

The traditional market offers a range of popular heritage activities including camel and horse rides. Also, there are traditional boat shows to highlight a distinctive cultural character that reflects souq's visual identity and uniqueness. Al Wakrah Old Souq is one of Qatar's most prominent tourist and cultural destinations during special occasions offering a unique experience that combines shopping, entertainment and heritage visits.





# A Qatar Olympics would be a legacy gamechanger: Sheikha Hind

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“It’s no secret that Qatar is going for the 2036 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and for me, as a person who is leading a foundation focused on education, and who has seen the legacy we were able to create in one sport through hosting the FIFA World Cup, it gives me chills to think about what can be created through all the different Olympic sports,” she said during the panel session, on which she was joined by Dr Najat Maalla, UN Special Representative on Ending Violence Against Children, with the session being moderated by Benny Bonsu, Director of Daily Content at the Olympic Channel. “It’s not only about creating a legacy for Qatar. Everything we do at Qatar Foundation is for the country, the region, and for a potential global effect. When you think about our region, and its 2bn people, there is a real opportunity to think about the socioeconomic possibility through the lens of sports, and to ensure sports is seen in a different way – a more sustainable and comprehensive way.”

Circle In – the name of which stems from sports teams coming together a huddle to symbolise unity and purpose – will provide accessible, safe, gender-inclusive, and sustainable community sports programmes, and capacity-building pathways, in the countries where it initially operates.

Its initial goal is to benefit up to 50,000 children and youth in these



countries, and train up to 5,000 coaches, teachers, and instructors to promote equality, inclusion, and education through sports. In a subsequent phase, Circle In will provide more countries in the region with digital resources that support them in developing localised, sports-based solutions to challenges they face.

“I’m very proud of this partnership, because we’re taking our expertise and learning in socioeconomic development through sports to different countries and finding local partners who can support our endeavours there,” HE Sheikha Hind told the summit.

“Even the name – Circle In – reflects that this is a community project. It’s not simply extracting something and placing it in a country. It’s about co-creating something together.” HE Sheikha Hind also explained how Qatar’s sporting ethos – from the world-class events

it hosts to the programs and pathways it provides for everyone to embrace, enjoy, and excel in sports – is built on gaining knowledge and ideas from an international outlook, and adapting this to fit the culture and values of the nation and region.

“When my country hosted the FIFA World Cup in 2022 – the safest, most family-friendly, and most inclusive World Cup in history – I was very proud that we stuck to our values,” she said. “This is important for any citizen when a sporting tournament comes to their country – that it is reflective of the values of that country. “It’s incredible to see the empowerment sports can bring. When I look at students from our school for children with autism participating in horse-riding classes, that is inclusive sports – and we do this across the board at Qatar Foundation. We ensure everyone has a space.

“Sports is part of the Qatari DNA,



and so is social development. When we look at what Qatar has done, not just across the region but globally, it only made sense to naturally evolve and transition these two elements together, and so we have an opportunity to create even wider impact through sports in the context of socioeconomic development.”

Mohamed al-Kubaisi, Acting CEO of Education Above All Foundation, said: “Circle In is more than a sport-for-good initiative – it is a powerful extension of Education Above All Foundation’s mission to ensure that every young person,

especially those from marginalised backgrounds, has access to inclusive education and opportunities for personal growth.

“Through our collaboration with Qatar Foundation and the IOC, we are integrating sports with education to build resilient, empowered communities where youth can learn, thrive, and lead change – both inside the classroom and on the playing field.” Through the Circle In collaboration, EAA Foundation is bringing its global expertise in education access, inclusion, and youth empowerment to ensure that the

initiative not only promotes sport for development, but also drives learning outcomes and social inclusion for vulnerable groups. EAA’s Foundation role includes integrating education and life skills into the design of sport-for-development programmes, leveraging its partnerships in more than 60 countries to identify communities where Circle In can have maximum impact. With a focus on girls, children with disabilities, and marginalised youth, EAA Foundation will ensure that the initiative delivers holistic, sustainable, and measurable outcomes.

# Health minister inspects Qatari Haj Mission’s Mina medical clinics

QNA  
Makkah Al Mukarramah

HE the Minister of Public Health, Mansoor bin Ebrahim al-Mahmoud, visited the Qatari Haj Mission’s medical clinics in Mina to inspect their preparedness and the medical, therapeutic, and emergency services provided to pilgrims during this year’s Haj season, 1446 AH.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs stated that HE the minister began his visit with a tour of the clinics, met with the medical team-including doctors, nurses, paramedics, and pharmacists-and listened to a detailed explanation of their workflow, field preparations, shift systems, and emergency response strategies during the Days of Tashreeq.

During the visit, HE the minister said that all Qatari pilgrims are safe and in good health, adding that he felt proud and reassured by the plans and preparations in place. He noted that the Qatari Haj Mission, across all its units, sets a unique example in serving pilgrims, commending the medical unit and its

specialised personnel’s significant efforts.

HE the minister praised the medical unit’s continuous presence alongside the pilgrims across holy sites and locations, and their ability to provide immediate healthcare support under all circumstances. He also emphasised the importance of supporting the Qatari Haj medical unit by providing it all the medical staff and supplies it needs, both for this season and future ones, for it to continue to deliver top-tier healthcare services.

Deputy Head of the Qatari Haj Mission’s medical unit Dr Mishal Abdullah al-Musaifri said that the Mina clinics operate 24/7 and are staffed by a distinguished team of doctors, nurses, paramedics, and pharmacists working in shifts to ensure immediate response to any medical case.

Dr al-Musaifri added that the clinics are divided into separate sections for men and women, each including triage rooms, examination and consultation rooms, isolation rooms, two fully stocked pharmacies, and observation rooms for cases requiring close monitoring or urgent intervention.

He said that the clinics were



equipped in compliance with the requirements of the Saudi Ministry of Health to ensure the highest safety standards, adding that cases are monitored closely with preventive measures being strictly enforced, especially amid the crowding and movement in the holy sites.

The Deputy Head of the Qatari Haj Mission’s medical unit noted that the clinics have treated more than 500 cases since the Day of Tarwiyah, through Arafat, Muzdalifah, and up to the first Day of Tashreeq in Mina. He said that most cases were mild to moderate, having such conditions as throat

infections, gastrointestinal issues, general fatigue, and muscle pain, adding that the overall health condition of Qatari pilgrims is stable and reassuring.

In terms of health awareness, he advised pilgrims to stay hydrated to avoid heat exhaustion, remain in air-conditioned tents during peak hours, use umbrellas or shaded walkways, wear face masks to prevent infectious diseases, avoid crowds, and delay the stoning ritual until after the peak heat in the late afternoon or evening. He also recommended elderly or chronically ill pilgrims to take advantage

of proxy rituals when needed.

In a related development, the holy sites services unit has already outfitted the Mina camps according to the highest standards to ensure comfort and privacy for all Qatari pilgrims across campaigns. Each pilgrim was provided with a high-quality multipurpose seat that can be used as a chair or a bed, along with a personal table suitable for eating or reading.

Every seat also includes a built-in power outlet with mobile phone charging capability, a feature introduced last year. Additionally, each tent is equipped with overhead lockers for storing personal belongings, multiple dining halls, open buffets with refrigerators for water, juices, and cold beverages, and several restroom facilities installed with the latest equipment for both men and women’s camps.

Qatar’s Haj camps in Mina are equipped with all safety and security measures, including a fully equipped ambulance and service staff to meet pilgrims’ needs. These are all part of the comprehensive services provided by the Qatari Haj Mission to facilitate the pilgrims’ performance of their rituals under the best conditions. These medical efforts are conducted in full coordination with the Ministry of Public Health, Hamad Medical Corporation, and the Primary Health Care Corporation, as part of the integrated Qatari Haj Mission system, and in collaboration with the relevant Saudi authorities, under the ongoing partnership with the Saudi Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Haj and Umrah.

The Qatari medical mission also praised the fruitful cooperation with Saudi authorities, which has helped create a safe health environment for pilgrims and enhanced the Qatari Haj Mission’s ability to implement its medical programs effectively. The Qatari Haj Mission confirmed that these health efforts are in line with the directives of Qatar’s wise leadership, aiming to provide the highest standards of healthcare to Qatari pilgrims, in accordance with the Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030, which prioritises human health and well-being.

The medical unit will continue operating until the end of the Haj season, with ongoing preparedness, meticulous planning, and precise field implementation-serving as a model in healthcare services for Qatari pilgrims performing Haj.



## MoPH organises key activities to mark World Food Safety Day

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has organised a range of important activities and events to mark World Food Safety Day, marked annually on June 7, and this year under the slogan “Food Safety is Everyone’s Business”. This year’s event is held under the theme “Food Safety – Science in Action”, highlighting the vital role that science plays in supporting policies and procedures designed to ensure food safety and protect consumer health.

To mark the occasion, MoPH launched an extensive awareness campaign across social media platforms, with the aim of raising public awareness about the importance of food safety and promoting correct practices that help

prevent exposure to food-related risks. Wasan Abdulla al-Baker, director of the Food Safety Department, MoPH, stated: “Qatar continues its efforts to strengthen food safety, recognising its importance as a fundamental requirement of food security, as food is not considered food unless it is safe.”

She added that food safety plays a key role in limiting the spread of foodborne diseases. She emphasised that World Food Safety Day plays an active role in raising awareness among individuals and educating them on how to prevent these diseases. It also sheds light on the solutions and measures that can be adopted to ensure food safety from source to consumer.

Al-Baker explained that the Food Safety Department at the Ministry has made significant progress in adopting a science-based approach as a cornerstone for strengthening the national food safety system. Among these achievements are capacity building in risk assessment and the implementation of related activities, which have enabled the department to respond effectively to food incidents and take the necessary actions.

The department has also established an internal scientific research team responsible for setting priorities for food safety research, directly supervising the completion of related studies in line with the ministry’s vision and objectives. In addition,

the department has consistently supported and developed its laboratory services by continuously expanding the scope of accredited analytical methods at the ministry’s Food Safety Laboratories.

As part of the World Food Safety Day activities, the ministry organised a workshop entitled ‘The Role of Science in Supporting Food Safety Regulatory Decisions’, held at the Itqan Clinical Simulation and Innovation at Hamad Bin Khalifa Medical City. The workshop covered several key topics, including the importance of relying on scientific data and credible evidence when formulating policies and making decisions related to food safety and consumer protection,

as well as the exchange of experiences and expertise among the relevant parties.

Key topics included Qatar’s scientific framework for ensuring the accuracy and consistency of food analyses to support evidence-based decision making, global research trends in food safety, and science-based decision making for safer food, with an overview of research and innovations at Qatar University.

In addition, the ministry, in collaboration with the Shafallah Centre for Persons with Disabilities, organised a children’s drawing competition for Shafallah students on the theme of food safety. The children’s artwork was displayed at the World Food Safety Day exhibition. The top

three prizes were awarded to Ali Hakim Wali, Ghaith Mohammed Khair and Hamza Mustafa.

Representatives from the ministry also delivered a bilingual lecture in Arabic and English for Shafallah Centre staff, covering the principles of food safety and ways to prevent foodborne diseases. Furthermore, the World Food Safety Day celebrations included an educational event for children aged 3-12 at Qatar Mall with the aim of building a culture of food safety in the community. The event featured educational games, drawing and colouring activities, interactive microscope demonstrations and the distribution of symbolic gifts to children to emphasise the importance of food safety.



## Ministry urges public to avoid littering at beaches, parks

The Ministry of Municipality has urged the public to avoid littering and leaving the remains of food at undesignated places at public beaches, parks and other places. It constitutes a clear violation of the applicable laws and regulations in addition to being an unacceptable conduct that spoils the otherwise good scenery of the country and other such places. Furthermore, the ministry stressed that positive public co-operation is key to maintain the cleanliness and beauty of the beaches and parks across the country.



## The Haunted House attracts crowds at Katara

The Drama Theatre at Katara Cultural Village witnessed the presentation of the play *The Haunted House* last night, amidst a remarkable turnout of the audience.

There was strong interaction with the play's events, presented in an innovative theatrical style that blends horror and comedy. The show received widespread acclaim from the audience, who interacted with the comic scenes and distinctive visual illusions.

This prompted the production team to increase the number of performances scheduled over the course of Eid al-Adha to meet the high demand.

This show is part of a new Gulf tour carried out by the "Salam Media Group" team, led by artist Abdulaziz al-Musallam, the writer, director, and star of the play.

Al-Musallam emphasised that Doha represents a pivotal milestone in the play's journey, given the strong public engagement and mutual trust it has generated with the Qatari audience.

The play takes place in a suspenseful setting, telling the story of a man who discovers a plot by his wife to seize his home by claiming she is possessed by a demon.



A scene from *The Haunted House*.

The plot unfolds in a dramatic and surprising manner.

The cast includes a number of Kuwaiti theatre stars, including Shihab Hajia, Khaled al-Mufidi, Fawz al-Shatti, Ibrahim al-Shaikhli, Abdullah and Mohammed Abdulaziz al-Muslim, Mustafa Ashkanani and Hiba al-Absi.

The success builds on the remarkable audience turnout achieved by the *Haunted House* series over the past years. It cements its position as one of the

most prominent theatrical experiences in the field of comedy horror theatre in the Gulf, thanks to its exciting plot and skilled acting with support by high-level visual and technical elements.

The production team for the sixth edition was keen to develop the script and introduce new scenes that suit the general taste of the Qatari audience. Thus the show had a special local character that increased audience interaction and immersion in the play's events. **Page 4**

## Lego Shows Qatar opens at QNCC

The second edition of Lego Shows Qatar 2025 has opened its doors at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC), welcoming families and Lego enthusiasts to experience a world of creativity, play and imagination.

Running from June 7-22 from 1pm-11pm, the event is presented by Visit Qatar as part of the official Qatar Calendar, produced by ATW Events, and organised by Events & Entertainment Enterprises with Ooredoo as the official Telecom Sponsor.

Building on the success of its first edition, this year's Lego Shows offers an even more immersive experience across Halls 8 and 9 at QNCC. With a wide range of themed zones, interactive activities, and live entertainment, families are already enjoying an unforgettable Eid al-Adha celebration.

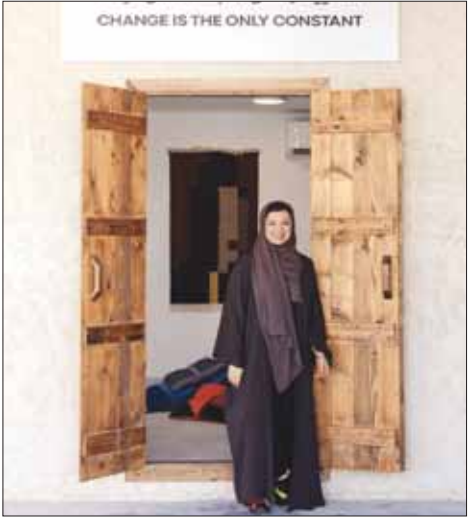
Visitors can enjoy several actions such as: Creative Lego Themes; Interactive Zones; Live Performances; Master Builder; Meet-and-Greet; Minifigure Experience and Retail and Food Zones.



## Two Qatari women artists to join Akoje Residency in Scotland



By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter



Qatar Museums has announced the selection of artists Zainab al-Shibani and Maryam al-Humaid to participate in the Akoje Residency programme, in collaboration with Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, which is being held at Dumfries House, the headquarters of the King's Foundation in Scotland.

This participation marks a significant achievement on both the artistic and cultural levels, as Zainab and Maryam will be the first artists from the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region to be selected to participate in this prestigious programme, which aims to support artists from around the world by providing them with a space to live, create, and engage with diverse artistic and cultural environments.

The Akoje Residency programme, in collaboration with the King's Foundation, aims to

provide a fertile environment for contemporary artists to develop their creative projects and engage with local Scottish culture within the inspiring historical and natural setting of Dumfries House. This house is a cultural landmark sponsored by the King's Foundation.

During the residency, the two artists will have the opportunity to focus on their artistic practice, away from the hustle and bustle of daily life, exploring new paths of creativity and artistic experimentation, and engaging with the local and international art community.

This collaboration between Akoje Residency and Qatar Museums reflects the commitment of cultural institutions in Qatar to empowering and supporting artists from the region on the international stage. It also underscores the importance of cultural exchange in building bridges between communities and promoting global artistic dialogue.

The participation of Zainab al-Shibani and Maryam al-Humaid in this programme represents a

qualitative step towards empowering female artists from the region and enhancing the cultural presence of SWANA creators on the international stage.

At a time when the world is reconsidering cultural representation and geographical diversity in the global art scene, this residency serves as a platform that celebrates two female voices offering contemporary visions rooted in local culture, yet intersecting with universal human and aesthetic issues.

This achievement not only highlights individual talent, but also reflects a shift in cultural policies towards greater inclusion of artists from non-Western backgrounds, calling for a reshaping of contemporary art narratives from a more pluralistic and equitable perspective.

It also demonstrates the importance of institutional partnerships that bring together the Global South and established cultural institutions in Europe to create equitable opportunities for knowledge and creative exchange.

## Cleanup drive at Al Ghariyah and Fuwairit beaches



Department of Wildlife Protection at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has carried out an extensive cleanup campaign in the northern part (Al Ghariyah and Fuwairit). This initiative is part of the broader cleanup efforts organised by the ministry during the Eid al-Adha holidays to clean up meadows and wild areas. The campaign aims to raise awareness among visitors of beaches and wilderness areas on the importance of maintaining cleanliness. Besides, special waste collection bags were distributed to encourage visitors to adopt responsible practices that contribute to environmental protection.

## Awqaf's 'Joy of Eid' initiative delivers gifts to 5,000 children

QNA  
Doha

The General Directorate of Endowments at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, with support from the Family and Childhood Endowment Fund, continued its 'Joy of Eid Programme' by distributing gifts to around 5,000 children across 35 prayer grounds and mosques throughout the country, in celebration of Eid al-Adha.

Director-General of the General Directorate of Endowments, Engineer Hassan bin Abdullah al-Marzouqi, has explained that the 'Joy

of Eid Programme' is an initiative that reflects the directorate's commitment to making endowments a meaningful part of people's lives, especially during joyful and festive occasions. The initiative embodies the slogan, "Endowment is a Community Partnership", and is part of the ongoing efforts of the Family and Childhood Endowment Fund to support families and children.

He noted that, for the first time, the gift distribution was carried out at 35 locations across various regions of the country, with five additional grand mosques included to ensure wider geographic coverage and to bring joy to as

**Director-General of the General Directorate of Endowments, Engineer Hassan bin Abdullah al-Marzouqi, has explained that the 'Joy of Eid Programme' is an initiative that reflects the directorate's commitment to making endowments a meaningful part of people's lives, especially during joyful and festive occasions**

many children as possible.

Al-Marzouqi emphasised that the children's enthusiastic response and visible happiness highlight the positive impact of such initiatives, particularly during seasons of devotion and giv-

ing. He affirmed that Eid al-Adha is a divinely ordained occasion for joy, compassion, sacrifice, and generosity, and a time to strengthen social bonds, one of the noble objectives of Islamic teachings.

He also pointed out that dis-

tributing gifts is a tangible expression of appreciation for children and their families, and a practical embodiment of the core humanitarian values upheld by the endowment system. It reflects a continuous commitment to spreading happiness and joy, especially on religious occasions.

The Family and Childhood Endowment Fund was established as a leading initiative to strengthen family ties and to provide a safe, developmental environment for children through programmes and projects aimed at instilling values and reinforcing ethical principles in younger generations. The fund places special emphasis on the well-

being of children, guided by the belief that nurturing the next generation is the cornerstone of building a healthy and prosperous society. Among its key objectives is instilling moral and educational values in children, and enhancing their sense of belonging and happiness, particularly during religious celebrations such as Eid al-Adha.

In addition, the fund supports families as the primary nurturing environment for children, working to strengthen family cohesion and providing assistance to underprivileged households, thereby helping create a safe and supportive environment for children's development.





# Katara Eid festivities bring joy to all ages

The Katara Cultural Village has continued to offer a variety of festive events in celebration of Eid al-Adha and attracting more visitors.

On the second day of Eid holidays, large crowds from various nationalities and age groups gathered, enjoying an atmosphere filled with joy and a strong sense of family togetherness. The day was marked by authentic folkloric performances drawn from the rich heritage of Morocco and Syria. Traditional rhythms and melodies blended harmoniously with the energy of the audience, who enthusiastically engaged with the musical and dance performances that reflected cultural identity and heritage.

At the Al Thuraya Planetarium, captivating educational shows attracted families and children, adding a scientific and entertaining dimension to the Eid celebration, with an interactive experience that combined imagination and knowledge at a high level.

In Building 18, the exhibition “Windows from Gaza” continues to welcome visitors, presenting artworks and models that carry the heartbeat of the land and messages of hope. The exhibited works highlight scenes from daily life in Gaza, expressing resilience and enduring beauty in the face of adversity.

The play “The Haunted House” also drew large audiences with its thrilling and dramatic atmosphere, offering family entertainment that skilfully balanced comedy and mystery, receiving an enthusiastic response from attendees.

Children’s joy was a central part of the scene. Katara’s events brought delight to their eyes due to the distribution of Eid gifts and engaging entertainment ac-



tivities spread across multiple areas, making the Eid celebration at Katara a cross-generational and cross-cultural festivity, brimming with joy and community spirit.

Music was an essential element of the celebration as well.

The Katara Oud Center hosted enchanting musical evenings that blended the warmth of melodies with the elegance of performance. Renowned oud masters and musicians performed pieces drawn from the classical Arab musical tradition,

much to the delight of the audience.

The festivities will continue until today, as Katara opens its doors to all visitors, serving as a vibrant platform for joy, cultural diversity, and a living bridge between heritage and modernity.





# North Korea hit by major Internet outage, likely due to internal cause

Reuters  
Seoul

North Korea's Internet was hit by a major outage that lasted several hours yesterday, knocking off connection to government websites and official news services online and severing the reclusive country from cyberspace.

It was not clear what caused the

outage but it may have been internal rather than a cyberattack, as connections via China and Russia were affected, said researchers who monitor North Korea's Internet and technology infrastructure.

North Korea's main official news services, its Foreign Ministry, and the Air Koryo national airline were among websites inaccessible on Saturday, before they started coming back slowly around midday according to checks by Reuters.

North Korea's entire Internet infrastructure was not showing up on systems that can monitor Internet activities, and e-mail services were also affected, Junade Ali, a UK-based researcher who monitors the North Korean Internet, said earlier.

"Hard to say if this is intentional or accidental - but seems like this is internal rather than an attack," Officials at South Korea's cyber terror response centre, a police

division that monitors North Korea's cyber activities, could not be reached for comment. Martyn Williams, who specialises in North Korea's technology and infrastructure at the Washington-based Stimson Center, also said the cause appeared to be internal as the Chinese and Russian connections were not working.

North Korea has one of the world's most strictly controlled Internet systems, including access

to any form of online communication.

The general public has access only to an intranet set up by the government and that is not connected to the wider global network. An elite few in the government and leadership are allowed open Internet access, and government and news websites often serve up propaganda for outside audiences.

North Korea has in previous years experienced large Internet

outages suspected as being caused by cyberattacks. The country operates elite teams of hackers, including a group known as Lazarus run by the government intelligence apparatus, that are blamed for attacks against foreign institutions and companies and more recently for theft and the laundering of cryptocurrencies.

North Korea denies involvement in hacking, crypto thefts and other cybercrime.

# China demonstrates coast guard capability to Pacific nations, step towards high seas patrols

Reuters  
Sydney

China is taking further steps towards high seas boarding of fishing boats in the Pacific for the first time, risking tensions with Taiwanese fleets and US Coast Guard vessels that ply the region, Pacific Islands officials told Reuters.

The Chinese Coast Guard demonstrated the capabilities of one of its largest ships, used to enforce maritime law in the Taiwan Strait, to Pacific Island ministers last week. It is also actively involved in debates on the rules of high seas boarding, according to documents and interviews with Pacific fisheries officials. The fisheries officials said it was anticipated China will soon begin patrols in a "crowded" fisheries surveillance space. "Hosting the leaders, demonstrating their capabilities in terms of maritime operations, those kind

of things are indications they want to step into that space," said Allan Rahari, director of fisheries operations for the Forum Fisheries Agency, in an interview with Reuters.

The agency runs enforcement against illegal fishing for a group of 18 Pacific Island countries, with assistance from navy and air force patrols by Australia, the United States, France and New Zealand.

The biggest fishing fleets in the Pacific, attracting the most infringement notices by inspectors, are Chinese and Taiwanese.

But China is also the largest fisheries partner to some Pacific Island countries, and Rahari said agreements for Chinese coast guard patrols in coastal waters could be struck under security deals with these countries. China registered 26 coast guard vessels with the Western & Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in 2024 for high seas boarding and inspections in a vast region where the US

- **China high seas boarding risks tensions with Taiwan fleets, US Coast Guard in Pacific**
- **Pacific Island ministers tour Chinese Coast Guard ship**
- **China and Taiwan have largest fishing fleets with most infringements in Pacific**

and Australia have the biggest inspection fleets.

The commission has not received a notification from China that it has conducted any inspection, but Chinese officials have become active in debate over the rules on boardings, WCPFC executive director Rhea Moss-Christian told Reuters. China last year called for a review of the guidelines, and in March, Chinese officials attended a video meeting about an Australian-led effort to strengthen voluntary rules, she said.

WCPFC inspectors in international waters need to gain permis-

sion for each inspection from the suspected vessel's flag state before boarding. Rahari said it could be "very complicated" diplomatically if a Chinese coast guard vessel sought to board a Taiwanese fishing boat. Beijing does not recognise Taiwan as a separate country. Chinese officials and the Chinese Coast Guard did not respond to Reuters requests for comment. Australia declined to comment, while Taiwan and the US Coast Guard did not respond to requests for comment.

Foreign ministers from 10 Pacific Island nations visited the

coastal Chinese city of Xiamen and toured Haixun 06, which can travel 18,500km (11,470 miles or 10,000 nautical miles) or 60 days without resupply. Papua New Guinea (PNG) foreign minister Justin Tkatchenko said 10 Pacific Island ministers saw the Chinese coast guard demonstrate a maritime emergency drill, but told Reuters they did not discuss Pacific patrols.

PNG is negotiating a new defence treaty with Australia, and struck a 2023 security deal with the United States allowing the US Coast Guard to patrol PNG's 2.7 million square kilometre exclusive economic zone.

Fiji said it had approved a new maritime security agreement with Australia this week. Nauru's government broadcaster posted photographs on social media of the Haixun 06 drill, which it said "reaffirmed the importance of maritime cooperation between China and Pacific Island nations". Under a security treaty struck in Decem-

ber, Nauru must notify Australia before the Chinese navy comes to port. The US Coast Guard has maritime law enforcement agreements with a dozen Pacific Island nations allowing it to enter nations' exclusive economic zones, and increased its patrols last year. The key considerations for China is stepping into that space without stepping on other partners toes, because that will then create conflicts within the region and that is something we don't want," Rahari said. Reuters previously reported the first US Coast Guard patrol in Vanuatu's waters saw local officials board several Chinese fishing boats in 2024, finding infringements, which Beijing criticised.

Since 2008, Chinese fishing vessels were issued with 158 infringements, or 46% of Chinese boardings by WCPFC inspectors including the US, France and Australia, WCPFC data shows. Taiwanese fishing boats were issued 233 infringements.

# Millions sit China's high-stakes university exam

AFP  
Beijing

Hopeful parents accompanied their teenage children to the gates of a busy Beijing test centre yesterday, among millions of high school students across China sitting their first day of the highly competitive university entrance exam.

Nationwide, 13.35mn students have registered for the multi-subject "gaokao" series this year, according to the Ministry of Education, down from last year's record-high 13.42mn test takers.

Outside the central Beijing secondary school, a proud parent who gave her name as Chen said "12 years of hard work have finally led to this moment" - as she waved a fan in front of her daughter while the student reviewed her notes one last time before the test.

"We know our kids have endured so much hardship," Chen told AFP, adding that she was not nervous. "I'm actually quite excited. I think my child is excellent, and I'm sure she will get the best score," she said. China's gaokao requires students to use all their knowledge acquired to this point, testing them on subjects including Chinese, English, mathematics, science and humanities.

The exam results are critical for gaining admission to university - and determining whether they will attend a prestigious or more modest institution. While teachers and staff offered students their support, holding up signs of encouragement, some test takers, dressed in school uniforms, appeared panicked, including a girl with tears in her eyes.

"There's no need for us parents to add pressure. The children are already under a lot of it," said a woman named Wang, whose son had just entered the exam hall.



Parents wait for their children during the first day of China's National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), known as "gaokao", outside a high school in Beijing yesterday.

Like many mothers, she wore a traditional Chinese qipao in hopes of bringing good luck.

"I hope my son achieves immediate success and gets his name on the (list of high-scoring candidates)," Wang said with a smile.

Higher education has expanded rapidly in China in recent decades as an economic boom pushed up living standards - as well as parents' expectations for their children's careers. But the job market for young graduates remains daunting. As of April, 15.8 percent of people aged 16-24 living in urban areas were unemployed, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Due to this pressure, many Chinese students prepare for the gaokao from a young age, often with extra lessons after the regular school day.

And every year education au-

thorities are on guard against cheating and disruptions during the exam. This week, China's Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang called for a "safe gaokao", stressing the importance of a rigorous campaign against cheating.

Areas around exam centres are closely guarded by police, with road lanes closed to traffic and several cities banning motorists from honking their horns so as not to disrupt the concentration of students.

In some schools, facial recognition is even used to prevent fraud.

While the university admission rate for gaokao test takers has exceeded 80-90 percent in recent years, many students disappointed with their results choose to repeat the exam. As there is no age limit for the test, some have become notorious for attempting the exam dozens of times, either

after failing it or not getting into their top-choice university.

One teacher at the Beijing school where parents saw off their children on Saturday estimated that only about 10 of the approximately 600 final-year students there would earn a place at one of the capital's top universities.

Jiang, a final-year high school student who only gave one name, said he dreamt of attending a Beijing university, and was remaining calm shortly before his Chinese exam.

"Even though the pressure is intense, it's actually quite fair," he told AFP. "I feel like all the preparations that needed to be made have been made, so there's really no point in being nervous now, right?"

"Whatever happens, happens. It's truly not something I can completely control."

# S Korea, US agree to work towards swift tariff deal

Reuters  
Seoul

US President Donald Trump and South Korea's new president Lee Jae-myung agreed to work toward a swift tariff deal in their first phone call since Lee was elected this week, Lee's office said. Trump has imposed tariffs on South Korea, a long time ally with which it has a bilateral free trade deal, and pressed it to pay more for the 28,500 US troops stationed there.

Separately, Trump allies have aired concerns about Lee's more conciliatory stance towards China, Washington's main geopolitical rival.

Lee, a liberal, was elected on June 3 after former conservative leader, Yoon Suk-yeol, was impeached and ousted.

The future of South Korea's export-oriented economy may hinge on what kind of deal Lee can strike with Trump, with all of his country's key sectors from chips to autos and shipbuilding heavily exposed to global trade. His term began on Wednesday.

"The two presidents agreed to make an effort to reach a satisfactory agreement on tariff consultations as soon as possible that both countries can be satisfied with," Lee's office said in a statement.

"To this end, they decided to encourage working-level negotiations to yield tangible results."

Trump invited Lee to a summit in the US and they plan to meet soon, according to a White House official. Analysts say the first opportunity for the two to meet could be at a G7 summit in Canada in mid-June.

Lee's office said the two leaders also discussed the assassination attempts they both experienced last year as well as their enthusi-

asm for golf. Lee underwent surgery after he was stabbed in the neck by a man in January last year, while Trump was wounded in the ear by a bullet fired by a would-be assassin in July.

South Korea, a major US ally and one of the first countries after Japan to engage with Washington on trade talks, agreed in late April to craft a "July package" scrapping levies before the 90-day pause on Trump's reciprocal tariffs is lifted, but progress was disrupted by the change of governments in Seoul.

Lee said on the eve of the elections that "the most pressing matter is trade negotiations with the United States." Lee's camp has said, however, that they intend to seek more time to negotiate on trade with Trump.

While reiterating the importance of the US-South Korea alliance, Lee has also expressed more conciliatory plans for ties with China and North Korea, singling out the importance of China as a major trading partner while indicating a reluctance to take a firm stance on security tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

Political analysts say that while Trump and Lee may share a desire to try to re-engage with North Korea, Lee's stance on China could cause friction with the US.

A White House official said this week that South Korea's election was fair, but expressed concern about Chinese interference in what analysts said may have been a cautionary message to Lee.

Speaking in Singapore last week, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said many countries were tempted by the idea of seeking economic co-operation with China and defence co-operation with the United States, and warned that such entanglement complicated defence co-operation.

# Beijing proposes easing export of rare earths to EU

China has proposed establishing a "green channel" to ease the export of rare earths to the European Union, the commerce ministry said yesterday, after Beijing restricted their sale abroad. Beijing has since April required licences to export these strategic materials from China, which accounts for more than 60 percent of rare earth mining production and 92 percent of global refined output, according to the International Energy Agency. The metals are used in a wide variety of products, including electric car batteries, and there has been criticism from industries about the way China's licences have been issued. "Export control on rare earths and other items is an international practice," the commerce ministry said in a statement. "China attaches great importance to Europe's concerns and is willing to establish a green channel for eligible applications, fast track the examination and approval, and instruct the working level to maintain timely communication on this," a ministry statement said. The comments were attributed to China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, who met on Tuesday with EU trade commissioner Maros Sefcovic. (AFP)



Students with parents after the first day of NCEE exams outside a high school in Beijing.







## Eid celebration in Manchester



Refugees attend a lunch hosted by Khizra Mosque in Manchester as part of its Eid al-Adha celebrations, in Manchester, Britain, yesterday.



# India hails trade deal in talks with visiting British FM

AFP  
New Delhi

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said yesterday a trade deal with Britain was “truly a milestone” that will boost bilateral ties as he welcomed his counterpart David Lammy to New Delhi. India and Britain struck a long-delayed free trade agreement (FTA) last month after negotiations were relaunched in February.

Britain has sought to bolster trade ties across the world since it left the European Union under Brexit, a need that became more pressing after the United States unleashed a global tariff blitz that risks causing weaker economic growth.

“The recent conclusion of the India-UK FTA... is truly a milestone which will not only propel our two-way trade and investment but will also have a positive effect on other strategic aspects of our bilateral ties,” Jaishankar said after meeting Lammy, who is on a two-day visit. “It would also contribute to the strengthening of supply and value chains,” he said. The accord will slash tariffs on imports of UK goods into India, including whisky, cosmetics and medical devices.

In exchange, Britain will cut tariffs on imports of clothes, footwear and food products, including frozen prawns, from



British Foreign Secretary David Lammy attends an interview with Reuters at the British High Commissioner Residence in New Delhi, India.

**Britain has sought to bolster trade ties across the world since it left the European Union under Brexit, a need that became more pressing after the United States unleashed a global tariff blitz that risks causing weaker economic growth**

India. Britain and India are the sixth- and fifth-largest global economies respectively, with a trade relationship worth around 41bn pounds (\$54.8bn) and investment supporting more than 600,000 jobs across both countries. They hope the free-trade agreement will increase trade

between them by about 25.5bn pounds, as well as boost the British economy and wages. Talks were relaunched in February after stalling under Britain’s previous Conservative administrations. Lammy said before his visit the deal with India was “just the start of our ambitions”.

## UK, India discuss ‘counter-terrorism’ co-operation after Pakistan ceasefire

Reuters  
New Delhi

Britain and India yesterday discussed expanding their “counter-terrorism” collaboration following recent fighting between India and Pakistan, Britain’s foreign minister told Reuters after meeting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

British foreign minister David Lammy is the highest-profile Western official to have visited both New Delhi and Islamabad since the South Asian neighbours agreed to a ceasefire last month after their worst fighting in nearly three decades.

The latest tensions began in April after the killing of 26 men in Indian Kashmir that New Delhi blamed on “terrorists” backed by

**British FM Lammy is the highest-profile Western official to have visited both New Delhi and Islamabad since the South Asian neighbours agreed to a ceasefire last month**

Pakistan, a charge Islamabad denied. India then attacked what it called “terrorist infrastructure” in Pakistan, leading to escalation from both sides until a May 10 ceasefire.

“We want the situation to be

maintained, but of course we recognise fragility, particularly in the backdrop of terrorism, terrorism designed to destabilise India,” Lammy said in an interview at the residence of the British High Commissioner in New Delhi. “We are keen to continue to work with our Indian partners on counter-terrorism measures.”

He said he discussed the next steps with both Modi and Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar, but gave no specifics.

Last year, India and Britain discussed combating the financing of terrorism, co-operation between law enforcement and judicial bodies and information sharing.

Lammy said he also discussed boosting trade between the world’s fifth and sixth largest economies. The countries concluded talks for a free trade deal early last month.

## Thailand tightens border controls for tourists after Cambodia clash

AFP  
Bangkok

Thailand temporarily closed its biggest border crossing with Cambodia to local tourists yesterday after a Cambodian soldier was killed in a recent military clash between the two uneasy neighbours. There has been sporadic violence on the Thai-Cambodia frontier since fighting first broke out in 2008, resulting in at least 28 deaths.

A Cambodian soldier was killed in the most recent outbreak on May 28 in an area known as the Emerald Triangle, where the borders of Cambodia, Thailand and Laos meet. The Thai and Cambodian militaries agreed to ease tensions the following day but Cambodia then said it would keep its troops in the area, despite Thailand urg-

ing it to withdraw. The Royal Thai Army took control of the “opening and closing” of all border crossings it shares with Cambodia on Saturday, citing a “threat to Thailand’s sovereignty and security”.

The 1st Army Region banned the passage of six-wheeled trucks and reduced the operating hours of the border crossing between Aranyaprathet in Thailand’s southeast and Poipet in Cambodia’s west. It said in a statement on Saturday that Thais and Cambodians would only be allowed to cross for work and trade purposes.

The Aranyaprathet-Poipet border crossing sees the most land traffic between the two countries with several thousand people using it each day, many of them Thais going to gamble at casinos on the Cambodian side. The Royal Thai Army told AFP that the restrictions only applied to citizens

of the two countries but that implementation “may vary from place to place”. Six other border checkpoints tightened their opening hours and issued bans on six-wheeled vehicles. The Thai army said trade remained unaffected and Cambodian workers were still permitted to enter Thailand. Thailand’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Phumtham Wechayachai said in a statement on Saturday it was “deeply regrettable” that Cambodia had “rejected” the proposal to withdraw its armed forces after the May 28 incident.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said on Monday the kingdom would file a complaint with the International Court of Justice over the border dispute.

Thai authorities said a Joint Boundary Committee would meet next week to resolve the issue.

## Eid prayers at Jama Masjid



Worshippers offer prayers at Jama Masjid on the occasion of Eid al-Adha, in the old quarters of Delhi, India, yesterday.

## Indonesian minister says EU free trade talks to wrap up this month

AFP  
Jakarta

Indonesia and the European Union (EU) are expected to conclude talks over an economic co-operation deal that will relax trade barriers this month, Jakarta’s top economic minister said yesterday. Southeast Asia’s largest economy and the 27-member European bloc have been negotiating since 2016 to strike a deal that is expected to increase trade and investment.

Ties have been frayed by a proposed import ban on products linked to deforestation into the

EU that has angered Indonesia because it is a major palm oil exporter. However, Jakarta’s chief economic minister Airlangga Hartarto told an online briefing on Saturday that talks were nearing their conclusion.

“We already have entered the final round. This means that we have resolved almost all issues,” Airlangga told reporters.

He said in an earlier statement Indonesia and the EU would announce the conclusion of the negotiations by the end of June. Airlangga did not disclose any agreements that would be part of the deal. He said the next step was a legal drafting process to be com-

pleted in a “short time” before the two parties could ratify the agreement. One of the main points of the agreement is the eradication of non-tariff barriers and the lowering of tariffs to make their markets more accessible to the other, Airlangga said.

“A strategic advantage for Indonesia is the opening of the European market which has so far been subject to relatively higher tariffs and import duties compared to our neighbouring countries,” he said.

The EU will also give “special treatment” to Indonesia on its top exports, potentially including forestry products, Airlangga said without elaborating.



## Fire on cargo ship off Alaska left burning

A fire on a cargo ship carrying electric vehicles off the coast of Alaska was left burning with salvage teams expected to intervene tomorrow, according to media reports.

The Alaskan coastguard received a distress call on Tuesday reporting a fire onboard the Morning Midas, a British-managed cargo ship with 22 crew members and carrying thousands of vehicles.

The crew evacuated on a lifeboat before being rescued by another private vessel.

An overflight of the cargo ship, currently located around 340 miles (547km) southwest of Adak, confirmed that the ship was still burning on Wednesday, the coastguard said in a statement.

“Currently, there are no visual indications that the ship is taking on water or listing, and the extent of the damage is unknown,” it said.

Dustin Eno, a spokesman for the ship’s management company Zodiac Maritime, said there were no firefighting vessels nearby to help extinguish the blaze, the *New York Times* reported.

A salvage team was expected to arrive tomorrow, the outlet and the *Los Angeles Times* said.

Video footage released by the coastguard shows smoke rising from the 600’ (183m) vessel, which is reported to be carrying more than 3,000 vehicles, around 750 of which are electric or hybrid.

Electric vehicles contain lithium-ion batteries, which are generally safe but can overheat and ignite if damaged.

The ship is also estimated to be carrying hundreds of metric tonnes of gas fuel. – **AFP**

## Musk to face ‘very serious consequences’ if he funds Democrats, says Trump

Reuters  
Washington

Donald Trump said yesterday that his relationship with his billionaire donor Elon Musk is over and warned there would be “serious consequences” if the Tesla and SpaceX chief executive funds US Democrats running against Republicans who vote for the president’s sweeping tax and spending bill.

In a telephone interview with NBC News, Trump declined to say what those consequences would be, and went on to add that he had not had discussions about whether to investigate Musk.

Asked if he thought his relationship with Musk was over, Trump said: “I would assume so, yeah.”

“No,” Trump told NBC when asked if he had any desire to repair his relationship with Musk. “I have no intention of speaking to him.”

However, the president said he had not thought about terminating US government contracts with Musk’s StarLink satellite Internet or SpaceX rocket launch companies.

Musk and Trump began exchanging insults this week, as the former denounced Trump’s bill as a “disgusting abomination”.

Musk’s opposition to the measure complicated efforts to pass the legislation in Congress, where Republicans hold only slim majorities

# Court says Trump can bar AP from key White House events

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

President Donald Trump can bar the Associated Press (AP) from some White House media events for now, a federal appeals court ruled on Friday, pausing a lower court order to give access to the US news agency’s journalists.

AP journalists and photographers have been barred from the Oval Office and from travelling on Air Force One since mid-February because of the news agency’s decision to continue referring to the “Gulf of Mexico” – and not the “Gulf of America” as decreed by Trump.

In April, district court judge Trevor McFadden deemed that move a violation of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and of the press.

McFadden, who was appointed by Trump

during his first term, had said in his ruling that if the White House opens its doors to some journalists it cannot exclude others based on their viewpoints.

However, on Friday, a panel of judges with the Washington-based federal appeals court ruled that, pending appeal, the government could go ahead and bar AP from “restricted presidential spaces”, which it said did not fall under First Amendment protections.

“The White House therefore retains discretion to determine, including on the basis of viewpoint, which journalists will be admitted,” the ruling said. “Moreover, without a stay, the government will suffer irreparable harm because the injunction impinges on the President’s independence and control over his private workspaces.”

The 2-1 ruling was written by US Circuit Judge Neomi Rao, who was joined by fellow Trump appointee US Circuit Judge Gregory Katsas.

## Report: Record fire season in Brazil drives acceleration in Amazon deforestation

A record fire season in Brazil last year caused the rate of deforestation to accelerate, in a blow to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva’s pledge to protect the Amazon rainforest.

Official figures released by the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), which tracks forest cover by satellite, indicated that deforestation rate between August 2024 and May 2025 rose by 9.1% compared to the same period in 2023-24.

And they showed a staggering 92% increase in Amazon deforestation in May, compared to the year-ago period.

That development risks erasing the gains made by Brazil in 2024, when deforestation slowed in all of its ecological biomes for the first time in six years.

The report showed that beyond the Amazon, the picture was less alarming in other biomes across Brazil, host of this year’s UN climate change conference.

Presenting the findings, the environment ministry’s executive secretary Joao Paulo Capobianco chiefly blamed the record number of fires that swept Brazil and other South American countries last year, whipped up by a severe drought. – **AFP**



Trump and Musk are seen in the Oval Office of the White House this picture taken on March 14. – **AFP**

their public feud, which exploded on Thursday.

During his first term as president, the House, then controlled by Democrats, twice voted to impeach Trump but the Senate both times acquitted him.

The White House and Musk did not immediately respond to requests for comment yesterday on the deleted posts.

People who have spoken to Musk said his anger has begun to recede and they thought he would want to repair his relationship with Trump.

One of the X posts that Musk appeared to have deleted was a response to another user posting: “President vs Elon. Who wins? My money’s on Elon. Trump should be impeached and (Vice-President) JD Vance should replace him.” Musk had written “yes”.

On Theo Von’s *This Past Week-end* podcast – recorded on Thursday as the feud between Trump and Musk unfolded, and released yesterday – Vance called Musk’s

criticism of Trump a “huge mistake”.

“I’m always going to be loyal to the president, and I hope that eventually Elon kind of comes back into the fold. Maybe that’s not possible now because he’s gone so nuclear. But I hope it is,” said Vance, describing Musk as an “incredible entrepreneur”.

Musk, the world’s richest man, bankrolled a large part of Trump’s 2024 presidential campaign, spending nearly \$300mn in last year’s US elections and taking credit for Republicans retaining a majority of seats in the House and retaking a majority in the Senate.

Trump named Musk to head an effort to downsize the federal workforce and slash spending, lauding him at the White House only about a week ago for his work as head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

Musk cut only about half of 1% of total spending, far short of his brash plans to axe \$2tn from the federal budget.

## Wrongly deported Salvadoran migrant arrested on return to US

AFP  
Washington

The Salvadoran migrant at the heart of a row over President Donald Trump’s hardline deportation policies was returned to the United States on Friday and arrested on human smuggling charges.

Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia was brought back to the United States from El Salvador and charged with trafficking undocumented migrants, Attorney-General Pam Bondi said.

“Abrego Garcia has landed in the United States to face justice,” Bondi said at a press conference.

The US Supreme Court had ordered the Trump administration to “facilitate” the return of Abrego Garcia after he was mistakenly deported in March to a notorious maximum security prison in El Salvador.

However, Bondi insisted to reporters that his return to the United States resulted from an arrest warrant presented to Salvadoran authorities.

“We’re grateful to (Salvadoran) President (Nayib) Bukele for agreeing to return him to our country to face these very serious charges,” she said.

In a post on X, Bukele said “we work with the Trump administration, and if they request the return of a gang member to face charges, of course we wouldn’t refuse”.

Trump, in remarks to reporters on Friday, described Abrego Garcia as a “pretty bad guy” and said he “should’ve never had to be returned”.

White House deputy press secretary Abigail Jackson said Abrego Garcia’s return “has nothing to do with his original deportation”.

“There was no mistake,” Jackson said on X. “He’s returning because a new investigation has revealed crimes SO HEINOUS, committed in the US, that only

the American Justice System could hold him fully accountable.”

Abrego Garcia, 29, was living in the eastern state of Maryland until he became one of more than 200 people sent to a prison in El Salvador as part of Trump’s crackdown on undocumented migrants.

Most of the migrants who were summarily deported were alleged members of the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, which the Trump administration has declared a foreign terrorist organisation.

Justice Department lawyers later admitted that Abrego Garcia – who is married to a US citizen – was wrongly deported due to an “administrative error”.

Abrego Garcia had been living in the United States under protected legal status since 2019, when a judge ruled he should not be deported because he could be harmed in his home country.

Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg, one of Abrego Garcia’s attorneys, said the government had returned him to the United States “not to correct their error but to prosecute him”.

“Due process means the chance to defend yourself before you’re punished, not after,” Sandoval-Moshenberg said, adding: “This is an abuse of power, not justice.”

Bondi alleged that Abrego Garcia had “played a significant role in an alien smuggling ring” and was a smuggler of “children and women” as well as members of the Salvadoran gang MS-13.

She said Abrego Garcia, who was indicted by a grand jury in Tennessee, would be returned to El Salvador upon completion of any prison sentence.

According to the indictment, Abrego Garcia was involved in smuggling undocumented migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and other countries into the United States between 2016 and earlier this year.

## Judge okays settlement allowing NCAA schools to pay athletes

Reuters  
Washington

A US judge has granted final approval to a \$2.8bn settlement with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) that will allow schools for the first time to compensate student athletes for past and future commercial use of their names, images and likenesses.

The settlement, approved in a ruling by US District Judge Claudia Wilken in the Oakland, California, federal court, resolves long-running litigation between the NCAA and student athletes.

“Despite some compromises, the settlement agreement nevertheless will result in extraordinary relief for members of the settlement classes,” she wrote.

Wilken said the deal will “permit levels and types of student-athlete compensation that have never been permitted in the history of college sports”.

The ruling marked a “historic day for college sports and the rights of athletes”, the lead attorneys for the plaintiffs, Steve Berman and Jeffrey Kessler, said in a statement.

In a statement, NCAA president Charlie Baker welcomed the judge’s ruling.

“Student-athletes will benefit from

the rich opportunities they enjoy now, plus far more scholarship opportunities, landmark financial benefits and a streamlined NCAA to support them,” Baker said.

The NCAA denied any wrongdoing in agreeing to settle.

The deal faced dozens of objections that it did not adequately compensate athletes or was unfair in other ways.

Objectors to the deal now can appeal to the San Francisco-based 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals.

The settlement, covering hundreds of thousands of current and former students since 2016, resolved three lawsuits that claimed NCAA rules barring payments to athletes violated US antitrust law.

The \$2.8bn will cover past damages.

The plaintiffs’ lawyers previously estimated that the deal would provide tens of billions of dollars to class members over the next 10 years.

Schools will be allowed to pay athletes from funds that universities receive from broadcasts and other commercial sources.

The NCAA in April convinced a federal judge in Manhattan to dismiss a lawsuit seeking compensation for thousands of former student athletes who played team sports in college prior to 2016.

Those students have filed an appeal.

## Riot police, protesters square off after ICE raids

Reuters  
Los Angeles

Helmeted police in riot gear turned out on Friday evening in a tense confrontation with protesters in downtown Los Angeles, after a day of federal immigration raids in which dozens of people across the city were reported to be taken into custody.

Live Reuters video showed Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers lined up on a downtown street wielding batons and what appeared to be tear gas rifles, facing off with demonstrators after authorities had ordered crowds of protesters to disperse around nightfall.

Early in the standoff, some protesters hurled chunks of broken concrete toward officers, and police responded by firing volleys of tear gas and pepper spray.

Police also fired “flash-bang” concussion rounds.

It was not clear whether there were any immediate arrests.

An LAPD spokesperson, Drake Madison, told Reuters that police on the scene had declared an unlawful assembly, meaning that those protesters

who failed to leave the area were subject to arrest.

Television news footage earlier in the day showed caravans of unmarked military-style vehicles and vans loaded with uniformed federal agents streaming through Los Angeles streets as part of the immigration enforcement operation.

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents targeted several locations, including a Home Depot in the city’s Wetlake District, an apparel store in the Fashion District and a clothing warehouse in South Los Angeles, according to the Los Angeles City News Service (CNS).

CNS and other local media reported dozens of people were taken into custody during the raids, the latest in a series of such sweeps conducted in a number of cities as part of President Donald Trump’s extensive crackdown on illegal immigration.

The Republican president has vowed to arrest and deport undocumented migrants in record numbers.

The Los Angeles police did not take part in the immigration enforcement action.

LAPD officers were deployed to quell civil unrest after crowds who had been protesting against the deportation

raids spray-painted anti-ICE slogans on the walls of a federal court building and massed outside a nearby prison where some of the detainees were believed to be held.

Impromptu demonstrations had also erupted at some of the raid locations earlier in the day.

One organised labour executive, David Huerta, president of the Service Employees International Union of California, was injured and detained by ICE at one site, according to an SEIU statement.

The union said in a statement that Huerta was arrested “while exercising his First Amendment right to observe and document law enforcement activity”.

No details about the nature or severity of Huerta’s injury were given. It was not clear whether he was charged with a crime.

ICE did not immediately respond to a request from Reuters for information about its enforcement actions or Huerta’s detention.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass issued a statement condemning the immigration raids, saying that “these tactics sow terror in our communities and disrupt basic principles of safety in our city”.





# Russia and Ukraine accuse each other of prisoner swap delay

AFP  
Kyiv

A large-scale prisoner exchange between Russia and Ukraine – the only concrete outcome of peace talks – was thrown into doubt yesterday after Moscow and Kyiv accused each other of delaying and thwarting the swap.

The hold-up to an exchange that both sides said would take place this weekend came as Moscow's army launched a barrage of missiles, drones and bombs across the country overnight and throughout the day yesterday, killing at least 10 people.

At talks in Istanbul on Monday, Kyiv and Moscow agreed to release all wounded soldiers and those aged under 25 who had been captured – more than 1,000 people on each side.

Russia said it would also hand back the remains of 6,000 killed Ukrainian soldiers.

Yesterday Moscow accused Ukraine of not turning up to collect the bodies and not agreeing a date to swap the captured soldiers, while Kyiv said Russia was playing “dirty games” by not sticking to the agreed parameters for the exchange.

“The Ukrainian side has unexpectedly postponed for an indefinite period both the acceptance of the bodies and the exchange of prisoners of war,” Russia's top negotiator Vladimir Medinsky said.

A defence ministry spokesman said “the Ukrainian side is still refraining from setting a date” for the first stage of the prisoner swap.

The exchange was set to be the largest of the war, topping last month's 1,000-for-1,000 swap that was agreed at a first round of talks in Istanbul.

After the Istanbul talks, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said it would take place this weekend, while Russia said it was ready for yesterday, today or tomorrow.

Responding to Russia's accusations, Ukraine's Co-ordination Headquarters for the Treatment of

Prisoners of War said no date had been agreed for the return of bodies.

It also said a list of names Russia said would be released did not match the terms of the agreement.

“Unfortunately, instead of constructive dialogue, we are again faced with manipulations,” it said in a statement. “We call on the Russian side to stop playing dirty games and return to constructive work to bring people back to both sides and to clearly implement the agreement in the coming days.”

The spat came hours after Russia launched a massive aerial attack across Ukraine, heavily targeting the city of Kharkiv.

At least 10 died in the overnight barrage and attacks throughout the day yesterday, officials said.

Kharkiv came under “the most powerful attack since the beginning of the full-scale war”, Mayor Igor Terekhov said.

Four people were killed and more than 20 wounded as homes and apartment blocks were pummelled overnight and guided bombs were dropped on the city yesterday afternoon.

Three people were also killed in the frontline Donetsk region, which has seen the most intense fighting of the war, and three more in the Kherson region, also partially occupied by Moscow's forces.

Since Russia invaded in February 2022, tens of thousands have been killed, with millions forced to flee their homes as cities and villages across eastern Ukraine have been destroyed.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga called for Kyiv's Western allies to punish Russia for refusing to halt its invasion.

“To put an end to Russia's killing and destruction, more pressure on Moscow is required, as are more steps to strengthen Ukraine,” he said.

The Ukrainian air force said Russia had fired 206 drones and nine missiles in the overnight barrage.

Russia's defence ministry said it had launched a “group strike” against “military-industrial” facilities in Ukraine.

## Return to your country: Kabul tells Afghans rebuffed by Washington

The Taliban government has urged Afghans hoping to emigrate to the United States to instead return to Afghanistan, after Washington tightened entry conditions.

US President Donald Trump this week announced a travel ban targeting 12 countries, including Afghanistan, which his proclamation said lacked “competent” central authorities for processing passports and vetting.

Commenting on the ban yesterday, Prime Minister Hassan Akhund urged Afghans to return to their country, saying that they would be protected even if they worked with US-led forces in the two-decade fight against the Taliban insurgency.

“For those who are worried that America has closed its doors to Afghans... I want to tell them, ‘Return to your country, even if you have served the Americans for 20 or 30 years for their ends, and ruined the Islamic system,’” he said in a speech marking the Eid al-Adha holiday, broadcast by state media.

“You will not face abuse or trouble,” he said, making reassurances that the Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada had “granted amnesty for all”.

After surging to power in 2021, Taliban authorities announced a general amnesty for Afghans who worked with the Western-backed forces and government.

However, the United Nations has recorded reports of extrajudicial killings, detentions and abuses.

Afghans fled in droves to neighbouring countries during decades of conflict, but the chaotic withdrawal of US-led troops saw a new wave clamouring to escape Taliban government curbs and fears of reprisal for working with Washington.

The United States has not had a working embassy in Afghanistan since 2021 and Afghans must apply for visas in third countries, principally Pakistan which has recently ramped up campaigns to expel Afghans.

Since Trump returned to the White House in January, Afghans have gradually seen their chances of migrating to the United States or staying there shrink.

Trump administration orders have disrupted refugee pathways and revoked legal protections temporarily shielding Afghans from deportation starting in July. – **AFP**

## France's Macron to visit Greenland on June 15

French President Emmanuel Macron is to visit Greenland, his office said yesterday, the first foreign head of state to do so since US President Donald Trump's repeated threats to seize the autonomous Danish territory.

Macron's office said he had been invited to visit on June 15 by the territory's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen and Danish leader Mette Frederiksen.

The three will hold talks focused on North Atlantic and Arctic security, climate change, the energy transition and the supply of critical minerals, the French presidency said.

The visit will contribute to fostering “European sovereignty” and was aiming at “strengthening co-operation” with Greenland, it added.

Frederiksen called the visit “a concrete testimony of European unity” in a statement.

“It has been uplifting to see the strong international support for Greenland and the Kingdom in the difficult foreign policy situation in recent months,” she said.

Danish and Greenlandic leaders have insisted that the autonomous territory, where a majority are in favour of independence in the long term, must decide its own future, and have repeatedly said Washington “will never get Greenland”.

Macron will travel on to Canada after the Greenland visit to participate in a G7 summit. – **AFP**

## Germany has three years to overhaul military, says official

AFP  
Berlin

Germany's armed forces have three years to acquire the equipment to tackle a possible Russian attack on Nato territory, the head of military procurement said yesterday.

Defence spending has risen up the political agenda since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and more recently with the United States pushing North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) members to increase their commitments.

“Everything necessary to be fully prepared to defend the country must be acquired by 2028,” Annette Lehnigk-Emden, head of the Federal Office for Military Procurement, told the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper.

Germany's chief of defence, General Carsten Breuer, recently warned that Russia could be in a position to “launch a large-scale attack against Nato territory” as early as 2029.

He said that there was a Russian build-up of ammunition and tanks for a possible attack on Nato's Baltic members.

Lehnigk-Emden said that Chancellor Friedrich Merz's new government was enabling the upgrade by allocating hundreds of billions of euros for defence.

She said the priority would be for heavy equipment such as Sky-ranger anti-aircraft tanks.

Merz has made rearmament a priority of his coalition government to make German forces “the most powerful conventional army in Europe”.

Rearmament had already begun under the previous government of Olaf Scholz after Russia launched its war in Ukraine.

And US President Donald Trump has raised the stakes further this year by pushing Nato members to increase their defence spending to 5% of GDP from the current level of 2%.

Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said on Thursday that 50,000-60,000 new soldiers would be needed in the coming years to meet the increased Nato defence needs.

Last year, the army had more than 180,000 soldiers and set a goal of exceeding 203,000 by 2031.

Germany is meanwhile looking to speed up the establishment of shelters where the population could find refuge in the event of conflict, according to the president of the German Federal Office for Civil Protection, Ralph Tiesler.

At the end of last year, the authorities began to catalogue tunnels, subway stations, underground car parks and cellars of public buildings that could be converted into bunkers.

“We are going to create 1mn shelter places as quickly as possible,” Tiesler told the *Sddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper, indicating that a plan to this effect would be presented this summer.

## Thousands march in Rome to protest ‘complicity’ on Gaza war

AFP  
Rome

Hundreds of thousands of people marched through the streets of Rome yesterday to protest the war in Gaza, in a rally called by opposition parties denouncing the government's alleged “complicity” in the conflict.

“Stop the massacre, stop complicity!” read a wide banner held by protestors at the start of the march, amid a sea of red, white and green Palestinian flags, peace flags and “Free Palestine” signs.

The peaceful protest attracted a massive crowd estimated by organisers at 300,000 people.

Police later said those estimates were “largely confirmed”, according to Italian news agency AGI.

It made its way from Rome's central Piazza Vittorio to San Giovanni, where speakers took to a stage to urge an end to the violence and denounce what some called the silence of the far-right Italian government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

The leader of the main opposition Democratic Party, Elly Schlein, called the turnout “an enormous popular response” in opposition to the war.

Italy's 5-Star Movement and the Greens-Left Alliance were also behind the protest.

The demonstration was “to say enough to the massacre of Palestinians, to say enough to the crimes of Netanyahu's far-right government” and to show the world “another Italy”, Schlein told journalists.

“An Italy that does not keep silent as the Meloni government does, an Italy that instead wants peace, wants an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, humanitarian aid, and wants recognition of the state of Palestine,” she said.

The leader of the 5-Star Movement, former prime minister Giuseppe Conte,



Protesters hold a banner reading ‘Free Palestine’ during a demonstration in Rome called by Italian opposition parties in support of Palestinians in Gaza. – **AFP**

told the crowd that he was there “to not be a partner to genocide” and rejected any accusation of antisemitism on the part of protestors.

Israel has come under increasing international criticism over the dire humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory, where the United Nations warned in May that the entire population was at risk of famine.

In Italy, Meloni has been pushed by the

opposition to condemn the actions of Israel's leader Benjamin Netanyahu in Gaza, but her criticism has been tempered.

Last month, Meloni called the humanitarian situation “increasingly dramatic and unjustifiable” and said she had had “often difficult conversations” with Netanyahu, while at the same time noting that “it was not Israel that started the hostilities”.

Many protesters came from across Italy to participate in the demonstration in the

capitol, including Gabriella Branca, a lawyer from Genoa.

“It's unbearable to witness the massacre of 60,000 people, including 20,000 children. We have to say enough,” the 67-year-old told AFP. “In other countries, as you know, demonstrations have drawn millions of people, so I hope that today in Rome we can send a signal to all of Italy, so that everyone takes to the streets to say enough and above all, to try to find peace.”

## 5.3-magnitude quake rocks northern Greece

A 5.3-magnitude earthquake rocked the Greek Orthodox religious enclave of Mount Athos in northern Greece yesterday, Athens' Institute of Geodynamics said.

The undersea quake had a depth of just 12.5km (7.7 miles) and struck northwest of the enclave's administrative capital of Karyes in the Halkidiki peninsula, the institute said on its website.

It was felt in surrounding areas and several aftershocks followed.

“We are well, people should not be worried,”

Mount Athos governor Alkiviadis Stefanis said.

One man visiting a monastery was taken to hospital with a hand injury after running and falling, he said.

There were no other reports of injury.

Mount Athos, an Orthodox spiritual centre since 1054, has enjoyed an autonomous statute since Byzantine times.

Known as the Holy Mountain in Greece, the community has around 20 inhabited monasteries, some of whom are over 1,000 years old. – **AFP**

## Bulgaria rescues dozens from ‘houses of horrors’

AFP  
Sofia

Dozens of people were rescued from two illegal care homes where they were subjected to brutal mistreatment, Bulgarian officials said yesterday.

Justice Minister Georgy Georgiev described the facilities as “houses of horrors” and officials described how victims were beaten, bound and sedated.

Some 75 people were removed from facilities in the east of the country, which the owners had converted into so-called health centres by offering “rooms for rent” for a little more than €400 a month.

The regional prosecutor's office in the town of Stara Zagora said five people had been arrested and an investigation had begun into “kidnapping, violence and negligence”.

“According to testimonies,

one older woman had not left the establishment for four years,” the regional prosecutor's office said in a statement.

“Another resident, who tried to flee, was caught, beaten and left unconscious,” the statement read.

The justice ministry added that some of those rescued had “their feet tied and were sedated” and were locked in rooms “without bedding, the window handles removed and cut off from the outside world”.

International organisations often criticise the poor state of health facilities in Bulgaria, the poorest country in the European Union.

The lack of facilities for older people has led to the development of illegal centres.

In November 2021, nine older people died in a fire at a nursing home near Varna and four others died in a similar incident in May 2022 at another facility in the same region.

AFP  
Madrid

A fire erupted in a retirement home in northeastern Spain killing a 93-year-old man and injuring 22 others due to smoke inhalation, officials said yesterday.

The fire broke out in a ground-floor room late on Friday at the home in the northeastern city of Zaragoza, local emergency services wrote on social network X.

Two men lived in the room, including the one who died, who was disabled “and was there-

fore not able to get out”, Zaragoza mayor Natalia Chueca told reporters at the scene.

Another 22 people were taken to hospital with injuries of varying degrees caused by smoke inhalation, among them a 46-year old man who lived nearby and had joined the rescue effort, emergency services said.

Several local residents told local media how they worked together with firefighters to evacuate residents, some of whom had to be rescued through broken windows.

“We saw smoke and decided to intervene. We broke the windows with a hammer, an axe, chairs from the bars, anything we could get our

hands on,” local resident Jesus Vadorrey told regional television station Aragon TV. “It was very agonising because the glass is very thick and people were already suffocating inside.”

The head of the regional government of Aragon, Jorge Azcon, thanked bystanders for their help, telling reporters that without them “we would probably be mourning even greater losses than we are today”.

Police have launched an investigation into the blaze.

The director of the home said it may have been caused by an overheating electric wheelchair battery charger.

## One dead, 22 hurt in Spain retirement home fire



## Where is the money the EU promised workers to go green?

Thomson Reuters Foundation  
Brussels

The European Union's flagship Just Transition Fund has spent less than 3% of its €26.7bn (\$30.5bn) to support regions and communities' shift away from fossil fuel industries, despite running for more than four years.

European Commission data reveals that only €735mn (\$840mn) of the bloc's fund had been spent by EU member states from 2021 through March 2025, the latest figures available.

"The Just Transition Fund has failed abysmally to help workers who have lost their jobs," said Ciaran Mullooly, an Irish Member of the European Parliament who has been investigating the fund's performance as a rapporteur.

"From an employment perspective it's completely devastating. Towns are being left with nothing. It's almost like they have

given up on a generation," he said.

Launched as part of the European Green Deal to make sure "no one and no region is left behind" in the transition to net zero, the fund was intended in part to retrain workers in areas like coal mines, steel factories and peat fields.

Running until 2027, after which no new projects will be considered, the fund has been championed by Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen.

Last year she pledged to "significantly increase" financing in future iterations.

Critics, however, have raised concerns that the delayed spending could hinder workers' transition to clean energy, risking rushed misspending ahead of the 2027 deadline and a backlash against green policies.

Europe's planned 2030 emissions reductions, some of the most ambitious in the world, could lead to an overall loss of 494,000 jobs, with the coal sec-

tor set to halve in the next five years, according to an impact assessment by the EU.

Yet depending upon policies such as cutting taxation and investment, it could also lead to a net gain of 110,000 jobs in growing sectors like electricity supply, the assessment found.

Mullooly said spending has been slow in part because the application process is bureaucratic and onerous, with community groups required to have financing upfront such as loans.

The Just Transition Fund is targeting regions where traditional polluting industries such as coal, peat, oil shale, cement, paper and fertiliser production are major job providers.

Poland, Germany and Romania are set to be the leading beneficiaries with €4.7bn (\$5.4bn), €3.7bn (\$4.2bn) and €2.5bn (\$2.9bn) respectively.

The grants can be used to train workers, assist in job searching, invest in small- and medium-

sized businesses, support research and launch clean energy projects. The fund has been used to launch Greece's first women-led energy co-operative, which has an output of 3 megawatts of wind and solar energy, and a gaming and technology hub in a former coal mine area in Poland.

However, five EU member states – Spain, Italy, Belgium, Slovenia and Cyprus – have spent no money to date, despite having more than €3bn (\$3.4bn) available among them, according to EC data.

The figures also showed 43% of the funds have been "decided" by EU member states, meaning they have been allocated but not necessarily spent.

Mullooly called for changes including the creation of special economic zones within 50 kilometres of job loss sites with priority access to funding, upfront funds for community groups and higher education and training for workers who lose their jobs.

A spokesperson for the Commission said the low spending rate was misleading because significantly more funds are in the process of being allocated for projects even if not yet spent.

The pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine slowed the initial roll-out, but states have an additional two years to spend resources after 2027, and they are "optimistic and confident" that everything will be spent on time, the spokesperson said.

**'NO ONE HAS THE SKILLS'**  
Union leaders and NGOs are more sceptical.

A representative for one major European labour union said workers' input was not being sufficiently considered in the spending plans.

Workers were also not receiving training, risking a skills gap and mass unemployment, said the representative who asked for anonymity.

"They aren't being consulted – and no one has the skills for

transition," they said. The Commission should require minimum spending to support marginalised groups, provide better technical support and require more credible plans for emissions reductions, said Alberto Vela, a spokesperson on climate and energy at the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), a network of non-profits.

"The Just Transition Fund can be a powerful catalyst for both decarbonisation and socio-economic changes in regions relying heavily on fossil fuels, but we risk not taking advantage of this opportunity," he said.

With only two years remaining, hasty, last-minute spending could upset the just transition, said Damijan Fiser, a spokesperson at the European Court of Auditors, an independent body that audits EU finances.

"When there's a pressure to rush spending, there's a higher risk that mistakes will appear," said Fiser.

## Homes smashed, help slashed: no respite for returning Syrians

Thomson Reuters Foundation  
Damascus

Around a dozen Syrian women sat in a circle at a UN-funded centre in Damascus, happy to share stories about their daily struggles, but their bonding was overshadowed by fears that such meet-ups could soon end due to international aid cuts.

The community centre, funded by the United Nations' refugee agency (UNHCR), offers vital services that families cannot get elsewhere in a country scarred by war, with an economy broken by decades of mismanagement and Western sanctions.

"We have no stability. We are scared and we need support," said Fatima al-Abbiad, a mother of four. "There are a lot of problems at home, a lot of tension, a lot of violence because of the lack of income." But the centre's future now hangs in the balance as the UNHCR has had to cut down its activities in Syria because of the international aid squeeze caused by US President Donald Trump's decision to halt foreign aid.

The cuts will close nearly half of the UNHCR centres in Syria and the widespread services they provide – from educational support and medical equipment to mental health and counselling sessions – just as the population needs them the most. There are hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees returning home after the fall of Bashar al-Assad last year.

UNHCR's representative in Syria, Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, said the situation was a "disaster" and that the agency would struggle to help returning refugees.

"I think that we have been forced – here I use very deliberately the word forced – to adopt



Syrian returnee, Ahmed al-Hadid, and his family members unload belongings from a truck in Aleppo's countryside.

plans which are more modest than we would have liked," he told Context/Thomson Reuters Foundation in Damascus.

"It has taken us years to build that extraordinary network of support, and almost half of them are going to be closed exactly at the moment of opportunity for refugee and IDPs (internally displaced people) return."

### BIG LOSS

A UNHCR spokesperson told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that the agency would shut down around 42% of its 122 community centres in Syria in June, which will deprive some 500,000 people of assistance and reduce aid for another 600,000 that benefit from the remaining centres.

The UNHCR will also cut 30% of its staff in Syria, said the spokesperson, while the livelihood programme that supports small businesses will shrink by 20% unless it finds new funding.

Around 100 people visit the centre in Damascus each day, said Mirna Mimas, a supervisor with GOPA-DERD, the church charity that runs the centre with UNHCR.

Already the centre's educational programmes, which benefited 900 children last year, are at risk, said Mimas.

Nour Huda Madani, 41, said she had been "lucky" to receive support for her autistic child at the centre.

"They taught me how to deal with him," said the mother of five.

Another visitor, Odette Badawi, said the centre was important for her well-being after she returned to Syria five years ago, having fled to Lebanon when war broke out in Syria in 2011.

"(The centre) made me feel like I am part of society," said the 68-year-old.

Mimas said if the centre closed, the loss to the community would be enormous: "If we must tell people we are leaving, I will weep before they do," she said.

### UNHCR HELP 'SELECTIVE'

Aid funding for Syria had already been declining before Trump's seismic cuts to the US Agency for International Development this year and cuts by



A recent photo shows Syrian returnee, Ahmed al-Hadid, hand over a document to an official at the immigration and passports department in Aleppo's countryside.



A truck transporting families, loaded with their belongings, drives through Bab Al-Salameh border crossing in Aleppo's countryside.

other countries to international aid budgets. But the new blows come at a particularly bad time.

Since former president Assad was ousted by rebels last December, around 507,000 Syrians have returned from neighbouring countries and around 1.2mn people displaced inside the country went back home, according to UN estimates.

Llosa said, given the aid cuts, UNHCR would have only limited scope to support the return of some of the 6mn Syrians who fled the country since 2011.

"We will need to help only those that absolutely want to go

home and simply do not have any means to do so," Llosa said. "That means that we will need to be very selective as opposed to what we wanted, which was to be expansive."

### ESSENTIAL SUPPORT

Ayoub Merhi Hariri had been counting on support from the livelihood programme to pay off the money he borrowed to set up a business after he moved back to Syria at the end of 2024.

After 12 years in Lebanon, he returned to Daraa in southwestern Syria to find his house destroyed – no doors, no windows, no running water, no electricity.

He moved in with relatives and registered for livelihood support at a UN-backed centre in Daraa to help him start a spice manufacturing business to support his family and ill mother.

While his business was doing well, he said he would struggle to repay his creditors the 20mn Syrian pounds (\$1,540) he owed them now that his livelihood support had been cut.

"Thank God (the business) was a success, and it is generating an income for us to live off," he said.

"But I can't pay back the debt," he said, fearing the worst. "I'll have to sell everything."

## Philippine marine life under threat from industrial fishing

Thomson Reuters Foundation  
Manila

Impoverished fishing communities in the Philippines are caught in a David-and-Goliath fight with industrial fishing companies after the country's top court loosened restrictions on commercial operations in protected coastal waters.

Already facing threats from extreme weather and urban development that have destroyed fish breeding grounds, fishers fear they may now have to compete with large vessels in municipal waters, the 15km stretch of sea off the coastlines of cities.

"Once commercial fishing vessels enter our area, there will come a time when we will no longer be able to catch any fish," said Rommel Escaral, 37, who has fished Manila Bay since he was a teenager. Mayors, environmentalists, fishing communities and the national government have all appealed against a Supreme Court ruling last year that invalidated a ban on large-scale fishing op-

erations in municipal waters, where about 2mn people rely on fishing for their livelihoods.

While the Supreme Court decision is not yet final during the appeals process, lawyer Grizelda Mayo-Anda of the Environmental Legal Assistance Center said that some commercial fishers have already been entering municipal waters. "In Palawan province... commercial fishers now use the ruling to their advantage," said Mayo-Anda, whose NGO has joined one of the appeals.

Municipal waters not only provide income to communities, who are among the country's poorest, but also act as extensions of protected marine areas by preventing overfishing in productive habitats to allow recovery of depleted stocks.

Small-scale Filipino fishers, who use more sustainable methods such as hand-lining, cast net fishing or bamboo fish corrals, have struggled for years with the encroachment of commercial fishing vessels in municipal waters. Some 370,000 municipal fishing vessels and more than 5,000 commercial vessels are



A drone view shows children picking through washed-up garbage along the polluted Pasig River on World Environment Day in Manila.

registered in the Philippines, according to 2022 data from the government's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

Last year fisheries production fell 5%, according to government figures, while production from both commercial and municipal fishers declined by nearly one-quarter from 2010-2023 due to overfishing, illegal fishing and habitat destruction. Commercial fishing often involves trawling, in which a vessel uses nets to collect everything in its

path, damaging coral reefs, seagrass beds and other habitats.

"If we totally allow commercial fishers even into municipal waters, it will only further decline our fisheries production," said Jerwin Baure, a marine biologist and member of the Advocates of Science and Technology for the People, an association of Filipino scientists.

### FEW PROTECTIONS

The League of Municipalities, an association of more than 1,400 mayors, questioned the ruling in

February, saying preferential rights for small-scale boats was a "matter of social justice, economic stability and environmental sustainability."

Alfredo Coro, mayor of the coastal town of Del Carmen, also appealed to Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Supreme Court justices to overturn the ruling. "The small fishers are... continuously being exposed to multiple threats including impacts of climate change, low income without social protection and limited access to public services due to their remote habitation," he said in an open letter shared with shared with the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Of the Philippines' more than 2mn square km of marine waters, 15% are classified as municipal waters, while commercial fishing vessels are allowed to fish within 84% of territorial waters, according to the Philippine Association of Marine Science. Fishers compete in shallow waters of up to 50 metres depth, because these are the richest fishing grounds due to their proximity to sunlight and

nutrients. Under the Philippines' fisheries code, small to medium commercial vessels may be given permission to fish in municipal waters without active gears like trawlers or towed nets which damage ecosystems.

Trawls are used to catch salt-water species like shrimps and anchovies, while purse seine – in which a large net surrounds a school of fish – is used for surface-dwelling and midwater species such as sardines, tuna and mackerel. Baure said the court ruling may force municipal and commercial boats to fight for fish stocks, with smaller boats at a clear disadvantage in fuel and equipment.

"Our country is already facing a lot of cases of illegal fishing, such as commercial vessels illegally entering municipal waters. That alone was a challenge to control," he said.

Scientists at the Philippine Association of Marine Science have called for a long-term and science-based harvest strategies that will provide equitable access to fisheries without harming marine biodiversity.



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GULF TIMES

Supply constraints challenge airlines amid optimistic growth forecasts

Gross Domestic Product or GDP has been the traditional driver of airline economics. However, although global GDP growth is expected to fall from 3.3% in 2024 to 2.5% in 2025, airline profitability may improve, according to industry analysts. Global airline industry's net profit to exceed \$36bn this year, improved from the \$32.4bn earned in 2024, largely on the back of falling oil prices, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which is the global body of airlines. Continued strong employment and moderating inflation projections are expected to keep demand growing, even if not as fast as previously projected. Efficiency is another significant driver of the outlook. Passenger load factors are expected to reach an all-time high in 2025 with a full-year average of 84%, as fleet expansion and modernisation remains challenging amid supply chain failures in the aerospace sector. Total traveller numbers are expected to reaching a record high 4.99bn in 2025, IATA data reveal. Overall, total revenues are expected to grow by 1.3%, outpacing a 1% increase in total expenses, shoring up industry profitability. Air passenger revenues are expected to reach \$693bn in 2025 (+1.6% on 2024), an all-time high. This will be bolstered by an additional \$144bn in ancillary revenues (+6.7% on 2024). Passenger growth (measured in Revenue Passenger Kilometres/RPK) is expected to be 5.8% - a significant normalisation after the exceptional double-digit growth of the pandemic recovery. It is expected that passenger yields will fall by 4% compared with 2024, which is largely reflective of the impact of lower oil prices and strong industry competition. This will continue the trend of travellers benefiting from ever-more affordable air travel. The real average return airfare (in 2024 US dollars) is expected to be \$374 in 2025. This is 40% below 2014 levels. On the other hand, global air cargo revenues are expected to be \$142bn in 2025, down 4.7% on 2024. This is primarily based on the expected impact of reduced GDP growth largely influenced by trade-dampening protectionist measures, including tariffs. As a result, air cargo growth is expected to slow to 0.7% in 2025 (from 11.3% in 2024). The cargo yield is also expected to reduce by 5.2%, reflecting a combination of slower demand growth and lower oil prices. Although significant uncertainty remains on how trade tensions will evolve over the year, as of April, cargo demand was holding up well with a 5.8% year-on-year increase. While demand for airline seats is rising, airlines around the world face a supply constraint: they can't get new planes fast enough! This shortage stems from several intertwined issues such as woeful production delays at major manufacturers Boeing and Airbus, supply chain disruptions, post-pandemic, and labour shortages. The aircraft backlog exceeds 17,000 (sharply up from the 10,000-11,000 pre-pandemic), with an implied wait time of 14 years. Supply chain issues have had significant negative impacts on airlines: driving-up leasing costs, increasing the average fleet age to 15 years (from 13 in 2015), cutting the fleet replacement rate to half the 5-6% of 2020, and reducing the efficiency of fleet utilisation (using larger aircraft than needed on some routes, for example). In 2025, some 1,692 aircraft are expected to be delivered. Although this would mark the highest level since 2018, it is almost 26% lower than year-ago estimates. Further downward revisions are likely, given that supply chain issues are expected to persist in 2025 and possibly to the end of the decade. Engine problems and a shortage of spare parts exacerbate the situation and have caused record-high groundings of certain aircraft types. The number of aircraft younger than 10 years in storage is currently more than 1,100, constituting 3.8% of the total fleet compared with 1.3% between 2015 and 2018. Willie Walsh, IATA's Director General, noted: "Manufacturers continue to let their airline customers down. Every airline is frustrated that these problems have persisted so long. And indications that it could take until the end of the decade to fix them are off-the-chart unacceptable!"

Global airline industry's net profit to exceed \$36bn this year, improved from the \$32.4bn earned in 2024

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A prayer to celebrate Eid



A Pakistani woman offers Eid prayers at the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

Biggest US oil field at risk of poisonous water leaks

By Kevin Crowley and David Wethe Bloomberg

Texas regulators are warning that wastewater from fracking in the biggest US oil basin is causing a "widespread" increase in underground pressure — a development that risks hindering crude output and harming the environment. Shale oil wells in the Permian Basin generate millions of gallons of chemical-laced water, which drillers then pump back into the earth. Landowners and activists have said for years that this process causes toxic leaks. Now the state's powerful oil and gas regulator, the Railroad Commission of Texas, is acknowledging the scale of the problem and imposing restrictions that could increase crude production costs. Chevron Corp, BP Plc, and Coterra Energy Inc as well as water management specialists Waterbridge Operating LLC and NGL Energy Partners, are among the companies that have received notices about the pressure issue from the Railroad Commission of Texas, according to a Bloomberg News review of public records. The RRC sent the messages to companies applying for new wastewater disposal wells. Producers began injecting more water into shallow rock formations roughly five years ago after pumping it deep below the surface was found to trigger earthquakes. But the volumes are now so large that the dirty water is breaching wells and causing the ground to swell and rupture, threatening to contaminate drinking supplies for people and livestock. Restrictions on both deep and shallow injection zones could mean producers will have to pump their wastewater farther afield, increase recycling or pay to clean

it up. All of these options would add to costs in the Permian, which accounts for about half of America's total crude production. It would be the latest blow to US producers already grappling with low oil prices and a shrinking inventory of top-tier drilling sites, despite President Donald Trump's pledge to unleash US "energy dominance" by backing fossil fuels. The RRC has updated its standard language in the letters to producers in a nod to the severity of the problem. It now says that disposing wastewater into the Delaware Mountain Group rock formation in the prolific western part of the Permian "has resulted in widespread increases in reservoir pressure that may not be in the public interest and may harm mineral and freshwater resources in Texas." "Drilling hazards, hydrocarbon production losses, uncontrolled flows, ground surface deformation, and seismic activity have been observed," the commission says. Starting next month, the RRC will place limits on water-pressure levels due to "the physical limitations of the disposal reservoirs". It will also require operators to assess old or unplugged oil wells within half a mile of the disposal site, twice the previous distance. Spokespeople for BP and Coterra declined to comment. Representatives for BP, Waterbridge and NGL didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. The RRC's staff has been studying issues related to wastewater disposal for several years, spokesperson Bryce Dubee said in an e-mail. "Let there be no doubt that our work and analysis to protect residents and the environment in West Texas has been happening for years and will continue," Dubee said. The commission conducted a two-hour webinar

on Thursday to explain its new guidelines for permitting saltwater disposal wells in the Permian. Chevron has taken a "leading position" in efforts to "responsibly manage underground injection of produced water in the Permian" and supports the RRC's new rules, spokeswoman Paula Beasley said in a statement. The company uses recycled and brackish water for all its fracking and is working on ways to treat produced fluids for reuse, she said. BP signed a 10-year deal with WaterBridge in January to transport wastewater away from its core production area in Reeves County, Texas. "It's important to develop long-term sustainable water solutions in the Permian Basin," Kyle Koontz, chief executive officer of BP's shale business, said at the time. Permian Basin oil production has soared over the past decade to about 6.7mn barrels of oil each day — more than the output from Iraq and Kuwait combined. But for each barrel of crude, it produces three to five barrels of water that contain so much salt and toxic materials that pumping it back underground is the only cost-effective disposal method. The shallow disposal zones, located between oil-rich layers of shale and the surface, consist of porous rock that can absorb water. But the 100-year history of crude production in the Permian means they are perforated with thousands of well bores, some up to a mile deep. Because of higher water pressure, fluids are now breaking through to oil drilling areas and old wells that were either abandoned or poorly cemented shut decades ago. The regulator's tighter restrictions come just weeks after Coterra was forced to halt some oil production in Culberson County, Texas, after waste fluids leaked into its wells. Executives said the problem was

localised and could be fixed by strengthening the protective casing around its wells. Coterra is remediating the affected wells but did not give an expected completion date. The company said it doesn't expect the issue to affect its long-term reserves. "We thought we were well calibrated," Blake Sirgo, Coterra's senior vice president for operations, said on a call with analysts May 6. "Sometimes the oil field still surprises us." One person who's not surprised is Sarah Stogner, the district attorney for three West Texas counties in the Permian Basin. She's been warning of rising subsurface pressure since 2021, when a landowner noticed oil and gas oozing from old wells on her property that had sat idle for decades. Stogner, then a lawyer for the landowner, publicised the case on social media, calling them "zombie wells". Over the next few years, several more wells blew out in the area, with some ejecting toxic fluids more than 100 feet in the air for several days. "These were old fields that suffered from a lack of pressure for decades," she said. "Suddenly we were seeing pressure where it shouldn't be. It was clear even back then there was a field-wide problem." The RRC mostly ignored her appeals for a thorough investigation, she said. Its elected commissioners, whose campaigns are largely funded by the oil and gas industry, framed the issue as primarily a plugging problem, claiming that old and abandoned wells had been improperly cemented shut, or not at all. But it's now becoming clearer that the underlying problem is too much wastewater injection. One blowout near Imperial, Texas, gushed toxic water high in the air for two weeks and had to be cemented shut in 2022. Researchers at Southern Methodist University later found the ground around the eruption site had been steadily bulging for three years, eventually rising 40cm (16 inches) before it burst open. Wastewater injection volumes several kilometres away "strongly correlate" with the ground movement, they said in a paper published in July 2024. SkyGeo, an analytics company that uses radar to track ground movements, reached a similar conclusion. "The injection of saltwater causes this unnaturally high pressure, and then it's going to find weak spots to come out," said CEO Pieter Bas Leezenberg. The RRC said its new permitting requirements will "ensure injected fluids remain confined to the disposal formations to safeguard ground and surface fresh water." To Stogner, the measures are an admission that toxic water leaks are a serious problem for the regulator, and for the Permian Basin. "They just completely ignored us," she said. "But now they cannot deny that it's happening."



Produced water gushes out of the ground a geyser in Toyah, Texas.



# Satellite imagery shows Ukraine attack destroyed, damaged Russian bombers



A combination of satellite images shows a group of TU 95 aircrafts before (left) and after a drone strike, in Belaya air base, Irkutsk region, Russia, on May 22, 2025. (Reuters)

By Tom Balmforth and Milan Pavicic

Satellite imagery of a Russian air base taken shortly after Ukraine carried out a drone attack deep inside Russia over the weekend shows several strategic bombers were destroyed and badly damaged, according to three open source analysts.

Ukraine targeted at least four air bases across Russia using 117 unmanned aerial vehicles launched from containers close to the targets. Drone footage of the operation verified by Reuters shows several aircraft were struck in at least two locations.

Capella Space, a satellite company, supplied Reuters with an image of one of those airfields, located in the Siberian region of Irkutsk. The image was taken on June 2, the day after one of the most complex and effective operations launched by Ukraine in more than three years of war.

Cloud cover can obscure conventional satellite pictures, but the data is from synthetic aperture radar (SAR) satellites which direct energy beams at the Earth and detect echoes, making it possible to identify small topographical details.

The image – more grainy than conventional high-resolution photographs and in black and white – appears to show the debris of several aircraft located along the runway of the Belaya military air base or parked in protective revetments nearby.

“Based on the debris visible, comparison to recent satellite images and released drone footage from Telegram posted to Twitter, I can see



A satellite image shows a destroyed TU 22 aircraft in the aftermath of a drone strike at the Belaya air base, Irkutsk region, Russia, on June 4, 2025. (Reuters)

the destruction of several aircraft,” said John Ford, a research associate at the California-based James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies.

Ford said that SAR imagery provided to him by Reuters showed what appeared to be the remnants of two destroyed Tu-22 Backfires – long-range, supersonic strategic bombers that have been used to launch missile strikes against Ukraine.

The SAR image, as well as drone footage of the strikes posted on social media, also indicated that four strategic

strikes against Ukraine.”

Africk added that Belaya air base is home to several flat decoy aircraft, which he said had apparently failed to mislead Ukrainian drones in this case.

**Large explosion**

Reuters has not yet obtained SAR imagery of the Olenya airfield, a base in Murmansk in Russia’s far northwest that was also attacked.

But drone video footage of Olenya base provided by Ukrainian authorities and verified by Reuters showed two burning bombers which appeared to be Tu-95s and a third, also a Tu-95, being hit by a large explosion.

The Russian Defence Ministry said Ukraine had launched drone strikes targeting military airfields in Murmansk, Irkutsk, Ivanovo, Ryazan, and Amur regions. Air defences repelled the assaults in three regions, but not Murmansk and Irkutsk, it said, adding that in those places several aircraft caught fire.

The Kremlin said on Tuesday that Russia had launched an official investigation into the weekend Ukrainian drone attacks.

Top Russian security official Dmitry Medvedev also said, in an apparent response to the strikes on Russian strategic bomber bases, that Moscow would take revenge. “Retribution is inevitable.”

Ukraine’s domestic security agency, the SBU, has claimed responsibility for the operation, called “Spider’s Web”, and said that in total 41 Russian warplanes were hit.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called the attack, which struck targets up to 4,300km (2,670 miles) from the frontlines of the war, “absolutely brilliant”.

The Ukrainian military initially added 12 aircraft to its running tally of Russia’s wartime military losses on Tuesday.

“After processing additional information from various sources and verifying it... we report that the total (Russian) losses amounted to 41 military aircraft, including strategic bombers and other types of combat aircraft,” it added in a later update. There was no immediate public response from Moscow to the SBU statement.

The SBU said the damage caused by the operation amounted to \$7bn, and 34% of the strategic cruise missile carriers at Russia’s main airfields were hit.

Reuters could not independently verify the claims. Some experts said the operation would not be enough to stop Russia from launching missile attacks on Ukraine using strategic bombers, but it would be hard, if not impossible to replace the damaged planes because some of them are no longer in production.

The attack was also likely to force Russia to reconfigure its air defences, according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) research group.

“The... operation will force Russian officials to consider redistributing Russia’s air defence systems to cover a much wider range of territory and possibly deploying mobile air defence groups that can more quickly react to possible similar Ukrainian drone strikes in the future,” the ISW said. — Reuters

# Polish nationalist’s victory deepens fiscal uncertainty

➤ **Political gridlock complicates reforms, deficit reduction**

➤ **Polish stocks, bonds underperform amid uncertainty**

➤ **Tax pledge by Tusk challenges fiscal consolidation**

➤ **So does political polarisation, analysts say**

By Karol Badohal, Karin Strohecker and Gergely Szakacs  
Warsaw/London

Poland’s path to narrowing its fiscal deficit, maintaining its credit ratings and keeping investors on board looks more difficult following conservative nationalist Karol Nawrocki’s presidential election triumph.

Nawrocki’s victory in last Sunday’s election could deal a blow to the centrist government’s efforts to cement the European Union and Nato member state’s pro-European orientation.

Poland faces big spending demands, including a rise in defence outlays after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and is grappling with the EU’s second-highest fiscal deficit, driven in part by what are widely seen as generous social policies.

Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who returned to power in 2023, has struggled to fulfil electoral promises that could strain public finances and the outgoing president, Andrzej Duda, has used his presidential veto powers to block some of Tusk’s political agenda.

Nawrocki, who like Duda is aligned with the opposition, could employ similar tactics, possibly delaying reforms and increasing the government’s reliance on fiscal measures in the run-up to a 2027 national election.

“The Nawrocki presidency will fuel domestic political instability. Tusk’s reform agenda will be paralysed,” Eurasia group analyst Orsolya Raczova said in a note, adding that Nawrocki could “actively stoke tension among coalition partners.”

S&P Global said that, at a minimum, Tusk could during Nawrocki’s presidency expect similarly “uneasy relations” between the president and the government, and that Poland’s economic strength and medium-term fiscal policies would remain the most important factors for Poland’s credit rating.

Tusk announced on Monday that he would call for a parliamentary vote of confidence in his coalition government soon. Parliament Speaker Szymon



President-elect Karol Nawrocki (right) and President Andrzej Duda embrace in front of a portrait of late former president Lech Kaczynski at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw last Tuesday. (AFP)

Holownia said he had proposed that the vote take place at an additional sitting of parliament next Tuesday.

Poland has pledged to bring its budget deficit below 3% of gross domestic product by 2028, but, given the high-stakes election calendar, Tusk’s government has ramped up borrowing to record levels ahead of the presidential ballot.

**Under pressure**

Polish stocks extended losses for a second day on Tuesday, slipping further away from their recent near 14-year highs, underperforming central European peers. Poland’s international bonds also came under some pressure.

Hasnain Malik, managing director with Tellimer, said the result was a “jolt” to investors. Before Monday, the zloty had



President-elect Karol Nawrocki greets his supporters gathered in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw as he leaves after meeting with Poland’s President Andrzej Duda. (AFP)

been up 11% versus the dollar this year and the local equity index had been up 40% in total US dollar return terms.

The International Monetary Fund projected in April that Poland’s economy would grow 3.2% this year and 3.1% in 2026, and slow to 2.7% by 2030.

But last month the European Commission forecast that the deficit would be more than 6% of GDP this year and next, nearly double the average for the 27-member EU and the bloc’s second-highest behind Romania.

The yield on Poland’s 10-year domestic government bond – a key benchmark for borrowing costs – is currently at around 5.5% – below the 6% mark it hovered around for much of the first three months of the year.

“Poland is likely to face continued political polarisation in the coming years, with the next general elections scheduled for 2027, potentially increasing reliance on expansionary fiscal policies and delaying fiscal consolidation,” Scope Ratings said.

S&P warned last week that while it was “not in a rush” to adjust Poland’s ‘A-’ credit rating, the deep polarisation in Polish politics made lowering deficits potentially risky.

Poland has a narrow window before the next election to craft a medium-term fiscal adjustment. Some economic analysts say its ability to do so now looks more uncertain.

“It is likely to be increasingly more challenging to implement fiscal tightening measures after the loss by the ruling coalition in the presidential election,” Ercan Erguzel, an economist at Barclays, wrote in a note.

One of Tusk’s main unfulfilled electoral promises is a doubling of the income tax free threshold, with an estimated price tag of some 55bn zloty (\$14.76bn), coming on top of social benefits already widely viewed as generous.

Aleks Szczerbiak, politics professor at the University of Sussex, said Tusk’s government was hostage to its income tax pledge, with cost-of-living issues still weighing on Poles despite inflation retreating.

“If they get to the next election, and there’s no road map and they haven’t started implementing it, that tax free allowance thing is very, very difficult,” he said, adding that the political demand was directly at odds with the economic imperative. “And I’m not quite sure how they’re going to square that circle.” — Reuters





Snapshots from activities at Msheireb Downtown Doha yesterday.  
PICTURES: Thajudheen



# Eid's all fun and games at Msheireb Properties

Msheireb Properties is organising a programme of activities and entertainment in celebration of Eid al-Adha. Taking place at Msheireb Galleria in Msheireb Downtown Doha until June 10, the festival offers live entertainment, stage shows, and fun-filled activities for children.

The festival features a lively entertainment stage offering interactive shows and diverse family activities. Visitors can enjoy theatrical performances and live music. The event also features dedicated children's programming to create a fun and family-friendly atmosphere. The celebration includes magic shows, bubble shows, interactive science experiments, face painting, creative workshops, and educational activities suitable for children of all ages. In addition, there is a variety of competitions and interactive activities that give children and families the chance to win prizes.

