly the United States, which had long been the world's biggest donor.

“It is completely legitimate for humanitarian action to be questioned, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) director-general Pierre Krahenbuhl told Swiss daily *Le Temps*.

“We can be told to do better with less,” he said. But states had to be more “coherent” in their response, he argued.

“They tend to accept that (conflicts) drag on and that humanitarian action is there” to step in, said Krahenbuhl.

“Above all, we need states to seek to resolve the conflicts in question,” he added.

There was too much reliance on aid agencies, and it was deeply “regrettable to see that some see dialogue and mediation as a sign of weakness”, said Krahenbuhl. “The nonchalance with which human beings go to war only to later say ‘never again’ is very disturbing.”

Since US President Donald Trump took office, Washington has announced the cancellation of 83% of programmes at the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

A number of UN agencies have already begun slashing jobs globally and have warned they will need to scale back their operations and lower their ambitions.

“Everyone is very worried,” said Krahenbuhl from Geneva – home not only to the Red Cross headquarters but also the United Nations' European headquarters and hundreds of international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). – **AFP**

### Top Tanzanian politician charged with treason

Tanzania's main opposition leader Tundu Lissu was charged yesterday with treason, which carries the death penalty, a day after being detained following a rally, one of his lawyers told AFP.

The east African nation has increasingly cracked down on its opposition, with Lissu's Chadema party accusing President Samia Suluhu Hassan of returning to the repressive tactics of her predecessor months before October's general election.

Lissu and other party members were detained on Wednesday after attending a rally in Mbinga, a town in the southern Ruvuma region, where Chadema said police officers dispersed the crowds with tear gas.

While Lissu has been arrested before – and usually released soon after – this is the first time he has faced such a serious charge.

Tanzania is scheduled to hold presidential and national assembly elections in October. – **AFP**

# Europe holds fresh ‘coalition of willing’ talks on Ukraine

AFP/Reuters

Brussels

European defence ministers held fresh talks yesterday on the potential deployment of troops to secure any Ukraine ceasefire, but there were more questions than answers as US peace efforts with Russia stall.

Britain and France are spearheading discussions among a “coalition of the willing” of 30 countries looking to shore up any deal US President Donald Trump might strike.

“Our planning is real and substantial. Our plans are well developed,” the UK defence minister, John Healey, told the meeting at North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) headquarters in Brussels. “Our reassurance force for Ukraine would be a committed and credible security arrangement to ensure that any negotiated peace does bring what President Trump has pledged, a lasting peace for Ukraine.”

Healey said he did not envisage “a peace-keeping force that will separate the currently warring sides down the line of contact”.

Bolstering Ukraine's battered forces would be a key part of the plans, he added.

France's Sebastian Lecornu echoed his British counterpart, saying that “the first guarantee

of security is obviously support for the Ukrainian army, which means refusing to demilitarise Ukraine, as Russia is demanding”.

Many senior European officials assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin is not interested in halting his invasion but they are keen to show US President Donald Trump that they are ready to play their part if his outreach to Moscow pays off.

Trump has made clear he expects Europeans to secure any peace that may result from his administration's talks.

Ukraine has said it is ready to accept a ceasefire while Russia has said it needs answers to multiple questions before it can decide.

London and Paris insist progress has been made at repeated rounds of talks – and military planners will now step up work on how to secure any peace in the skies, at sea and on land.

However, ministers from other countries said there was still uncertainty over the aims of any possible deployment – and whether it would be backed up by US military might.

“What is the potential mission, what is going to be the goal?” asked Dutch Defence Minister Ruben Brekelmans.

“What is the mandate? What would we do in the different scenarios, for example, if there would be any escalation regarding Russia?” he

added. “It's very important to have the United States on board, but then it also needs to be clear what type of mission it is and what we ask from the United States.”

European officials say that so far six countries – including Britain, France, and the Baltic states – have said that they could contribute troops.

Sweden's Pal Jonson said that Stockholm had “a number of questions that we need to get clarified” before making any commitments.

“It's helpful if there's a clarity of what that mission would entail, and what do we do – if we are peacekeeping, deterrence or reassurance,” the minister said.

A major problem for European allies as they scramble to come up with any plan is that they are largely in the dark about US efforts with Russia to halt the fighting.

Trump's administration has held several rounds of talks with both Ukrainian and Russian officials hoping to secure a halt in fighting, without seeing any tangible results.

The two sides in principle agreed to stop targeting energy infrastructure but they never cemented the conditions and strikes have continued.

Russia so far has said it would not accept troops any Nato countries be stationed on Ukrainian soil as part of a peace deal.

## Francis makes surprise visit to St Peter’s Basilica

Pope Francis, who is recovering from life-threatening pneumonia, made an unscheduled visit to St Peter's Basilica yesterday, his second surprise event in two days after previously meeting King Charles III.

The public appearance, after Wednesday's unscheduled private audience with the king and Queen Camilla, comes as the 88-year-old Catholic leader recovers at the Vatican after five weeks in hospital.

In a video verified by Reuters, the 88-year-old Pontiff is seen in a wheelchair wearing black pants and with a striped blanket wrapped around his chest.

The Pope rarely makes public appearances wearing civilian garb rather than his traditional papal vestments, but has occasionally dressed down during some trips abroad.

The date of the video recording was verified by Reuters by its metadata and confirmed by the person who shared it.

“We were visiting St Peter's Basilica and saw some guards passing by and making way, so we went to see what it was, and it was the Pope,” said Luiz Gil, who took the video. “Few people noticed, it was very quick, but he stopped to talk to a family with a baby.”

Vatican News later reported that the Pope greeted workers engaged in restoration work and some gathered pilgrims, Vatican News reported.

A video published by Ansa news agency showed the Pope wearing a cannula – a tube tucked into the nostrils – to help him breathe.

When a young restorer caught a glimpse of the Pope, he beckoned to her to come closer so he could thank her and shake her hand, Ansa reported.

The woman replied “that she was sorry that her ‘hands were cold’ but the Pope wanted to shake them anyway”.

Monsignor Valerio Di Palma, the canon of St Peter's, told Vatican News that the Pope's appearance sparked “too much emotion”.

“My vision blurred from the

tears and I couldn't even take a photo,” he said.

On Wednesday afternoon, the Pope met privately with Charles and Camilla for 20 minutes, despite Buckingham Palace having earlier cancelled a planned official audience due to the Pontiff's frail health.

It was the first meeting between Charles, the head of the Protestant Church of England, and the Pope since the monarch ascended to the throne in 2022.

The Vatican published a photo of the meeting yesterday morning, showing the Pope clasping the queen's hand, with the king nearby holding a gift box.

Francis offered his congratulations to the royal couple, who celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary on Wednesday, the palace and the Vatican said.

During the encounter, the king – who is receiving treatment for cancer – and the Pope also exchanged well-wishes for each other's health, the Vatican said.

“Their majesties were delighted the Pope was well enough to host them – and to have had the opportunity to share their best wishes in person,” a Buckingham Palace statement added.

Charles, 76, has been suffering from an unnamed cancer for more than a year and less than two weeks ago he was briefly admitted to hospital after experiencing side effects from his treatment.

He was out of action for a matter of days before resuming his official engagements on April 1.

Francis, who almost died twice during his treatment for double pneumonia, has been in convalescence since his return to the Vatican on March 23.

Despite being ordered to rest and recover for two months, the Argentine made an unexpected appearance in St Peter's Square last Sunday at the end of a mass.

On Tuesday, the Vatican said that Francis's voice and mobility were improving, raising hopes that he may take part in upcoming Easter celebrations. – **AFP/Reuters**



Pope Francis is seen during his surprise visit to St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in this screengrab taken from a handout video. – **Reuters**

### Pakistan to seek fresh bids for PIA: adviser

The Pakistani government will seek fresh expressions of interest for the sale of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) later this month, a government adviser said yesterday, two days after the PIA reported its first annual profit in over two decades.

Pakistan has been looking to offload a 51-100% stake in debt-ridden PIA, part of an effort to raise funds and reform cash-bleeding state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as envisaged under a \$7bn International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme.

However, Islamabad's attempt to privatise the PIA last year fell flat when it received only a single offer, well below the asking price of \$300mn.

Pakistan has offloaded almost all of the national carrier's legacy debt and shifted it to government books after bidders raised issues that had led to the failed attempt, according to the privatisation ministry.

### Turkiye courts order release of 107 students detained over mass protests

Turkish courts have ordered the release of at least 107 students arrested during protests against the jailing of Istanbul's popular mayor, a lawyer told AFP.

Nearly 2,000 people, including more than 300 students, were arrested in a crackdown on the protests after the March 19 arrest of Ekrem Imamoglu on graft charges.

Imamoglu, a leading opposition figure, is the chief political rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Lawyers and politicians supportive of Imamoglu have slammed “police brutality” towards students arrested over the protests.

Yesterday two Istanbul courts ordered 107 students' release, lawyer Ferhat Guzel said.

The court also lifted house arrests ordered for 25 students, he added.

The majority of the young protesters, most of them aged about 20, were attending rallies for the first time in their lives but found themselves in the dock as a result, while their anxious parents watched.

Erdogan has accused the opposition party of “darkening” the lives of young people.

Some of the students were detained during clashes with police outside City Hall last month.

“If the lives of those young people are darkened, it is again you, as the CHP, who darkened those lives,” Erdogan said. “You call the youth to the streets, have them attack the police, then you shamelessly shed crocodile tears.” – **AFP**



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TIMES

# Looming shadows of Trump tariffs

It has been only two and a half months since Donald Trump returned to the White House, but the world has already fundamentally changed.

Trump is rapidly undermining US trade relations and the global system of free trade that the United States helped establish after 1945. His bid to “liberate” the US economy with escalating tariffs represents an essential change from the more modest trade-war tactics deployed during his first term. According to the Yale Budget Lab, the average US tariff rate is now at its highest level since 1909.

Trump is also casting doubt on America’s longstanding alliances, not least Nato and the security guarantees that it represents. In late February, he publicly humiliated Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office, then showed the Ukrainian president the door. Since then, US support for Ukraine has effectively ended, giving Russian President Vladimir Putin a stronger hand than he has had in years. Trump has made no effort to hide the fact that his sympathies lie with Russia, the aggressor, rather than with Ukraine, the beleaguered democracy that has been fighting for its freedom and sovereignty.

Trump has also suggested that the US should take control of Gaza, expel its population to other Arab states, and turn the enclave into a resort. And he continues to talk about annexing Canada, Greenland, and the Panama Canal. Apparently, it is not enough for the US to control most of the Western Hemisphere; Trump wants to own it, too.

While everyone expected turmoil, few anticipated brazen imperialism. Pundits and commentators have long interpreted “America First” as a revival of the isolationist movement that was active before World War II, but Trump seems to have something else in mind. He wants a world where a handful of global superpowers compete – violently if necessary – for resources, raw materials, and spheres of influence.

The pain, hardship, and injustice will get only worse from here

On the home front, he has allowed the world’s richest man, Elon Musk – the vanguard leader of a Silicon Valley-based techno-fascist movement – to gut the American state under the guise of cost-cutting, elimination of waste and fraud, and deregulation. The mass firings and demolition of entire agencies will have lasting consequences, which are painful to consider. The gutting of USAID alone may result in hundreds of thousands of deaths in Africa and other vulnerable regions of the world.

Faced with such cruel, wanton destruction, one must ask the essential question: What does any of this actually do for the US? Will it make the country stronger? If we evaluate the administration’s decisions strictly in light of America’s own interests – maintaining its global power and influence – the only possible answer is no. Trump’s policies, both foreign and domestic, increasingly seem to be geared toward weakening America – or even toward its self-destruction.

After all, the US gains nothing from hostility toward Europe. By alienating its allies, it is destroying one of the main pillars of its superpower status. For decades, “the West” – an unrivalled geopolitical framework of military alliances and trade relationships – served as a force multiplier for US power and influence. It is why America handily won the Cold War and grew stronger than any power in history. Who benefits from throwing all that away? Only Russia and China, which have been quietly watching and waiting as America commits suicide.

We can already say that there will be no return to the previous international order. Trump has destroyed trust in the US for at least a generation. American commitments are no longer credible. The country’s institutions – including major media outlets, universities, and law firms – are crumbling before our eyes. The US will still enjoy a unique geographical position between the Atlantic and the Pacific, but the rest of the world will know that Trumpism has become an enduring feature of its politics.

The disappearance of “the West” and the collapse of American leadership (and democracy) will dramatically alter world politics in the twenty-first century. Order will give way to chaos, and the risk of war will increase as rival superpowers jockey for position. American society itself will remain polarised, consumed by irrationalism, and prone to conspiracy theories.

In his 1935 novel *It Can’t Happen Here*, Sinclair Lewis imagines the rise of a dictator to mirror the Fascist and Nazi regimes in Europe. Now, 90 years later, his dystopia is materialising. Like Goethe following the Battle of Valmy in 1792, when the Prussian army retreated before the French revolutionary forces, we are witnessing the start of a new era in world history. The pain, hardship, and injustice will get only worse from here. — Project Syndicate

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# Fear grips Silicon Valley after tariff turmoil delays IPOs

By Katie Roof, Kate Clark and Yazhou Sun Bloomberg

This was supposed to be the year that Silicon Valley’s years long backlog of billion-dollar startups were finally able to go public, delivering riches to venture capitalists. Instead, President Donald Trump’s promises of sweeping tariffs and the havoc in global markets have thrown those plans into limbo, threatening to plunge the VC and startup industry into crisis.

Most major public listings planned for this year are on ice, with StubHub Holdings Inc, payments firm Klarna Group Plc and trading platform eToro Group Ltd all pausing their preparations. Some of these businesses, like Klarna, intend to list as soon as the market stabilises. But others aiming to go public this year, particularly those directly impacted by the tariffs, may struggle to reach that goal altogether.

A significant delay to initial public offerings could starve venture capitalists of cash at a critical moment. “A major source of anxiety is going to be around the exit markets and whether or not they are open,” said Tomasz Tunguz, founder of Theory Ventures. “If we have another two years of no liquidity, it’s going to be really problematic for the asset class.”

On Monday, the mood inside Silicon Valley VC firms was tense – similar to the environment in March of 2020, in the run-up to the global pandemic. “We’ve had a lot of Slack traffic over the last few days,” said Jake Saper, a general partner at Emergence Capital, with investors and founders rushing to make sense of the new policies. One founder told Saper her

company’s customers were feeling “Covid-level fear and uncertainty.”

“We’ve been through so many crises now,” Saper said, that the firm has an emergency playbook, starting with identifying the hardest-hit companies and helping them respond. Tariffs are likely to impact startups dealing with hardware and international trade, such as e-commerce-related businesses, investors say. And AI companies may also see an increase in computing prices.

“We are trying to triage and figure out which ones will have the most pain early on,” Saper said.

Many in the industry caution that it’s too early to know what the impact of the tariffs will be – partly due to uncertainty over whether the policies will stick. Meanwhile, volatility in the public markets is “going to be giving everyone whiplash,” said Pegah Ebrahimi, a co-founder of venture firm FPV Ventures.

Stock prices reflect “an incredible amount of self-imposed tariff chaos,” said Byron Deeter, a partner at Bessemer Venture Partners and chair of the National Venture Capital Association. The result is that potential IPO investors are “completely distracted.” His firm, a backer of would-be public companies StubHub and Hinge Health, is watching the markets carefully, he said, and waiting for a reprieve. “Let’s all hope it’s in days or weeks instead of months or quarters.”

For some planned IPOs, “we’re now looking at 2026 at the earliest,” said Mitchell Green, founder of growth equity firm Lead Edge Capital. That means further delaying payouts to the investors in VC funds for another six to 12 months, he said, on top of an existing multiyear drought. “This comes amid an investment environment already starved for liquidity,” Green said.

Chris Farmer, partner and chief executive officer at SignalFire, expressed relief that the firm just completed its new fundraising, calling the timing “very fortunate.” He said there’s a risk that some limited partners are going to grow even more skittish, worsening an already tough environment. “Budgets will get pulled if they believe they are not going to get the distributions they are baking on.”

Unable to sell their stakes in startups on the public markets, some investors may turn to private shares sales instead. “If the secondary market is the only place to access high-growth private companies in a closed IPO environment, we anticipate seeing high demand for quality companies,” said Charlie Grimes, head of global capital markets at Forge Global, a trading platform for private companies.

In the short term, market uncertainty could make it harder for buyers and sellers on secondary markets to agree on a price. But a sustained lack of public offerings could make private trading more active.

“The big question is on pricing and whether valuations will reset yet again,” Grimes said, referring to the slowly fluctuating share prices of pre-IPO companies. While Wall Street valuations have an effect on startups, private markets are less reactive to day-to-day volatility, he said, and it can take weeks or even months for pricing changes to materialise.

Investors looking to cash out of startup investments are also hopeful an uptick in large venture-backed acquisitions will provide some relief. David Chen, Morgan Stanley’s global head of technology investment banking, said last month that economic uncertainty meant “the sellers’ willingness to transact has actually improved” – and that with no clear IPO window

in sight, acquisitions can become more attractive.

However, volatility can also lead to disagreements between buyers and sellers about acquisition prices. And tariffs could create added challenges for cross-border deal-making.

Some of Trump’s most vocal supporters in tech remain hopeful that tariffs could help America in the long-run, despite the recent investor unrest. Some VCs have stressed that the move will help the US reduce dependence on foreign trade for products like drones. “Do the hard things and have a 70% chance you win,” Sequoia Capital partner Shaun Maguire said in a post on X.

Nik Talreja, CEO of Sydecar, outlined a different potential upside to the market turmoil in a memo to employees reviewed by Bloomberg. “In an environment where public equity and debt markets pull back, there is the potential for private markets to remain an interesting place to invest capital,” he wrote.

But Talreja, whose company develops software for venture capitalists to manage their funds, also cautioned that the private markets could follow Wall Street to a slowdown in the second half of this year. “We do not know to what extent and how far-reaching the impact of any such slowdown will be,” he wrote.

Eric Liaw, a general partner at IVP, is broadly pessimistic about the impact of the tariffs on the VC industry, but said it’s hard to predict the impact of such a sprawling change to international trade. The firm will host a private event for portfolio CEOs and chief financial officers about navigating tariff volatility on Friday. For now, IVP is advising portfolio companies to exercise caution. “It’s tough to pick a fight with the whole world simultaneously,” Liaw said.



Tech's venture capitalists were hoping this year would provide some relief from a years long slump.





# Prayer is the life of the heart

The state of a person in prayer depends on his righteousness and conduct. The more he perfects his prayer, the better his conditions and conduct are and vice versa.

One may wonder: How? The prayer is a way of life; it is the highest level of servitude to Allah, the Exalted. Observing *khushoo'* (i.e. the state of the heart when it stands before its Lord in full submission, humility and absolute concentration) in the prayer is the reason for attaining success in this worldly life and in the Hereafter as well. Allah, the Exalted, says (what means): {Successful indeed are the believers. Those who offer their prayer with all solemnity and full submissiveness} [Qur'an 23:1-2] The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention), said: "Prayer is the best deed, so whoever could pray more, let him do so." [Ahmad, At-Tabarani; Al-Albani: authentic] He, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, also said: "... prayer is a light..." [Muslim] Prayer is a light for the slave in this worldly life and the Hereafter.

Let us have a quick glance at the meanings of the prayer.

When the praying person stands before his Lord with an attentive, submissive, pure heart, directing it towards his Lord, and recites *takbeer* (i.e. saying 'Allahu Akbar': Allah is the Greatest) to start the prayer; he is proclaiming that Allah, the Exalted, is greater than anyone and anything else. Then, he commences his prayer and seeks the forgiveness from Allah, the Exalted, by saying the *istiftaah* (the opening supplication of the prayer) supplication which reads: "Allahumma,

*ba'id bayni wa bayna khatayaya kama ba'adta bayna al-mashriqi wa al-maghrib. Allahumma, naqqini min khatayaya kama yunaqqa ath-thawbu al-abyadhu min ad-danas. Allahumma, ighsilni min khatayaya bil-ma'i wa ath-thalji wa al-barad'.* (O Allah, set me apart from my sins (faults) as the East and the West are set apart from each other, and clean me from sins as a white garment is cleaned of dirt (after thorough washing). O Allah, wash off my sins with water, snow and hail.) [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

If one fully comprehends what this means, will he then commit a sin deliberately or insist on it?

Then, the praying person seeks refuge with Allah, the Exalted, from the devil and recites *Al-Fatihah*, which is known as *Umm Al-Kitab* (i.e. The Mother of the Book), because it combines all the meanings of faith and *tawheed* (i.e. Islamic monotheism) from praising, expressing gratefulness, glorifying, worshipping and relaying on Him Alone, acknowledging the Day of Judgment and that Allah is its Master, along with asking his Lord for guidance and nothing except it. Guidance here refers to the guidance to the path of the prophets and the believers. Then, the praying person asks Allah, the Exalted, to shield him against the path of those who have incurred [His] anger and of those who are astray, meaning the Jews and Christians and those who are similar to them.

After reciting *Al-Fatihah*, the praying person says *takbeer* (saying *Allahu Akbar*) and performs *rukoo'* (i.e. bowing) before his Lord, saying: "*Subhana Rabbi Al-'Atheem*." (how Perfect my Lord is,

the Great!). When the praying person understands the meaning of this glorification of Allah, the Exalted, this bowing, this physical submission before his Lord, and this veneration with the tongue; should he not know that his Great Lord loves His slave to be submissive to Him in all matters? Would he not know that his Lord Wants him not to favour his personal desires (preferences), opinions, and reason over that which He Has Legislated for His slaves?

How strange the case is of someone who performs the prayer (as described above), and then after that he approves legislations other than that ordained by Allah and shows keenness on going against His commands! Such a person did not perform the prayer as due.

Reflect on the condition of someone who is raising his head from *rukoo'* and is praising and glorifying Allah, the Exalted, saying: "*Sami'a Allahu liman hamidah, Rabbana wa laka al-hamd, mil' as-samawati wa mil' al-ardh wa mil' ma shi'ta min shay'in* ba'd. Ahla ath-thana'i wal-majd la mani'a lima a'tayt wa la mu'tya lima mana't wa la yanfa'u thal-jaddi minka al-jadd" (Allah, the Exalted, hears the one who praises Him; Our Lord, to You be the praise, filling the heavens, filling the Earth, and filling whatever else You may will, Lord of Glory and Majesty.

None can withhold what You grant, and none can grant what You withhold, nor can the wealth of a wealthy benefit him before You." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Then, the praying person prostrates himself before his Lord. What a great and honourable position it is as the praying

person places his forehead on the ground, showing submission, humility, and poverty to his Lord, saying, "*Subhana Rabbi Al-'Ala'*" (How perfect is my Lord, the Most High!) If the Muslim was offered heaps of money to prostrate himself before other than Allah, the Exalted, he would never accept it. Prostration serves as a spiritual remedy for the human self from arrogance, blameworthy sense of pride, and haughtiness. Thus, the praying person learns to adhere to humility and submission to Allah, the Exalted, which entails modesty and treating others with kindness.

Then, the praying person testifies that Prophet Muhammad, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, is the Messenger of Allah, asks his Lord to bestow His blessings and mercy upon him in the prayer. Such marvelous meanings in the prayer serve as a deterring factor for the person from committing vices and sins. Allah, the Exalted, says (what means): {... and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater...} [Qur'an 29:45]

The more the praying person fails to understand the meaning of all of this, the less his prayers would prevent him from committing vices and sins. Thus, we come to realise that the deficiency is in the worshipper's performance and his understanding of the prayer and not in the prayer itself.

In conclusion, we come to know that the prayer includes the following: Perfect servitude to Allah, the Exalted. Praising Allah, the Exalted, with His Names and Attributes. Disassociation from disbelief and

disbelievers. Acknowledgment of sins. Reliance on Allah, the Exalted, and humility. Proclamation that there is no power and strength save by Allah. Compliance with the guidance of the Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*. Submission, obedience, surrender, and humility to Allah Almighty. Testifying that Muhammad, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, is the Messenger of Allah.

Is this not a way of life for a Muslim, knowing that his Lord and God is the Creator of the universe and the Disposer of all affairs?

If the person understands the meaning of all of this in his prayer; he will finish the prayer as a different (better) person with brighter inner light. He will renew his submission to his Lord and will never dare to violate or reject the Divine Revelation, be it through negation, plainly going against the Divine Commands, or distortion. Prayer is a way of life that aims to rectify the person ideologically, spiritually, behaviorally, morally, and systematically.

We ask Allah, the Exalted, to make us among those who constantly establish the prayer.

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>



## The obligation of five daily prayers

Prayer is the most obligatory of the five pillars of Islam next to the two testifications of Faith, and it was ordained in the best and the most perfect way for an act of worship. Prayer includes many of the acts of worship, like the remembrance of Allah Almighty, the recitation of the Qur'an, standing humbly before Almighty Allah, bowing, prostration, supplication, and *takbeer* (uttering the words 'Allahu Akbar').

Prayer is also the head of the physical acts of worship, of which none of the religions brought by any of Allah's messengers is void. Prayer, unlike all other acts of worship, was enjoined by Almighty Allah on His messenger, Muhammad, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* (may Allah exalt his mention), the Seal of Messengers, on the night of *Al-Mi'raj* (the ascension of the Prophet). This is an indication of its greatness, a confirmation of its being obligatory, and a sign of its high status in the Sight of Allah. There are many hadiths indicating the virtues of prayer and showing its being obligatory on all Muslim individuals. The fact that prayer is an obligatory act of worship is primarily known in Islam. So, whoever denies this fact is considered to be an apostate.

Linguistically, prayer means invocation; Allah, the Exalted Commands the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, to 'pray' for the believers, saying (what means): "...And invoke [Allah's blessings] upon them..." [Qur'an 9: 103]

According to the *Shari'ah* (Islamic jurisprudence), prayer is defined as a special kind of sayings and deeds beginning with *takbeer* and ending with *tasleem* (saying 'assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah'). It is called 'prayer' because it includes invocation. During prayer, the worshipper is in a state of invocation through worshipping Almighty Allah, praising Him, or supplicating Him for something.

This is why it is called 'prayer'. Prayer was decreed by Almighty Allah on the night of *Al-Mi'raj* before *Hijrah*, as five prayers to be performed every day and night at specified times by every legally accountable Muslim. Allah, the Exalted Says (what means): "... Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specified times." [Qur'an 4: 103]

Those prayer times are the times pointed out by Allah's Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, through his words or his deeds. Allah, the Exalted, Says (what means): "And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth, and to establish prayer and to give *Zakah*. And that is the correct religion." [Qur'an 98: 5]

In addition, in many verses of Allah's Glorious Book (the Qur'an), Allah, the Exalted Says: "And establish prayer..." [Qur'an: 2: 43]



Almighty Allah also Says (what means): [O Muhammad], tell My servants who have believed to establish prayer..." [Qur'an 14: 31]

Moreover, Allah, the Exalted Says: "So Exalted is Allah when you reach the evening and when you reach the morning. And to Him is [due all] praise throughout the heavens and the earth. And (Exalted is He) at night and when you are at noon." [Qur'an 30: 17-18]

Therefore, it is obligatory for whoever reaches one of the specified times of prayer, being adult and sane, to perform it, excluding women in a state of menstruation or postnatal bleeding. Scholars unanimously agree that it is not obligatory for women in the aforesaid two cases to perform prayer, nor to perform it later after purification. On the other hand, whoever is in a state of unconsciousness, as in sleeping, fainting, and the like, has to perform the prayer the moment they wake up or recover to the normal state. Allah, the Exalted, Says (what means): "...And establish prayer for My remembrance." [Qur'an 20: 14]

In addition, the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, says: "Whoever misses a prayer out of oversleeping or forgetfulness, let him perform it once he remembers it."

A guardian of a child has to command him to perform prayer when the child reaches the age of seven, though it is still not obligatory for him. But the purpose is to make the child interested in prayer and used to it. Thus, the child and his guardian will be rewarded when the former performs prayer, for Allah, the Exalted, Says (what means): "Whoever comes [on the Day of Judgment] with a good deed will have ten times the like thereof [to his credit] ..." [Qur'an 6: 160]

Moreover, when a woman showed the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, a young boy who was with her, saying: "Does this one have to perform Haj (pilgrimage), O Messenger of Allah?" He replied, "Yes, and you will have a reward."

So, a guardian has to teach

his child how to perform prayer and how to perform ablution for it. A guardian has also to beat his child if the latter is ten years old and neglects prayer, for the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "Command your children to perform prayer when they become seven years old, and beat them for (not performing) it (i.e. prayer) when they become ten years old; and arrange their beds (so that boys and girls sleep) separately." [Ahmad, At-Tirmithi, Abu Dawood, and other compilers of hadiths]

It is also impermissible to perform prayer later than its due time, for Allah, the Exalted Says (what means): "...Indeed prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specified times." [Qur'an 4: 103]

The meaning is that prayer has specified times at which it has to be performed. A prayer is impermissible to be deferred except for those who would like to combine it with the following prayer, provided that the said prayer can be combined with another, and that the case is among those in which combining two prayers is permissible as well as the person being one who is allowed to combine prayers in this way. As for delaying performing a night prayer until the morning, a day prayer until the night, or the *Fajr* (dawn) Prayer until sunrise, it is by no means permissible, whether the reason is a state of major ritual impurity, minor ritual impurity, or anything else. Rather, one has to perform them at their specified times, regardless of one's state.

A person might happen to be detained in hospital where he is confined to a bed that he cannot leave to pray, or cannot change the impure clothes he wears, or cannot find pure earth to perform *tayammum* (dry ablution) instead of ablution to pray. Some ignorant people in this case defer prayer on the pretext that they will perform it later when possible. In fact, this is a grave mistake and a means of missing prayer whose reason is unawareness and lack of juristic consultation. What they have to do is to perform prayer at its specified times regardless of their states. Their prayer will be sufficient, even if it is performed without *tayammum* or in impure clothes; Allah, the Exalted Says (what means): "So fear Allah as much as you are able..." [Qur'an 64: 16]

Even if they pray without facing the *Qibla* (the direction of Ka'aba), provided they are unable to face it, their prayer is still valid.

The prayer is the basic pillar of Islam, and the main difference between a Muslim and a disbeliever. So, whatever good deeds one might do are useless if one is negligent of prayer, we ask Almighty Allah for safety.

(Extracted from *A Summary of Islamic Jurisprudence*)

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>

## The call to prayer

In Arabic, the word '*Athan*' is to call or to inform. Religiously, it is a call made to inform people that the time of the prayer has begun. It is obligatory for the congregation in the mosque while for individuals praying alone at home, for example, it is a highly preferred act. It begins by proclaiming the greatness and oneness of Allah and the denial of disbelief and polytheism, testifying to the messengership of Muhammad, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, and then calling to a prosperity which is everlasting, pointing to the return to Allah.

The '*Iqamah*' is the second and final call to prayer and is uttered immediately before the beginning of the obligatory prayer indicating that it is actually time to perform the prayer.

**The story of *Athan***  
The '*Athan*' was made part of *Shari'ah* (Islamic jurisprudence) during the first year of the Muslims' migration to Madinah. Before its legislation, Muslims used to agree about fixed times for congregational prayers. Even still, they sometimes found it difficult to remember the exact timings. One day, The Messenger of Allah, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, and the Muslims discussed the matter of calling the people to prayer at the exact time. Many opinions put forward by the Companions of Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, about the issue. Some suggested the use of a bell like the Christians, others suggested the use of a horn like the Jews, but 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, suggested sending someone to announce the prayer.

Then Allah's Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, agreed to use a bell, but he was not happy to use it because of its similarity with the Christians.

After the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, had ordered a bell to be made so that it could be struck to gather the people to prayer, a companion, Abdullah Ibn Zayd Ibn Abd Rabbih, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "I was sleeping when I saw in my dream that a man carrying a bell in his hands, and I said: "Slave of Allah, will you sell this to me?" Then he asked what I would do with it? I replied that we would use it to call the people to Prayer. He said: "Shall I not guide you to something better than that?" I replied: "Certainly," Then he told me to say the '*Athan*' and he told me its wordings.

When I told to Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, in the morning about the vision what I had seen, he, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "It is a true vision, '*Inshaa'Allah*', so get up along with Bilal, and when you have taught him what you have seen, let him use it in making the call to prayer, for he has a stronger voice than you." So, I got up along with Bilal and began to teach it to him, and he used it in making the call to prayer.

'Umar Ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, heard this when he was in his house, and came out trailing his cloak and said: "Allah's Messenger, by Him Who has sent you with the truth, I have seen the same thing (during sleep) as has been said." To this Allah's Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, replied: 'Praise be to Allah!'" [Ahmad and At-Tirmithi]

**Its excellence and virtues**  
Many Prophetic narrations describe the virtues of the '*Athan*' and the one who calls it. The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "If the people knew what was in the '*Athan*' (of virtues and rewards) and the first row (i.e. the first line in congregational prayer), and that they could not get it except by drawing lots, they would draw lots..." [Al-Bukhari]

The Prophet *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, also said: "Your Lord, the Exalted, Says: "Look at my slave there who makes the call to prayer and establishes the prayer out of fear of Me. I have forgiven My slave and have allowed him to enter Paradise." [Ahmad, Abu Dawood and An-Nasa'i]

The text of the *Athan* (Arabic accent):  
*Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar, Ashhadu alla ilaha illallah, Ashhadu alla ilaha illallah, Ashhadu anna Muhammadar-rasoolullah, Ashhadu anna Muhammadar-rasoolullah. Hayya 'ala-ssalah,*

*Hayya 'ala-ssalah. Hayya 'alal-falah, Hayya 'alal-falah. Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar. La ilaha illallah.*

**The meaning of the *Athan***  
Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest. Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest. I bear witness that there is no deity (worthy of worship) but Allah. I bear witness that there is no deity (worthy of worship) but Allah. I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger. I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger. Come to the prayer, Come to the prayer. Come to prosperity, Come to prosperity. Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest. There is no deity (worthy of worship) but Allah.

The text of '*Iqamah*' (Arabic accent):  
*Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar, Ash-hadu alla ilaha illallah, Ashhadu anna Muhammadar-rasoolullah, Hayya 'ala-ssalah, Hayya 'alal-falah, Qad qamati-ssalah, qad qamati-ssalah Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar. La ilaha illallah.*

**The meaning of the '*Iqamah*'**  
Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest. I bear witness that there is no deity (worthy of worship) but Allah. I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger. Come to the prayer, come to prosperity. Prayer is to begin, prayer is to begin. Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest. There is no deity (worthy of worship) but Allah. As for *At-Tathweeb* (Saying "Prayer is better than sleep"), it is part of the morning '*Athan*' to say twice, '*assallatu khayrun mina-naum* (prayer is better than sleep) after *Hayya 'alal-falah, Hayya 'alal-falah*.

**The response those who hears the *Athan* and *Iqamah***  
It is preferred that whoever is listening to the '*Athan*' should repeat it with the caller saying his exact words, except for the two '*hayya 'ala-ssalah, hayya 'alal-falah*' phrases, after which he should say instead '*laa hawla wa laa quwwata illa billah*' (there is no power or might save with Allah.) Everyone who hears the call can repeat it, whether clean or unclean, in a state of post-sexual uncleanness or menstruating and so on, as it is a remembrance (*Thikr*). Those who cannot do so are the ones who are praying, who are relieving themselves, or are having intimate relations. As for the '*Iqamah*', it is preferred that the one who hears it repeats the words, except '*qad qamati-ssalah*'.

**Supplications after *Athan***  
The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "Supplications (offered) in between the (two) calls for prayer (i.e. *Athan* and *Iqamah*) will never be rejected." The companions, may Allah be pleased with them, said: "O Prophet of Allah! What should we say?" He, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "Ask Allah the Almighty, to grant pardon (and good health) in both this life and the hereafter." Allah's Messenger, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, said: "Any person who, on hearing the *Athan*, supplicates: "*Allahumma rabba haathihid-da'watit-tammati was-salatil-qa'imati, ati Muhammadan al-waseelata wal-fadheelata wab'ath-hu magaman mahmudanal-lathee wa'adtahu*. ('O Allah! Lord of this complete prayer of ours. By the blessing of it, give Muhammad (*sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*), his eternal rights of intercession, distinction and highest class (in Paradise). And raise him to the promised rank You have promised him,' then he will assured of my intercession on the Day of Judgement.)" [Al-Bukhari]

Article source: <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/>



# Rawdat Al Khail Park - Six decades of history



A latest overview of Rawdat Al Khail Park in Doha. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen



This photograph from 1970 shows the newly-planted avenue of Washingtonia Filifera palms.



Washingtonia Filifera palms at Doha Public Park in 1984.



An interior view of Doha Public Park in 1984.

**Shafeeq Alingal**  
Staff Reporter

Charming green lush trees, fabulous walkways and sport equipment, neat amenities and cottage like little eateries, Rawdat Al Khail Park (erstwhile Doha Public Park, later known as Muntazah Park) has it all. Nestled in the heart of Doha with all recreational amenities, the park which has a special place in the hearts of Doha residents, just marked the third anniversary of its reopening yesterday. *Gulf Times* Archives has chronicled the trajectory of the decades long development and transformation of Rawdat Al Khail Park. The park's history dates back to 1965 when the first part of Doha Public Park (the first name) was completed and the second phase of development came to an end in 1984 with a much spacious area of 115,000sq m with a design that integrated the natural beauty and architectural distinctiveness. The park remained the prime leisure spot for Doha residents until the early 2000s when it was closed for a pretty long refurbishment. Having remained closed for more than 20 years, the park was reopened on April 10, 2022, ahead of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 with all features for an outstanding recreational and sports destination. Also, the park serves as a gathering point for many with trees and a great



Beautiful silhouettes of trees during sunset at Rawdat Al Khail Park. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen.

variety of shrub species spanning along C Ring Road and Rawdat Al Khail Street. Green spaces cover an area of 98,000sq m with 1,600 trees. The attractions include a 1,183m pedestrian path, a 1,119m running track, and a 1,118m cycling track along with exercise and training areas with fitness equipment in addition to play areas for children, bicycle stands, a bike rental shop, food kiosks, areas for barbecue and a good number of seats.



The main gate of Doha Public Park in 1984.



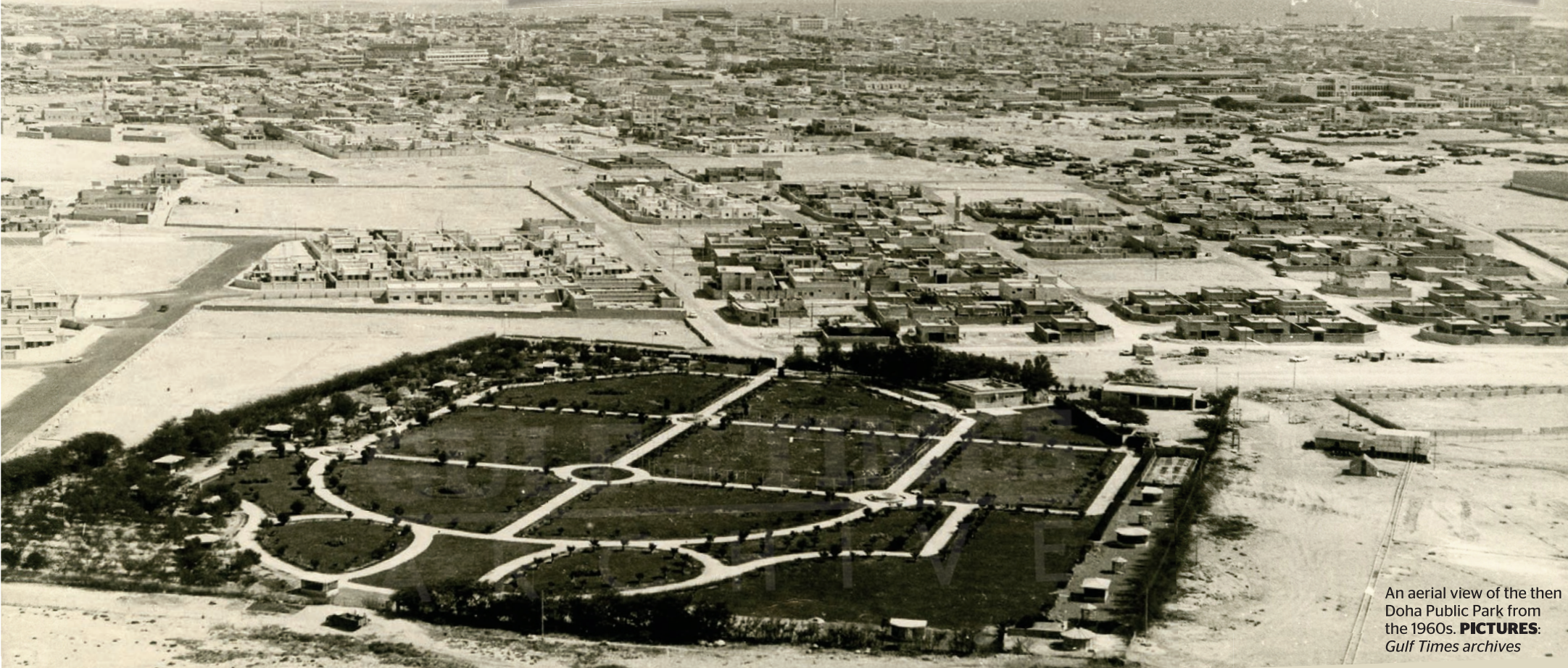
A building adjacent to Doha Public Park in 1984.



Another view of Doha Public Park in 1984.



A kids play area in Doha Public Park in 1984.



An aerial view of the then Doha Public Park from the 1960s. **PICTURES:** Gulf Times archives