





Amir congratulates Mongolian president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to Mongolian President Ukhnaa Khurelsukh, on the anniversary of his country's Independence Day. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani also sent a similar cable of congratulations to Prime Minister Zandanshatar Gombojav. (QNA)

Qatar, Saudi Arabia hold co-ordination meeting on Abu Samra, Salwa crossings



The third co-ordination meeting between Qatar and Saudi Arabia was held in Doha, aimed at discussing ways to enhance security co-operation and improve procedures to facilitate the movement of travellers at the two land border crossings (Abu Samra and Salwa). The Qatari side was headed by Chairman of the Permanent Committee for the Management of Abu Samra Crossing Colonel Khalid Ali al-Meshal al-Buainain, while the Saudi side was headed by Commander of the Border Guard at Salwa Crossing Brigadier General (Navy) Mohammed bin Suleiman al-Balawi. During the meeting, discussions focused on enhancing the working mechanisms and joint co-operation between the two crossings, as well as developing co-ordination between both sides. (QNA)

Action over camping violation



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has removed a camp site in the central part of the country due to the owner's failure to comply with the official end date of the 2024-25 winter camping season. Accordingly, the necessary legal measures have been taken against the violator. This action was part of a wide-scale inspection campaign carried out by the Wildlife Protection Department, which covered Rawdat Rashed and Rawdat Aisha in the central part of the country.



Unsuitable trees removed to protect beach environment



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's Wildlife Protection Department Patrols in co-operation with the Department of Nature Reserves has removed a number of trees that were planted by some visitors at the "Umm Al-Maa" beach, as they were not suitable for the surrounding natural environment, and to maintain the desired ecological balance. Meanwhile, the ministry expressed its appreciation to beachgoers for their concern in planting trees, reflecting their sense of social responsibility towards their local environment. It also stressed the importance of co-ordination of environmental initiative-takers with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to protect the ecological balance and biodiversity across all areas of Qatar's environment.

‘Conscious Generation’ programme launched to promote youth awareness

The Permanent Committee for Penal and Correctional Institutions in Qatar has launched a nationwide awareness initiative called "Conscious Generation", targeting young students across schools. The programme runs from July 6 until Aug 14 and brings together several government entities including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Sports and Youth, Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Head of the Permanent Committee Major General Nasser Mohammed Issa al-Sayed emphasised that the initiative seeks to educate youth on crime prevention and instil ethical values through a series of lectures and awareness activities held in 31 clubs and youth centres across the country. He added that the programme revolves around four central pillars including religious awareness, educational awareness, legal and security awareness, and self-awareness. These topics aim to foster a responsible and informed generation equipped to contribute positively to society. (QNA)



vention and instil ethical values through a series of lectures and awareness activities held in 31 clubs and youth centres across the country. He added that the programme

Al-Muraikhi meets Italian deputy FM

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met yesterday in Rome with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation of Italy Edmondo Cirielli. The meeting dealt with bilateral co-operation and the means to enhance them, in addition to discussing several issues of joint interest. (QNA)



Expert stresses importance of first aid skills

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

“First aid is a crucial skill that can make the difference between life and death in emergency situations and it is a responsibility that everyone should be prepared to handle,” Nawal Hassan, an international Emergency First Response (EFR) instructor with 15 years of experience, told *Gulf Times*. “Whether at home, in the office, on the street, during a road accident, or in a shopping centre, knowing how to provide basic medical assistance can help save lives and prevent minor injuries from becoming serious,” she pointed out, highlighting the importance of EFR and practising first aid beyond formal settings. Nawal who has certified numerous life-savers and emergency first responders in the region, is also known for her social media advocacy in first aid and general healthcare. She was speaking in the context of a recent first aid and life saver training programme, designed to equip families and children with essential skills for emergencies, especially during the summer. Nawal stressed the critical role of teaching these skills to younger generations, saying: “Teaching first aid to children is essential for their safety and confidence, especially in emergencies when they may be alone. “They should learn fundamental skills such as cleaning small wounds, maintaining calm, identifying serious situations, and crucially, how to contact emergency services like 999 or local equivalents”. Nawal emphasised the value of role-playing emergency scenarios and teaching children not to panic, seeking help from trusted adults, and to follow safety steps. This empowerment, she noted, can enable them to act wisely and potentially save lives while awaiting professional help. She elaborated on the varied scenarios where first aid can be life-saving. At home, knowledge of techniques like the Heimlich manoeuvre for choking or proper burn treatment can avert tragedy. In the workplace, trained employees can offer immediate help for sudden health issues like heart attacks or falls, stabilising colleagues and maintaining or-



Nawal Hassan teaches first aid to children at a recent training programme in Doha. (Supplied photos)



der. In public spaces, from busy streets to shopping centres, a bystander with first aid knowledge can be instrumental in controlling bleeding after a road accident or assisting someone who has collapsed due to a medical condition, providing crucial support until paramedics arrive. “First aid is especially important for vulnerable groups,” Hassan said, pointing to children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic diseases, all of whom are more susceptible to emergencies. “In all these cases, early intervention through basic first aid can stabilise the person's condition and reduce the risk of serious harm”. “Everyone should take the time to learn it, as emergencies can happen anywhere and at any time. With basic knowledge and quick action, we can protect our loved ones, support our communities, and potentially save lives,” she added.

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# Israeli strike on south Lebanon kills one: ministry

AFP  
Beirut

An Israeli air strike in southern Lebanon yesterday killed one person, the Lebanese health ministry reported, with Israel saying it had targeted a man accused of helping smuggle weapons from Iran.

The attack was the latest in Lebanon despite a months-long ceasefire between Israel and

Iran-backed Hezbollah there. In a statement, the health ministry said that an “Israeli enemy” drone strike on a car near Al-Numairiya, in Nabatiyeh district, killed one person and wounded five others.

The Israeli military later said it had killed Mohammad Shoaib, whom it accused of having aided in the smuggling of weapons to Lebanon and the occupied West Bank. Israel has kept up regular strikes in Lebanon, particularly in the south, since a November 27

ceasefire meant to end over a year of hostilities with Hezbollah that left the group severely weakened.

Under the agreement, Hezbollah was to pull its fighters back north of the Litani River, around 30 kilometres from the border with Israel, leaving the Lebanese army and United Nations peacekeepers as the only armed parties in the area.

The ceasefire requires Israel to fully withdraw its troops, but it has kept them in five locations in

south Lebanon that it deems strategic.

**AOUN RULES OUT NORMALISATION**

Yesterday, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said that while he was open to peaceful relations with Israel, normalisation of ties was “not currently part of Lebanese foreign policy”.

Aoun’s statement is the first official reaction to Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar’s statement last week in which he expressed

his country’s interest in normalising ties with Lebanon and Syria.

Aoun “distinguished between peace and normalisation”, according to a statement shared by the presidency.

“Peace is the lack of a state of war, and this is what matters to us in Lebanon at the moment. As for the issue of normalisation, it is not currently part of Lebanese foreign policy,” the president said in front of a delegation from an Arab think tank. Lebanon and Syria have

technically been at war with Israel since 1948, with Damascus saying that talks of normalisation were “premature”.

A Lebanese official, requesting anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue, told AFP that Aoun was referring to a return to the 1949 armistice between the two countries, signed after the first Arab-Israeli war.

The official said Lebanon “remains committed to the 2002 Arab peace initiative.”

## Palestinian support rally in Yemen



Yemenis raise placards during a rally in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and in condemnation of Israel and the US, in the Houthi-run capital Sanaa, yesterday.

## Palestinian Authority says settlers beat man to death in West Bank

AFP  
Ramallah

The Palestinian health ministry said a 23-year-old man was beaten to death by Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank yesterday, the latest deadly assault as violence surges in the territory.

A spokesman for the Palestinian Authority ministry, Annas

Abu El Ezz, told AFP that Saif al-Din Kamil Abdul Karim Musalat “died after being severely beaten all over his body by settlers in the town of Sinjil, north of Ramallah, this afternoon”.

A week earlier, AFP journalists reported clashes between dozens of Israeli settlers and Palestinians in Sinjil, where a march against settler attacks on nearby farmland had been due to take place.

Israeli authorities recently erected a high fence cutting off parts of Sinjil from Road 60, which runs through the West Bank from north to south.

Violence in the territory has surged since the outbreak of the war in Gaza triggered by Hamas’ October 2023 storming of Israel. Since then, Israeli troops or settlers in the West Bank have killed at least 954 Palestinians.

### Death toll rises to four in Red Sea Houthi ship attack: EU naval force

Four crew members of a cargo ship attacked and sunk by Yemeni fighters earlier this week are presumed dead, an EU naval force said yesterday, with search operations ongoing in the Red Sea, AFP reported from Dubai. “Fifteen crew members are missing. The four presumed casualties are among the missing crew members,” the European Union’s Operation Aspidos naval task force told AFP, citing a private company conducting search and rescue operations. On Monday, the Houthi fighters attacked the Liberian-flagged bulk carrier Eternity C in the Red Sea off the port city of Hodeidah for two days before sinking it.

## As heatwaves intensify, Morocco ups effort to warn residents

AFP  
Casablanca

Lhoussaine Youabd knows nearly all the languages spoken in Morocco, a useful skill in his role warning the population of growing climate-related risks in the country braving increasingly common heatwaves.

“Every time a weather alert is issued, I go on the media to warn Moroccans,” Youabd, 52, a meteorological engineer at the national weather service, told AFP.

This has been his mission for the past decade, going on TV and radio stations to get the message across to as many Moroccans as possible, particularly in remote rural areas.

Youabd said villagers are “happy that we speak their language” — dialects of colloquial Arabic or those used by the Amazigh — when issuing updates, warnings and recommendations that could be life-saving. The General Directorate of Meteorology (DGM) has recently declared 2024 Morocco’s hottest year on record while registering an average rainfall deficit of -24.7%, on the North African country’s seventh straight year of drought.

In late June this year, as a deadly heatwave affected large areas of southern Europe — across the Mediterranean from Morocco — the DGM said several cities broke their temperature records for that



People cool off at the beach of Sale during a heatwave in Rabat.

month. Displaying a weather forecast map mostly shaded in intense red, Meriem Alaouri, the interim head of the national weather service in Casablanca, said that the upcoming summer months are expected to be even hotter than usual. Scientists say that recurring heatwaves are a clear marker of global warming and that they are set to become more frequent, longer and more intense.

Fuelled by human-driven climate change, 2024 was the warmest year on record globally — and 2025 is projected to rank among the top three.

When extreme weather events hit, like heatwaves, storms or floods, Moroccan authorities issue colour-coded warning bulletins that are transmitted by the civil defence and media outlets.

Youabd said that in recent years, text messages are also used to alert

local officials across the country, who can then notify residents in their area. The DGM has also expanded its social media presence, using networks like Facebook and LinkedIn to get the message across, and a “Smart Alert” that would land directly in Moroccans’ mobile phones is currently being developed, he said.

Hicham Fenniri, director of the International Water Research Institute at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, said it was important to ensure local, regional and national leaders and decision-makers are well informed about climate risks.

In remote areas, connecting residents to the electricity grid is crucial to make sure they can “access information” and install air conditioning systems, he said.

Traditional houses “but remade using clean science and technol-

ogy” can help reduce some effects of the intense heat, along with ensuring access to potable water to mitigate dehydration risks.

In 2024, authorities said that 5.4% of Moroccans living in rural areas did not have access to electricity, and 20.4% had no reliable source of clean water. Ben Achir Chekroun, a 66-year-old pensioner from Harhoura, south of the capital Rabat, said that the weather alerts were easy to follow. “We get the information either from the radio, on online media and in newspapers,” he told AFP.

Loubna Rouhi, head physician at the local medical centre in Harhoura, said that in the scorching heat, it was recommended to stay in the shade and avoid going outside during the hottest hours, between 10am and 4pm, as well as wearing light clothes and staying hydrated. The 48-year-old doctor said that she has used health ministry notices to help inform the population about the risks of extreme heat.

One recent campaign launched by the ministry aims to warn against scorpions and snakes, which are far more active in the heat. Mohammed Esmaili, a senior health ministry official, said that a specialised medical kit has “helped significantly reduce mortality” linked to scorpion or snake bites, from 7.2% of cases in 2013 down to 1.2%.

Reuters  
Gaza

At six months pregnant, displaced Palestinian woman Fatima Arfa wishes she could be buying cute clothes and toys for the special day when she delivers a healthy, safe child.

Instead she spends much of her time seeking medical help in war-ravaged Gaza, weak and fearful that malnutrition will sabotage her pregnancy as Israel presses on with a military campaign that has led to widespread hunger among children and adults and reduced the enclave to rubble.

She longs for simple foods like milk, eggs and red meat that could improve her health and increase the chances of delivering a healthy baby. But just trying to deal with deficiencies is exhausting and highly risky under steady bombardment.

“I’m coming from a faraway place, and on foot too, because I need to have a blood transfusion because of a very big deficiency, malnutrition,” said Arfa, 34, staring at medical imaging of her unborn baby.

In June, the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned an estimated 55,000 pregnant women in Gaza face growing health risks such as miscarriage, stillbirth and undernourished newborns.

Tackling those grim realities is challenging for doctors who face severe shortages of medicine and fuel to keep overwhelmed hospitals running as the nearly two-year war between Israel and Hamas rages.

During a consultation with



Fatima Arafa, a pregnant and displaced Palestinian woman, eats a meal inside her tent, where she has taken shelter with her family after fleeing their home, in Gaza City.

Arfa, Fathi al-Dahdouh, director of external clinics at Al-Helou Hospital, examines documents about her health.

She has anaemia and hopefully she can receive two units of blood and needs admission to hospital because she can’t live a normal life with low energy levels, or walk, he said.

“We hope that God will stop this war and open the crossings so that green food supplies, fruits, and vitamins can enter, along with these things,” said al-Dahdouh.

Thousands of starving Gazans who frantically wave pots around at food collection points risk violence merely walking to those areas. Israeli air strikes can hit at any minute and most Gaza residents have been displaced.

Arfa is getting weaker by the day and generating enough energy on a meagre diet is a huge challenge.

“It is very difficult, and in the middle of the heat. I leave small children at my house, and until

now they may not have had breakfast, and neither have I,” she said, sitting in a makeshift tent near her children, wondering how she will be able to support them, and husband Zahi.

Her daughter serves food from a cooking pot into a bowl for the whole family of 7.

Zahi, 40, complains that much of Gaza’s population relies on mostly lentils.

Sometimes he wanders around flattened neighbourhoods desperate for flour, anything that could give his wife the strength to produce life in a strip where Israeli strikes have killed over 57,000 people, according to Gaza authorities.

“More than once, I was exposed to death. I failed every time I tried to even get a can of tuna or a can of peas for the children. I couldn’t,” said Zahi.

The Hamas storming of southern Israel triggered the war in 2023.

## Tears of bitterness at funeral of Kenya hawker killed in rally

AFP  
Kangema

Before the white coffin containing Kenyan hawker Boniface Kariuki was carried into a vehicle for his final journey home, his mother screamed in grief — yet another parent to lose a child in deadly demonstrations roiling the east African nation.

Yesterday, hundreds of mourners streamed into a field near Kariuki’s home, roughly 100 kilometres from Nairobi, to witness his burial and vent their anger and grief.

The 22-year-old mask vendor was shot at point-blank range by an officer in riot gear during a rally against police brutality in June, and later died in a Nairobi hospital.

That day, Kariuki was not protesting.

The incident was captured on film and shared widely across social media, with mourners placing

a still image of the moment just before he was shot on top of his coffin, which was also draped in a Kenyan flag.

His death has thrust the long-standing issue of police brutality in the country back into the spotlight and galvanised anger towards a government many Kenyans see as corrupt and unaccountable.

“Our grief cannot be understood. We shall miss you constantly,” his younger sister Gladys Wangare said.

“Your constant smile, genuine concern about our family. Life will never be the same again. Your place will remain empty,” she added.

As the coffin travelled to his hometown of Kangema, villagers gathered to see the entourage, with riot police eyeing the calm crowds from junctions.

Kariuki’s friend and fellow hawker Edwin Kagia, 24, described him as a hardworking, humble and “good guy” who was always cracking jokes.

### LEGAL Man jailed after refusing to watch president on TV

A Tunisian inmate was sentenced to six months in prison after he was reported to authorities for refusing to watch a TV news segment about President Kais Saied, his lawyer and an NGO said yesterday, AFP reported from Tunis. The inmate’s lawyer, Adel Sghaier, said his client was initially prosecuted under Article 67 of the penal code, which covers crimes against the head of state, but the charge was later revised to violating public decency to avoid giving the case a “political” dimension. The local branch of the Tunisian League for Human Rights in the central town of Gafsa said that the inmate had “expressed his refusal to watch (coverage of) presidential activities” during a news broadcast that was playing on TV in his cell.





# Kenya swears in top electoral officials after president’s approval

Reuters  
Nairobi

Kenya swore in a group of top electoral officials yesterday, hours after their approval by President William Ruto, filling essential positions which had long been left vacant in a country with a long history of contentious and often violent elections.

The chairperson and six commissioners, who will serve for six years, took their oaths at a ceremony overseen by Chief Justice Martha Koome, local broadcast footage showed.

“You are taking office at a time when our nation is undergoing a period of great reckoning, a moment when Kenyans, especially

our young people, are expressing discontent, are expressing frustrations with public institutions,” Koome said.

The East African nation’s next general election will be held in 2027, but Ruto is already under pressure from street protests led by young people dissatisfied with high living costs, corruption and police brutality.

The speedy appointment of electoral officials was one of the rallying cries during protests last year.

Chairperson Erastus Ethecon is a human rights lawyer and previously worked as Turkana County’s top legal adviser. He has also worked with the UN Development Programme and the UN Resident Co-ordinator in Kenya.

“My first and foremost loyalty is to the people of Kenya who hold the sovereign power,” Ethecon said after being sworn in.

“I wish to assure Kenyans that their voices will not only be heard, but they will also count during the coming elections.” Ruto suspended four election commissioners in December 2022 after they rejected his victory in elections held earlier that year. The dispute proceeded to the Supreme Court, which upheld Ruto’s win and rejected the commissioners’ arguments that the vote-tallying process had been opaque.

The appointment of new election commissioners had been delayed in part due to several legal petitions, which a high court dismissed on Thursday.

# Mali junta chief approves law giving him unlimited mandate

AFP  
Bamako

Mali’s junta chief has granted himself a five-year presidential mandate, renewable “as many times as necessary” and without election, in a law made public on Thursday.

General Assimi Goita’s approval of the measure had been widely expected for several days, and comes after the country’s military-appointed legislative body passed the bill last week.

The law, which was leaked to the public after being signed by Goita on Tuesday, allows him to lead the west African country until at least 2030, despite the military government’s initial pledge to return to civilian rule in March 2024. It is the latest in a series of restrictions on freedoms by Mali’s military leadership to consolidate its power in the militant-hit Sahelian nation.

The country’s cabinet, the Council of Ministers, had already adopted the measure last month. Under the law Goita will be able to serve “as head of state for a term of five (05) years, renewable as many times as necessary, until the country is pacified”. When Goita took power, he insisted on Mali’s commitment to the

fight against militant violence and initially pledged a return to civilian rule. He was even celebrated in some quarters as a hero who might bring salvation to his troubled west African nation.

But he ultimately failed to make good on his promise to cede power to elected civilians, which was to occur by March 2024. Earlier this year, a junta-led national consultation recommended proclaiming Goita president without a vote for the five-year renewable term. The same assembly — boycotted by most political groups — also recommended the dissolution of political parties and tougher rules for their creation.

Subsequently, the junta announced in May the dissolution of all political parties and organisations, as well as a ban on meetings.

The ongoing squeeze on Mali’s civic space comes against a backdrop of clamour by authorities for the country to unite behind the military. Goita’s rule has marked a turning point in Mali’s relationship with the West. The country has broken ties with France and other former allies and pivoted toward Russia. Mali and its junta-led neighbours Burkina Faso and Niger have teamed up to create their own confederation, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), and have announced the creation of a joint 5,000-strong force for joint military operations.

## Nigeria says US pressuring Africa to accept Venezuelan deportees

Nigeria’s foreign minister said the United States was pressuring African countries to accept Venezuelan deportees, some straight out of prison, but Africa’s most populous country could not accommodate them due to its own problems, Reuters reported from Lagos.

President Donald Trump’s administration this week asked five African presidents visiting the White House to take in migrants from other countries when deported by the US, two officials familiar with the discussions told Reuters.

Yusuf Tuggar, the Nigerian foreign minister, told local Channels TV late on Thursday that Nigeria could not accept that. “You have to also bear in mind that the US is mounting considerable pressure on African countries to accept Venezuelans to be deported from the US, some straight out of prison,” he said from Brazil where he was at a Brics summit.

“It will be difficult for a country like Nigeria to accept Venezuelan prisoners into Nigeria. We have enough

problems of our own,” noting his nation’s 230mn strong population. The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

Since returning to office in January, Trump has been pressing to speed up deportations, including by sending migrants to third countries when there are problems or delays over sending them to their home nations.

This week, he hosted the presidents of Liberia, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Gabon at the White House.

According to a US and a Liberian official, he presented the plan for African countries to take in migrants from other countries when they are deported by the US. *The Wall Street Journal* reported on Wednesday that an internal State Department document sent to the African governments before the meeting called on them to agree to the “dignified, safe, and timely transfer from the United States” of third country nationals.

# Trained hounds on the trail of South Africa’s endangered tortoises



Dog-handler Esther Matthew, and Collie dog, Delta, working as part of the Endangered Wildlife Trust’s Dryland Conservation Project, play a short game of frisbee as a reward for locating a critically endangered Geometric tortoise on a private reserve in the Boland district of the Western Cape.

AFP  
Boland

Snout pressed to the ground, a border collie named Delta zigzagged through the shrubs on a private nature reserve near Cape Town, frantically sniffing for critically endangered tortoises.

The hound stopped abruptly in front of a small bush and lay down, signalling a find as Delta’s handler moved in to search the surrounding area.

Hidden in the tall grass was a tiny reptile, its shell marked with yellow star-like patterns — a clear sign it was a geometric tortoise, a species found only at the southern tip of Africa.

“It’s an adult female, you can tell by its flat belly,” said Esther Matthew, the dog’s handler and a conservation officer for South Africa’s Endangered Wildlife Trust.

She explained that the organisation uses canines to sniff out the endangered species by “building positive association with the tortoises’ odour”, throwing Delta a foam frisbee as a reward.

Dogs are five times more effective than humans at this type of search and “also help us find the smaller tortoises which are often overlooked, the hatchlings and the juveniles”, Matthew said.

“We’ve seen a dramatic increase in the number of finds with the dogs.”

**SHRINKING NUMBERS**

The help has become crucial in studying and protecting the geometric tortoise, found only in South Africa’s Western Cape province and on the verge of extinction.

The species’ population was already as low as 1,500 individuals in the wild in the early 1990s, according to biologist Andrew Turner, who works



A critically endangered Geometric tortoise walks through the bush on a private reserve, where they are protected as part of the Endangered Wildlife Trust’s Dryland Conservation Project, in the Boland district of the Western Cape.

for the conservation authority Cape Nature.

It is now estimated at only several hundred animals with “declines pretty much across the entire remaining range of this species”, he said.

On the nature reserve, Delta and Matthew — helped by colleagues searching the bushes with sticks — found a dozen of the hardy reptiles.

“We record all the tortoises we can find, all the data, measurements and weight,” Delta’s handler explained.

**‘CREATING CORRIDORS’**

With the species’ natural habitat shrinking due to agriculture and urban expansion, these surveys have become all the more critical, Turner said.

“There are very few places left in the Western Cape that still support these tortoises. It’s really just a couple of nature reserves and pieces of good habitat left on people’s private property,” he added.

“The remaining patches of vegetation are not really connected to each other anymore. There are farmlands in between,

roads, towns and industries so there is limited ability for the tortoises to disperse and rescue other populations.”

This fragmentation makes them all the more vulnerable to droughts, predation and fires, which scientists argue have become more frequent and intense thanks to climate change.

Poaching — of the tortoises and the plants they feed on — is also a threat, Turner said.

“They are down to such small levels that they actually need as much assistance as they can get,” he said.

To save the species, the Endangered Wildlife Trust has looked at building “partnerships” with landowners and communities living in the animals’ habitat.

“The biggest thing is... creating corridors where species can work through,” explained Zanne Brink, who leads the organisation’s dry lands conservation programme.

“Our biggest challenge is to get enough information to prevent critical biodiversity areas from being lost to unsustainable land use.”

# Germaine Acogny, promoting Africa as a beacon of dance

AFP  
Toubab Dialaw

A group of performers stepped and swayed in the sand at an open-air studio on the Senegalese coast as Germaine Acogny, known as the mother of contemporary African dance, called out to them.

“Walk! Take in the energy of the earth”, commanded Acogny, who for some 60 years has imbued her students with the joy and distinct techniques that have characterised her career.

Gathered in a circle around Acogny, the approximately 30 students moved in harmony, feet striking the sand to the beat of percussion and the xylophone-like balafon.

At the age of 81 “Maman Germaine”, as she is called, offers fewer such masterclasses these days, but is far from taking a bow.

A tireless advocate for dance, she has spent her career promoting her continent’s influence in the art form, amplifying black clout in a field she says is characterised by white dominance.

For her next big project, she is preparing a solo show at a major Paris theatre that pays tribute to French-American dancer Josephine Baker, whom Acogny



French-Senegalese choreographer and dancer Germaine Acogny (right) gets ready ahead of a dancing class with her students at the Ecole des Sables in Toubab Dialaw. **Right:** Acogny (centre) practices with her students during a dancing class at the Ecole des Sables.

admires for “bringing the world together”. AFP caught up with the French-Senegalese artist at her dance school, Ecole des Sables, in the town of Toubab Dialaw, some 60 kilometres south of Dakar.

In her masterclass, Acogny invites students to commune with nature before giving them dance instructions.

The large open-air tent where they have assembled makes it easy: Beyond the edge of its canopy lies the Sahel brush and just beyond that the Atlantic Ocean.

She teaches students her trademark Acogny technique which she

describes as “an interpretation of nature” combined with inflections of her grandmother, a Yoruba priestess whom she never met.

“The symbol of my technique is the tree, which is deeply rooted and reaches towards the sky, drawing influence from elsewhere,” she said.

Professional dancers from around the world gather at Ecole des Sables.

Wesley Ruizbiza, one of its instructors, said Acogny has “restored pride and also made African dancers understand the richness of their own dance”.



“We don’t always need to look elsewhere,” he said.

Nadia Gabrieli Kalati, a 35-year-old Cameroonian-Italian dancer based in Paris, found that being in an environment where there were other people like her created an “opening for new possibilities”.

She enrolled in the three-month training masterclass like many other professionals from Africa and the African diaspora.

“I acquired knowledge here that I wouldn’t have been able to have if I had only stayed in France,” she said.

Acogny emphasised that her

school “creates a training programme for the diaspora and black people, to give them strength and to believe in themselves”.

When the Ecole des Sables opened in 1998, it consisted solely of an enormous tent in the middle of the brush with a view of the ocean, said Acogny’s husband and school co-founder, Helmut Vogt.

Students at the time stayed in the town, he said, but now the school, its two studios and many bungalows practically constitute their own village.

As Acogny describes it, the school is today “in proportion

with Africa and the continent”.

Born in Benin in 1944 to a colonial-era civil servant father and teacher mother, Acogny moved to Senegal at the age of four.

“I didn’t speak the same language, so I wanted to express myself with my body,” she told AFP.

“When we were playing children’s games, I would say: ‘Let’s dance like trees’”.

She perfected her technique in traditional African dance, western dance and modern dance in Paris and New York.

Here, she would sometimes face racist comments by teachers: “I was told I had flat feet and a big bottom, even though I was thin like Francoise Hardy”.

Her first solo dance was inspired by the poem “*Femme noire*” (*Black Woman*) by Senegal’s first president, Leopold Sedar Senghor.

Since then, Acogny has performed solo on stages around the world, choreographed numerous shows and was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Dance in Venice in 2021.

In 2026, Ecole des Sables will host the Dance Biennial in Africa, a major cultural event.

Acogny hopes the opportunity will allow Dakar to have its moment in the spotlight as a “beacon of dance”.



# Seeing the world through the ‘camera’s eye’



US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump greet first responders near the Guadalupe River following devastating flooding that occurred in the area over the July 4 weekend, in Kerrville, Texas, yesterday. At least 120 people are dead and more than 170 still missing, following July 4 holiday weekend floods that ravaged the central Texas Hill Country - including a river bank cluttered with children's summer camp cabins. (AFP)



A labourer drinks water as he works at a construction site of the 'Chennai Metro Rail' project in India yesterday. (AFP)



An aerial view shows Chinese-made cars parked at a port in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province, yesterday, before being loaded onto a ship for export. (AFP)



A Ukrainian serviceman uses a smartphone next to a makeshift memorial for Ukrainian and foreign soldiers in Kyiv, yesterday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. (AFP)



A woman looks on as Palestinians inspect destroyed tents at a makeshift displacement camp following a reported incursion a day earlier by Israeli tanks in the area in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. (AFP)



Women pray among the gravestones at the memorial cemetery in the village of Potocari, near the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica, yesterday, on the 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre. Thousands of people are expected to gather in Srebrenica on July 11 to commemorate the genocide committed 30 years ago by Bosnian Serb forces, one of Europe's worst atrocities since World War II. (AFP)



A laid-off employee fights back tears while carrying a box of office belongings as she leaves the US State Department in Washington, DC, yesterday. The US State Department began laying off more than 1,300 employees as part of President Donald Trump's campaign to massively downsize the federal government workforce. A State Department official said 1,107 members of the civil service and 246 Foreign Service employees were being informed that they were being fired. (AFP)



A worker weaves a traditional Banarasi saree on a handloom at a workshop in Ajmer. (AFP)



An Afghan child rides his bicycle along a deserted street in the drought-ridden village of Bolak at Chahar Bolak district, Balkh province. (AFP)



Ukrainian firefighters work to extinguish a fire in a horses' stable and neighbouring residential houses following Russian drones strike in Odesa, yesterday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The southern Ukrainian port city of Odesa was struck later in the morning, wounding eight people, local officials said. (AFP)



Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) commanders and fighters stand in front of a picture of jailed leader and founder of the PKK Abdullah Ocalan during a ceremony in Sulaimaniyah, in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, yesterday. Thirty PKK fighters destroyed their weapons at a ceremony in Iraqi Kurdistan yesterday, two months after the Kurdish rebels ended their decades-long armed struggle against the Turkish state. (AFP)



# State Department starts firing more than 1,350 US-based employees

Reuters  
Washington

The US State Department began firing more than 1,350 US-based employees yesterday as the administration of President Donald Trump presses ahead with an unprecedented overhaul of its diplomatic corps, a move critics say will undermine US ability to defend and promote US interests abroad.

The layoffs, which affect 1,107 civil service and 246 foreign service officers based in the United States, come at a time when Washington is grappling with multiple crisis on the world stage: Russia's war in Ukraine, the almost two year-long Gaza conflict, and the Middle East on edge due to high tension between Israel and Iran.

"The Department is streamlining domestic operations to focus on diplomatic priorities," an internal State Department notice that was sent to the workforce said. "Headcount reductions have been carefully tailored to affect non-core functions, duplicative or redundant offices, and offices where considerable ef-

ficiencies may be found."

The total reduction in the workforce will be nearly 3,000 including the voluntary departures, according to the notice and a senior State Department official, out of the 18,000 employees based in the United States.

The move is the first step of a restructuring that Trump has sought to ensure US foreign policy is aligned with his "America First" agenda.

Former diplomats and critics say the firing of foreign service officers risks America's ability to counter the growing assertiveness from adversaries such as China and Russia.

"President Trump and Secretary of State Rubio are once again making America less safe and less secure," Democratic Senator Tim Kaine from Virginia said in a statement.

"This is one of the most ridiculous decisions that could possibly be made at a time when China is increasing its diplomatic footprint around the world and establishing an overseas network of military and transportation bases, Russia is continuing its years-long brutal assault of a sovereign

country, and the Middle East is careening from crisis to crisis," Kaine said.

Several offices were set up inside the Department's headquarters in Washington, DC, for employees who are being laid off to turn in their badges, laptops, telephones and other property owned by the agency.

The offices were marked by posters that read "Transition Day Out Processing".

One counter at the building was dubbed as an "Outprocessing service centre" with small bottles of water placed next to a box of tissue. Inside one office, cardboard boxes were visible.

A five-page "separation checklist" that was sent to workers who are fired yesterday and seen by Reuters tells the employee that they will lose access to the building and their e-mails at 5pm.

It asks the employees to fulfil a set of steps ahead of their termination.

Trump in February ordered Secretary of State Marco Rubio to revamp the foreign service to ensure that the Republican president's foreign policy is "faithfully" implemented.

He has also repeatedly pledged to "clean out the deep state" by firing bu-

reaucrats that he deems disloyal.

The shake-up is part of an unprecedented push by Trump to shrink the federal bureaucracy and cut what he says is wasteful spending of taxpayer money. His administration dismantled the US Agency for International Aid (USAID), Washington's premier aid arm that distributed billions of dollars of assistance worldwide, and folded it under the State Department.

Rubio announced the plans for the State Department shake-up in April, saying that the department in its current form was "bloated, bureaucratic" and was not able to perform its mission "in this new era of great power competition".

He envisioned a structure that he said would give back the power to regional bureaus and embassies and get rid of programmes and offices that do not align with America's core interests.

That vision would see the elimination of the role of top official for civilian security, democracy, and human rights and the closure of some offices that monitored war crimes and conflicts around the world.

"This decision sends the wrong signal to allies and adversaries alike: that the Unit-

ed States is pulling back from the world stage," the American Foreign Service Association, a professional group which represents State Department employees, said in a statement.

"As allies look to the US for reassurance and rivals test for weakness, the administration has chosen to sideline the very professionals best equipped to navigate this moment. Meanwhile, countries like China continue expanding their diplomatic reach and influence," it added.

The reorganisation had been expected to be largely concluded by July 1 but did not proceed as planned amid ongoing litigation, as the State Department waited for the US Supreme Court to weigh in on the Trump administration's bid to halt a judicial order blocking mass job cuts.

On Tuesday, the court cleared the way for the Trump administration to pursue the job cuts and the sweeping downsizing of numerous agencies.

Since then, the White House Counsel's Office and the Office of Personnel Management have been co-ordinating with federal agencies to ensure their plans comply with the law.



A woman cries during a demonstration in Caracas for children who remain in the US after being separated from their parents. - AFP

## Venezuelans deported from the US demand return of their children

Hundreds of people protested in Caracas on Thursday demanding the return of at least 30 children who remain in the United States after being separated from their Venezuelan parents during deportation.

Mariale Castellano, deported on May 28, was among the protesters, pleading for the return of her nine-year-old daughter who is still in the United States in the care of a foster family.

"I was four to five months waiting for deportation with her, but it didn't happen," the 26-year-old mother said.

At the protest, a woman read out a letter, later handed over to the UN office in Caracas, asking for "urgent action in favour of the return" of children separated from their parents.

Protesters carried white balloons, photos of the young children and signs reading "SOS, USA, release our children".

On June 30, the Venezuelan government denounced the "kidnapping" of 18 children under the age of 12.

However, the number of children stranded in the United States has increased since then.

Protesters at the march also called for the return of 252 Venezuelans deported on March 15 to El Salvador by US President Donald Trump, as part of his crackdown on undocumented people alleged to be violent criminals.

"Trump, we ask you from our hearts, return our sons, they are Venezuelans," said Maria Venegas, a relative of one of the Venezuelan deportees being held at El Salvador's maximum security CECOT prison.

Official figures show that between February and the first week of July, some 7,000 people – about 1,000 of them children – have been repatriated to Venezuela from the United States and Mexico. - AFP

## Colombia military bombing kills three drug cartel members

A military bombing of an outpost of Colombia's powerful Gulf Clan drug cartel killed three of its members, officials said yesterday, as the conflict-torn country confronts its worst violence in a decade.

The bombing in Colombia's northwestern Antioquia department on Thursday came as the security forces seek to rein in the 7,500-member cartel amid record levels of cocaine production.

Colombia is the world's main producer of the drug.

The operation has left three dead and one captured "so far", security secretary Luis Eduardo

Martinez told Blu Radio.

"The bombing caused a landslide. It is believed that there may be (more) bodies under the debris," he added.

It was the fourth such military operation against the Clan in Antioquia this year, with an estimated 30-40 cartel members "neutralised" in total, Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez said on X.

With the stated goal of achieving "total peace" after decades of conflict, leftist President Gustavo Petro took office in 2022 and reopened peace talks with an array of armed groups.

Most negotiations have broken down. - AFP

# Trump in Texas to survey flood damage

AFP/Reuters  
Kerrville, Texas

US President Donald Trump arrived yesterday in Texas as questions swirled over the authorities' response to devastating flash floods that have left at least 120 people dead, including dozens of children.

The Republican leader and First Lady Melania Trump flew by helicopter to the Hill Country of central Texas to meet with first responders, families and local officials, a week after a rain-swollen river swept away houses, camp cabins, recreational vehicles and people.

As they touched down in Kerrville, a city in the worst-affected Kerr County, where at least 96 people are confirmed dead from the historic flooding, they were greeted by Texas Governor Greg Abbott.

"We're going to be there with some of the great families" of flood victims, Trump told reporters before leaving the White House, calling the disaster a "terrible thing".

The search for more than 170 missing people, including five girls who were at summer camp, entered the eighth day as rescue teams combed through mounds of debris and mud.

However, with no live rescues reported this week, worries have swelled that the death toll could still rise.

Trump has brushed off questions about the impact of his cuts to federal agencies on the response to the flood, which he described as a "100-year catastrophe" that "nobody expected".

On Thursday, Homeland Security Depart-



Trump waves as he boards Air Force One before departing for Texas at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. - AFP

ment head Kristi Noem defended the immediate response as "swift and efficient".

Later that day, with Texas officials facing questions about why emergency evacuation messages to residents and visitors along the flooding Guadalupe River reportedly were delayed, in some cases by several hours, Trump expressed support for a flood warning system.

"After having seen this horrible event, I would imagine you'd put alarms up in some form, where alarms would go up if they see any large amounts of water or whatever it is," Trump told NBC News in a telephone interview.

"But the local officials were hit by this just like everybody else," he said.

The floods, among America's deadliest in recent years, have also reopened questions about Trump's plans to phase out federal disaster response agency FEMA in lieu of greater state-based responsibility.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) began its response to the Texas flash floods over the weekend after Trump signed a major disaster declaration to release federal resources.

However, the president has so far avoided addressing questions about its future.

Noem insisted that the FEMA should be "eliminated" in its current form at a government review meeting on Wednesday.

Officials in Kerr County, which sits astride the Guadalupe River in an area nicknamed "Flash Flood Alley", said that at least 36 children were killed in the disaster at the start of the Fourth of July holiday weekend.



Details have surfaced about reported delays of early alerts at a local level that could have saved lives.

Experts say forecasters did their best and sent out timely and accurate warnings despite the sudden weather change.

Kerr County Sheriff Larry Leitha said "it was between 4am or 5am when I got notified" of incoming emergency calls.

ABC News reported on Thursday that at 4.22am on July 4, a firefighter in Ingram, upstream of Kerrville, had asked the Kerr County Sheriff's Office to alert residents of nearby Hunt to the coming flood.

The network said its affiliate KSAT obtained audio of the call, and that the first alert did not reach Kerr County's CodeRED system for a full 90 minutes.

In some cases, it said, the warning messages did not arrive until after 10am, when hundreds of people had already been swept away.

The flooding of the Guadalupe River was particularly devastating for summer camps on its banks, including Camp Mystic, where 27 girls and counsellors died.

More than a foot of rain fell in less than an hour on July 4.

Flood gauges showed the river's height rose from about a foot to 34' (10.4m) in a matter of hours, cascading over its banks and sweeping away trees and structures in its path.

The Texas state legislature will convene in a special session later this month to investigate the flooding and provide disaster relief funding.

Jon Moreno, 71, a longtime Kerrville resident whose property on high ground was spared, praised the government response – local and federal.

He has heard the debate about what more could have been done – including sirens – but said that he didn't think it would have made much difference, given people's desire to build along the flood-prone riverbanks.

"It's unavoidable," he said. "All those people along the river – I wouldn't want to live there... it's too dangerous."

### Wildfire forces evacuation of part of Grand Canyon

Spreading wildfires forced the evacuation yesterday of part of the famed Grand Canyon, with the US National Park Service appealing for visitors to stay calm.

The canyon's North Rim, which is less popular with tourists than the South Rim, was being cleared due to a blaze called the White Sage Fire.

"Evacuees should travel calmly at a normal rate of speed and stay on paved roads only. North Rim day use is closed until further notice," the Park Service said in an order.

It was not immediately known how many people were being forced to leave the area.

The fire is burning outside the Grand Canyon National Park but approaching Jacob Lake, Arizona, a town known as the gateway to the North Rim.

One of the greatest wonders of the natural world, the Grand Canyon is the result of the Colorado River eating away at layers of red sandstone and other rock for millions of years, leaving a gash up to 18 miles (30km) wide and more than a mile (1.6km) deep.

Last year just under 5mn people visited the site.

Another popular site, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park in Colorado, was also closed yesterday because of a wildfire. - AFP

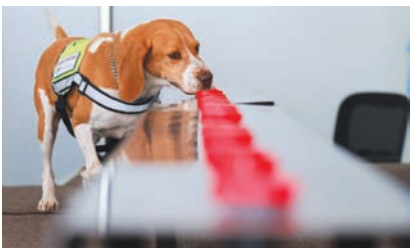
# Sniffer dogs helping Mexico to fight the flesh-eating screwworm

By Cassandra Garrison  
Reuters

With tail wagging, tongue out and ears perked, Hummer – a young mixed breed dog with a slick black coat – sits down in front of a sample of screwworm scent, promptly accepting praise and treats from his handler.

Trained to detect the smell of screwworm, a flesh-eating pest that has infected Mexico's cattle herd and disrupted livestock trade with the United States, Hummer and his canine colleagues offer a glimmer of hope in controlling the worm.

At a government-run training centre about an hour outside Mexico City, officials from a special unit of the country's health safety agency Senasica run a three-month intensive training programme for a select group of dogs to sniff out screw-



Maiden, a dog trained to identify pests that attack lemon trees, practices at the canine training centre Ceacan, in Tecamac on the outskirts of Mexico City. - Reuters

worm and other pests or diseases in live animals or agricultural products.

Most of the dogs are rescued from shelters, allowing animals that may have been abandoned for being too difficult to find a new life.

Feisty pups that steal food from the ta-

ble, never calm down and have a relentless desire to play are the perfect candidates.

"Sometimes what people don't want is the ideal for us," said Cesar Dangu, head of the canine training centre Ceacan. "We also have to look for other qualities: that they don't get angry, they are affectionate, they can live with people and with other animals."

Not all dogs respond to the aroma of screwworm, a pest that infests livestock and wildlife and carries maggots that burrow into the skin of living animals, causing serious and often fatal damage.

Some dogs will refuse to approach the aroma, Dangu said, making those that take to it even more valuable in their task.

After cases started emerging in Mexico, the US closed its southern border to imports of certain livestock, including cattle, in May before a gradual reopening began this week.

On Wednesday, however, the US government once again closed the border to cattle after a new case of screwworm was detected in Veracruz state, about 370 miles (595km) south of the US border, a decision Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum called "exaggerated".

On a sunny afternoon at Ceacan, just hours after the border closure announcement, the work of the dogs took on new urgency.

There are only six screwworm-sniffing dogs working at a livestock border passage in the southern state of Chiapas, which borders Guatemala, the heart of Mexico's screwworm infestation.

Havana, a two-year-old Shepherd mix, practices detecting screwworm on cow-sized equipment inside a greenhouse, a training exercise meant to mimic the sweltering heat the dogs must tolerate in Chiapas, said instructor Mayte Tontle.

"We want our dogs to adapt as much as possible to the real-life conditions," Tontle said.

With at least 47 new cases of screwworm detected daily in Mexico, according to government data, the handful of highly trained canines are a small element of Mexico's response, which also includes a \$51mn facility in Chiapas to produce sterile flies to reduce the reproducing population of the wild flies.

The plant, with a hefty \$21mn investment from the US, is expected to be ready in the first half of 2026.

The dogs trained at Ceacan will work until they complete eight years on the job or turn 10 years old, whichever comes first.

After that, they retire.

"I would say 99% of the dogs are adopted by their handler. There is an unbreakable link because of the love between the handler and the dog," Dangu said.



## Moscow sizzles in record heatwave

Moscow sweltered yesterday in a heatwave with temperatures topping 35° Celsius (95° Fahrenheit), according to the Russian weather service, breaching a municipal record registered nearly 30 years ago.

The previous record temperature of 33.4C (92F) in the Russian capital, a city with a continental climate, was set in 1996.

However, it was broken on Thursday with a temperature of 33.9C (93F), the Russian Meteorological Centre reported on its website yesterday.

It added that a new record high was likely to be registered during the day, with weather services predicting temperatures of up to 36C (37F).

The heatwave was forecast to “persist” until early next week across central Russia and southern Europe, with temperatures “three to eight degrees above average climate norms”, said the Russian Meteorological Centre.

The unprecedented heatwave saw Muscovites flocking to their suburban country houses, as well as to the capital’s parks and fountains.

“It’s hard, I’m taking medication,” Valentina Aleksandrova, 86, told AFP on a Moscow street.

The heat stress poses a particular challenge for workers on construction sites, as well as for the elderly.

Some were swimming in the city’s ponds and canals, despite the swimming bans warning of pollution in place.

“The water is dirty, look. We’re here because it’s easier to breathe near the water at 33 degrees,” said Igor, 55, after taking a dip in Tushino, northwest of the capital.

Scientists have long warned that climate change, driven by mankind’s burning of fossil fuels, is making acute heatwaves, droughts, and other extreme weather events more frequent and more intense.

Western Europe experienced its hottest June on record last month, according to the EU’s climate monitor Copernicus. – **AFP**

## Police free 1,194 in global trafficking raids: Europol

Police rescued 1,194 potential human trafficking victims and arrested 158 suspects in co-ordinated raids across 43 countries last month, the European Union’s law enforcement agency said yesterday.

Operation “Global Chain”, which deployed 15,000 officers, targeted human traffickers and smugglers in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas, Europol said in a statement.

“Many of the victims had been trafficked across borders, and even continents, demonstrating the global nature of human trafficking schemes,” the statement said. “Investigations show that the vast majority of victims of sexual exploitation are female and adult, while the exploitation of underage victims is mostly connected to forced begging and forced criminal activity such as pickpocketing.”

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, human trafficking has surged since 2020, driven by armed conflicts, climate-related disasters and wider global instability. – **AFP**

## AFP news agency to reduce staff numbers, foreign network costs

The chairman of Agence France-Presse (AFP) outlined his plans yesterday to cut costs at the news agency with a retirement incentive scheme and a reduction in spending on expatriate journalists.

Fabrice Fries warned last month that the group needed to save €12-14mn (\$13.8-16.1mn) by the end of 2026 due to a fall in revenues.

Speaking to employee representatives yesterday, he said that he hoped to save €4-5mn a year with a retirement incentive plan in which 50-70 employees would leave and not be replaced.

Costs linked to AFP’s foreign network of journalists would also be cut by around €3mn a year, or around 10% of the total, he said.

This would be achieved by reducing the number of jobs with expatriate conditions, which typically include housing benefits and school fees.

“AFP is committed to expatriation,” Fries said – but “not at any price”.

An experienced journalist working in Germany on expatriate conditions costs the same as four locally employed early-career reporters, he added.

Funding the cost-saving measures would require “external financing”, he said.

That could mean taking a loan from the French state, rescheduling existing debt payments or a bank loan.

## EU sets sights on climate target deal by September

Reuters  
Copenhagen/Brussels

Most European Union countries have backed plans to agree a deal on their new climate change target by September, sources familiar with the discussions said yesterday.

EU countries are negotiating their new 2040 climate change target, which the Commission last week proposed should be a 90% emissions reduction from 1990 levels, although countries would be allowed to buy international carbon credits to meet a limited share of the goal.

Denmark, which took over the EU’s rotating presidency this month and is chair-

ing negotiations among countries on the target, aims to strike a deal at a summit of ministers in September, Denmark’s energy and climate ministry said in a statement yesterday.

“It is extremely important that we unite the EU around new climate goals... we have a very small window to put a bow on these negotiations,” Danish climate minister Lars Aagaard said, following a meeting of EU countries’ climate ministers in Aalborg, Denmark, which concluded yesterday.

In the meeting, most of the European Union’s 27 member countries backed the plan to land a deal on the 2040 climate target in September, three sources familiar with the talks said.

However, a handful of countries, includ-

ing Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, opposed a fast-tracked deal – while others demanded changes to the Commission’s proposal, the sources said.

“This is not a decision that we can just take lightly, it’s affecting the whole economy. Working under such time pressure is just not reasonable,” Polish deputy climate minister Krzysztof Bolesta told Reuters, of the proposed September deadline.

Spokespeople for Hungary and the Czech Republic’s EU representations each confirmed their governments opposed the September deadline.

Climate change has made Europe the world’s fastest-warming continent, fueling deadly heatwaves and fires.

However, the 2040 target has stoked po-

litical tensions over how ambitious to be in tackling climate change, at a time when Europe is sharply raising defence spending and attempting to support struggling local industries.

To attempt to win over sceptical governments, the Commission proposed flexibilities that would soften the 90% emissions target for European companies.

Bolesta said that countries had raised concerns in yesterday’s meeting over issues including a lack of clarity on how these flexibilities would work.

The EU faces a mid-September deadline to submit a new 2035 climate target to the United Nations – which the Commission has said should be derived from the 2040 goal.

## Drowning deaths in France rose 58% during heatwave

France’s public health authority said yesterday that more than 100 people had died from drowning between June 1 and July 2 this year, an increase of 58% over the same period last year, blaming it on unusually warm weather at the end of June.

Sante Publique, the French authority, said

429 total drownings had occurred in France between June 1 and July 2, an increase of 95% over that period last year.

“These increases occurred in a context of high temperatures in the second half of June 2025, which led to an increase in people going to swimming areas to cool off,”

the agency said in a bulletin.

Large swaths of Europe, including France, sweltered over a 10-day heatwave ending July 2.

Scientists said 2,300 people died of heat-related causes across 12 European cities during the extreme weather. – **Reuters**

## 30 years on, Bosnia marks genocide in Srebrenica

AFP/Reuters  
Srebrenica

Thousands of mourners commemorated yesterday the genocide committed 30 years ago by Bosnian Serb forces in Srebrenica, one of Europe’s worst atrocities since World War II.

Families buried the partial remains of seven victims, one of them a woman, alongside 6,750 already interred.

Local and foreign dignitaries laid flowers at the memorial where the names of the victims are engraved in stone.

About 1,000 victims have yet to be found from Europe’s worst atrocity since World War II, which, decades later, still haunts Bosnia and Herzegovina’s 3mn people.

Families who retrieved victims’ remains have increasingly opted to bury even just a few bones to give them a final resting place.

The remains of seven victims were laid to rest during the commemorations in the eastern town, which mark the bloodiest episode of Bosnia’s inter-ethnic war in the 1990s.

They included those of Sejdalija Alic, one of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys killed by Bosnian Serb forces after they captured Srebrenica on July 11, 1995.

His granddaughter Anela Alic, whose father was also killed in the massacre and was buried earlier, came to the funeral.

“I never saw my father... and today, my grandfather is being buried, just some of his bones, next to his son,” the 32-year-old said, in tears. “It’s a deep sadness... I have no words to describe it.”

She was born in early 1994, after her pregnant mother was evacuated in a Red Cross convoy from the ill-fated town.

The victims of Srebrenica, which was at the time a UN-protected enclave, were buried in mass graves.

In a bid to cover up the crime, the Bosnian Serb forces had the remains removed to secondary



People gather among gravestones at the memorial cemetery in the village of Potocari, near the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica, on the 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre. – **AFP**

mass graves, causing many of the bodies to be shredded by heavy machinery, according to experts.

“For 30 years we have carried the pain in our souls,” said Munira Subasic, president of the association Mothers of Srebrenica.

She lost her husband, Hilmo, and 17-year-old son Nermin in the massacre.

“Our children were killed, innocent, in the UN-protected zone. Europe and the world watched in silence as our children were killed.”

The seven victims buried under white tombstones yesterday at the memorial centre after a joint prayer included a 19-year-old man and 67-year-old woman.

The remains of most of the victims are incomplete, and in some cases consist only of one or two bones, experts said.

Families have waited years to

bury their loved ones, hoping more remains would be found.

However, Mevlida Omerovic decided not to wait any longer to bury her husband, Hasib.

He was killed at age 33, at one of the massacre’s five mass-execution sites, the only atrocity of Bosnia’s 1992-1995 war qualified as genocide by international justice institutions.

“Thirty years have passed and I have nothing to wait for anymore,” said Omerovic, 55.

She wants to be able to visit her husband’s grave, even though only his jawbone will be in the coffin.

“I have only this tombstone to caress, to pray next to it,” said Sefika Mustafic, standing next to the graves of her sons Enis and Salim, who were both teenagers when killed. “I’d like to dream about them but it doesn’t work. I’ve said thousands of times,

‘Come my children, Come into my dream’... I say it when I pray, when I come here, but it doesn’t work.”

Canadian veteran Daniel Chenard, deployed with UN peacekeepers in Srebrenica from October 1993 until March 1994, when Dutch troops took over, attended commemorations haunted by decades of guilt.

“I forgave myself... I found peace. I always wanted to tell them (victims’ families): ‘I apologise... I’m sorry for abandoning you’.

“We (UN troops) did what we could... but the tragedy still happened,” the 58-year-old said, in tears.

Bosnian Serb wartime political and military leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic were sentenced to life imprisonment by an international tribunal, notably for the Srebrenica genocide.

However, Serbia and Bosnian Serb leaders continue to deny that the massacre was a genocide.

Last year, an international day of remembrance was established by the United Nations to mark the genocide, despite protests from Belgrade and Bosnian Serbs.

Serb officials deny the massacre was a genocide, but President Aleksandar Vucic voiced condolences to the Srebrenica victims’ families on behalf of the people of Serbia yesterday, calling it a “terrible crime”.

“We cannot change the past, but we must change the future,” he posted on X.

European Union enlargement commissioner Marta Kos, who attended the commemorations, said: “Srebrenica remains a deep scar on European history.”

“It is our duty to remember,” she said.

Several dozen people gathered yesterday evening in central Belgrade, where they will light candles for the massacre victims.

Last year, the UN General Assembly declared July 11 an international day of remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide, with many countries organising commemorations this year.

### ‘3mn Afghans could return this year’

Three million Afghans could return to their country this year, a UN refugee official said yesterday, warning that the repatriation flow is placing intense pressure on an already major humanitarian crisis.

Iran and Pakistan have introduced new policies affecting displaced Afghans, with Tehran already having given 4mn “illegal” Afghans until July 6 to leave Iranian territory.

The UNHCR representative in Afghanistan, Arafat Jamal, said during a video press conference from Kabul that more than 1.6mn Afghans have already returned from Pakistan and Iran this year.

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees now estimates 3mn coming into Afghanistan this year, Jamal said. – **AFP**

## Pakistan court suspends order seeking YouTube ban on government critics

Pakistani court has suspended an order seeking to ban the YouTube channels of more than two dozen critics of the government including former prime minister Imran Khan, a defence lawyer said.

Alphabet-owned YouTube this week told 27 content creators that it could block their channels – including those of journalists and Khan and his party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf – if they failed to comply with a judicial magistrate court order seeking to ban them.

A regional communication manager for YouTube

did not respond to a Reuters request for a comment.

The judicial magistrate court in Islamabad had said it was seeking the ban after the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency criticised the channels in a June 2 report for “sharing highly intimidating, provocative and derogatory contents against state institutions and officials of the state of Pakistan”.

The decision to suspend the order was taken by an additional sessions judge, said Imaan Mazari, the lawyer for two of the YouTube content creators. – **Reuters**

## Separatists kill nine bus passengers in Pakistan

Reuters/AFP  
Quetta

Pakistan’s authorities retrieved the bullet-ridden bodies of nine bus passengers kidnapped by insurgents in a spate of attacks on buses in the mountainous southwestern province of Balochistan, officials said yesterday.

The separatist Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) claimed the killings of the nine labourers, saying that they were involved in spying for Pakistani intelligence agencies.

The militants boarded two buses on a major highway and checked passengers’ identity cards before forcing nine people off the vehicles at gunpoint overnight on Thursday.

“The terrorists forced the two passenger buses to stop on a highway and pulled nine passengers out. They took them in an area nearby and killed all of them,” local government official Naveed Alam told AFP.

The attackers specifically targeted people from Punjab, the country’s most populous and prosperous province and a major recruitment base for the military.

Baloch separatists, who have been demanding a greater share of resources, have played a role in similar past killings of those identified as hailing from the eastern province of Punjab.

Government official Naveed Alam said the bodies with bullet wounds were found in the mountains overnight, while a provincial government spokesman, Shahid Rind, said the passengers were seized from two buses on Thursday evening.

Ethnic insurgents accuse Pakistan’s government of stealing regional resources to fund expenditure elsewhere, mainly in the sprawling province of Punjab.

Security forces foiled three insurgent attacks on Thursday before the kidnappings, Rind said, accusing neighbour and arch rival India of backing the militants.

The Indian foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

New Delhi denies accusations by Islamabad that it is funding, training and backing the militants in a bid to stoke instability in the region, where Pakistan relies on China among international investors to develop mines and mineral processing.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) is the strongest among the insurgent groups long operating in the area bordering Afghanistan and Iran, a mineral-rich region.

In recent months, separatists have stepped up their attacks, mostly targeting Pakistan’s military, which has launched an intelligence-based offensive against them.

Their other main targets have been Chinese nationals and interests, in particular the strategic port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea, with the separatists accusing Beijing of helping Islamabad to exploit resources.

The BLA blew up a railway track and took more than 400 train passengers hostage in an attack in March that killed 31.





Beijing offers to help resolve Thailand, Cambodia border dispute



A general view of the 32nd Asean Regional Forum at the Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, yesterday.

Asean agrees Myanmar polls not a priority, says Malaysia

Reuters  
Kuala Lumpur

The Southeast Asian bloc Asean has agreed that an election in Myanmar was not a priority and is urging the country's ruling junta to adhere to its peace commitments instead, Malaysia's foreign minister said yesterday.

Myanmar, an Asean member, is in the grips of an escalating civil war and critics have derided the junta's planned election this year as an attempt to prolong military rule through proxies in the absence of a viable political opposition. Minister Mohamad Hasan said members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), which Malaysia is chairing, want Myanmar to honour a "five-point consensus" peace plan its junta agreed to in 2021, months after a coup against Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government.

The peace plan has largely

been a failure, with the military government unwilling to engage in dialogue with opponents it views as "terrorists". Opposition political parties have been decimated and what remains of them are either barred from or unwilling to contest the election.

"An election is not part of the five-point consensus," Mohamad told reporters on the sidelines of a gathering of Asean foreign ministers. "We advised Myanmar that an election is not a priority for now, the priority is to cease all violence... so that all parties can sit together."

Asean has barred Myanmar's generals from attending its key meetings since 2022 for failing to honour its peace commitments. Myanmar is represented at meetings by foreign ministry officials. Mohamad said the bloc would not accept an election in Myanmar that was not participated by all parties.

"There's no point in having

a partial election. That will not solve any problems, but instead will worsen conditions."

Myanmar's military is battling to contain a widening rebellion by ethnic minority rebel armies and a resistance movement that mushroomed quickly after a lethal crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrations.

At least 3.5mn people have been displaced, according to the United Nations.

Human rights groups have accused the junta of committing widespread atrocities against the civilian population, which it has dismissed as Western disinformation. Asean also wants a temporary ceasefire announced by the junta after a devastating earthquake in March to be extended and expanded, Mohamad added.

Rebels, rights groups and conflict monitors have accused the junta of ignoring its own ceasefire and continuing artillery and air assaults, which it denies.

Rubio meets China's Wang amid trade tensions, sees chance of Trump-Xi talks

Reuters  
Kuala Lumpur

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio yesterday said he had "positive and constructive" talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, as the two major powers vied to push their agendas in Asia at a time of tension over Washington's tariff offensive.

The top US diplomat was in Malaysia on his first Asia trip since taking office, seeking to stress the US' commitment to the region at the East Asia Summit and Asean Regional Forum, where many countries were reeling from a raft of steep US tariffs announced by President Donald Trump this week.

Rubio had his first in-person talks with the Chinese foreign minister, coming as Beijing has warned the US against reinstating hefty levies on its goods next month and threatened retaliation against nations that strike deals with the US to cut China out of supply chains.

Wang has sharply criticised Washington during talks with Asian counterparts in Malaysia, calling the US tariffs "typical unilateral bullying behaviour".

But both sides described the bilateral meeting as positive and constructive yesterday. Rubio said the odds of Trump meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping were high.

"We're two big, powerful countries, and there are always going to be issues that we disagree on. I think there's some areas of potential co-operation and I thought it was a very constructive, positive meeting, and a lot of work to do," he told reporters.

Rubio emphasised that his sit-down with Wang was not a negotiation, but rather about establishing a constructive baseline to continue talks. Asked about a possible Trump-Xi meeting, Rubio said both sides wanted to see it happen.

"We have to build the right atmosphere and build... deliverables, so that a visit isn't just a visit, but it actually has some takeaways from it that are concrete. But there's a strong desire on both sides to do it."

China's foreign ministry said Wang had emphasised that both



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio meets with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi during the 58th Asean Foreign Ministers' meeting and related meetings at the Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

countries should translate consensus reached by their leaders into policies and actions.

"Both sides agreed that the meeting was positive, pragmatic and constructive," it said.

Rubio's visit is part of an effort to renew US focus on the Indo-Pacific region and look beyond conflicts in the Middle East and Europe that have consumed much of the administration's attention since Trump's return to office in January.

But that has been overshadowed by this week's announcement of steep US tariffs on imports from many Asian countries and US allies, including 25% targeting Japan, South Korea and Malaysia, 32% for Indonesia, 36% for Thailand and Cambodia and 40% on goods from Myanmar and Laos.

China, initially singled out with levies exceeding 100%, has until August 12 to reach a deal with Washington to avoid Trump's reinstating additional import curbs imposed during tit-for-tat tariff exchanges in April and May.

Analysts said Rubio would use the trip to press the case that the US remains a better partner than China, Washington's main strategic rival. Rubio met his counterparts from Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia yesterday.

Wang has rebuked the US in Kuala Lumpur, saying no country should support or agree with its tariffs, according to remarks released by Beijing yesterday.

He told Thailand's foreign minister the tariffs had been abused and

"undermined the free trade system, and interfered with the stability of the global production and supply chain".

During a meeting with his Cambodian counterpart, Wang said the US levies were an attempt to deprive southeast Asian countries of their legitimate right to development.

"We believe that southeast Asian countries have the ability to cope with complex situations, adhere to principled positions, and safeguard their own interests," he said.

In a joint communique yesterday, Asean foreign ministers expressed concern over rising global trade tensions and the need to diversify trade, calling for a transparent and fair multilateral trading system.

Without mentioning the US, they said unilateral tariffs were "counterproductive and risk exacerbating global economic fragmentation".

Rubio also met Russia's Sergei Lavrov on Thursday and said he and Lavrov had shared some ideas on a new or different Russian approach on Ukraine.

"I don't want to oversell it, okay, but it was constructive," he said yesterday. "We'll find out, but there are some things that we will potentially explore, and I relayed that to the president and our team."

Rubio also met Japan's foreign minister and South Korea's first vice foreign minister in Malaysia yesterday to discuss regional security and a strengthening of their "indispensable trilateral partnership", the US state department said in a statement.

Woman missing for 12 days in Australian bushland found

German backpacker Carolina Wilga has been found alive but "ravaged by mosquitoes" 12 days after going missing in remote bushland in western Australia, police said. A member of the public found the 26-year-old on a bush track yesterday, and she has been taken to hospital in Perth for treatment. "She's been ravaged by mosquitoes. She's obviously been through an amazing journey, a trauma, and no doubt will be a testimony demonstrating her bravery in the circumstances out there," a WA police officer said. "I think once we do hear her story, it will be a remarkable story."

Wilga had been last seen on June 29 arriving in a Mitsubishi van at a general store in the small agricultural community of Beacon, northeast of Perth. Police found the van on Thursday apparently abandoned after getting stuck in dense bushland about two hours' drive from where she was last seen, sparking a major land and air search of the area.

Taiwan military drills



Taiwanese reservists participate in pre-combat training during the annual Han Kuang military exercise in Miaoli. Taiwan kicked off its annual military drills on July 9, with newly delivered US high-tech rocket systems featuring in exercises aimed at preparing the island for a Chinese attack.

Support for Rohingya refugees 'risks collapse'

Reuters  
Geneva

Essential services for the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh are at risk of collapsing unless more money is found, the United Nations refugee agency said yesterday, with its appeal for \$255mn to support them just 35% funded.

More than 1mn Rohingya have been crammed into the camps in southeastern Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee settlement. Most fled a brutal crackdown by Myanmar's military in 2017, although some have been there for longer.

"There is a huge gap in terms of what we need and what resources are available. These funding gaps will affect the daily living of Rohingya refugees as they depend on humanitarian

support on a daily basis for food, health and education," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees spokesperson Babar Baloch told reporters in Geneva.

The humanitarian sector has been roiled by funding reductions from major donors, led by the US under President Donald Trump and other Western countries, as they prioritise defence spending prompted by growing fears of Russia and China. "With the acute global funding crisis, the critical needs of both newly arrived refugees and those already present will be unmet, and essential services for the whole Rohingya refugee population are at risk of collapsing unless additional funds are secured," Baloch said.

Health services would be severely disrupted by September, and by December essential food assistance would stop, UNHCR said.

Security, trade in focus as Australia PM heads to China

Reuters  
Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese leaves for Shanghai today on an official visit to China where regional security tensions and efforts to grow economic ties are likely to dominate talks.

Australia's exports to China, its largest trading partner, span agriculture and energy but are dominated by iron ore, and Albanese will travel with executives from mining giants Rio Tinto, BHP and Fortescue and hold business events in three cities over six days.

"The relationship in China means jobs in Australia, it's as simple as that," Albanese told reporters yesterday.

Albanese's second visit to Beijing, where he will meet President Xi Jinping, comes after Canberra stepped up screening of Chinese investment in critical minerals and as US President Donald Trump rattles the global economy with sweeping import tariffs.

Albanese is yet to meet Trump, after scheduled talks at the G7 were cancelled when the US president left early. The US, Australia's major security ally, is reviewing the AUKUS nuclear submarine partnership amid concern selling submarines to Aus-

tralia could weaken US deterrence to China.

Foreign Minister Penny Wong warned in a speech in Malaysia on Thursday that China continues to project military power regionally with an objective to change the balance of power, saying Beijing's nuclear and conventional military build-up was "worrying".

AUKUS contributed to "collective deterrence in our region," she said.

Richard Maude, an Asia Society non-resident fellow and former Australian intelligence chief, said Albanese needed to expand the economic relationship with China but also "get through the visit in a way that makes clear to Australia's close

partners and to the Australian public that Australia is talking clearly and frankly to China about aspects of China's behaviour that concern us".

The Chinese navy held live-fire exercises in the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand with no advance warning in February, and there have been tense encounters between Australian and Chinese military aircraft in the disputed South China Sea.

While Beijing is keen to move ties forward, its proposals for cooperation on artificial intelligence, for example, have already met with a cool response, said Maude, who wrote Australia's 2017 foreign policy white paper.

Australia's two-way trade with China was worth A\$312bn last year, or a quarter of all Australian trade.

Ties have stabilised since 2020 when China imposed unofficial bans on A\$20 billion in Australian exports. Direct engagement with Chinese leaders was important for Australia's security, Albanese told reporters yesterday. "We co-operate where we can and we disagree where we must, and we're able to have those honest conversations about some of the disagreements that are there," he said.

Treasurer Jim Chalmers has said economic ties with China are a priority, but also complex.

Australia's increased screening

of Chinese investment in critical minerals, renewable energy and key infrastructure is likely to be raised by Beijing, company executives said, although on Tuesday Chalmers said Australia would not ease its scrutiny.

"The government understands it is not in Australia's national interest to further increase China's stranglehold on the critical minerals supply chain," said Maude.

Geoff Raby, a former Australian ambassador to China, said China would probably raise its ambition to join the 11-member regional trade pact, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which Australia chairs.



# US singer denies more charges in UK assault case



US rapper Chris Brown leaves Southwark Crown Court in London yesterday, after pleading not guilty to a charge of occasioning actual bodily harm during an alleged London nightclub brawl in 2023.

AFP  
London

American R&B singer Chris Brown yesterday pleaded not guilty in a UK court to further charges stemming from an alleged London nightclub brawl in 2023.

Fans of the singer, who is in the middle of an international tour, packed the public gallery at London's Southwark Crown Court.

Brown, who had a troubled relationship with Barbadian singer Rihanna, turned to face his sup-

porters at the end of the hearing, waving and blowing them a kiss.

"I love you Chris," one of them said.

He formally entered not guilty pleas to charges of assault occasioning actual bodily harm and having an offensive weapon - a bottle - in a public place.

Brown, who is on £5mn (\$6.7mn) bail, spent nearly a week in jail in May before being released.

Police arrested him at a five-star hotel in the northwestern city of Manchester hours after he reportedly flew in by private jet.

Judge Tony Baumgartner earlier

gave him the green light to continue his scheduled tour, which began on June 8 in Amsterdam.

Under the terms of his bail, Brown will forfeit the £5mn guarantee if he fails to return for court proceedings.

At a hearing last month, Brown entered a not guilty plea to the more serious charge of attempting to cause grievous bodily harm with intent.

The charges all relate to the same alleged incident at Tape, an exclusive private members' club in Hanover Square in London, on February 19, 2023, while Brown was

touring in the UK.

The victim was allegedly struck several times with a bottle before being pursued, punched and kicked.

Brown appeared in the dock yesterday with co-defendant Omololu Akinlolu, 39, also a US national, with whom he is jointly charged.

Akinlolu also entered a not guilty plea to the same actual bodily harm charge.

At the earlier hearing he denied the charge of attempting to cause grievous bodily harm.

Both men are expected to stand trial in October 2026.

# India, Australia trade talks hit tariff hurdles as deadline looms

India's refusal to concede on politically sensitive dairy and agriculture products reflects mounting pressure from powerful farm groups

Reuters  
New Delhi/Canberra

India has rejected Australia's push for deeper tariff cuts, hampering efforts to conclude the second phase of a trade pact by year-end, two Indian government sources said.

An interim trade pact signed in 2022 lowered tariffs on a range of goods, but negotiations on a broader Comprehensive Economic Co-operation Agreement (CECA) covering goods, services and visas have slowed, with dairy and alcohol emerging as key sticking points, the sources said.

The officials declined to be named as they were not authorised to speak to media on confidential trade talks. India's commerce ministry and Australia's department

of foreign affairs and trade did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

"There is no question of agreeing to Australia's demands for further tariff cuts"

India's refusal to concede on politically sensitive dairy and agriculture products reflects mounting pressure from powerful farm groups, which is also shaping trade talks with other partners, including the US. "There is no question of agreeing to Australia's demands for further tariff cuts," a senior Indian official with direct knowledge of the talks with Australia said.

"It could have an impact on millions of farmers and our grape producers," Farmer groups and politicians from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state Gujarat and grape-growing Maharashtra, are strongly opposing any concessions, the official added.

Australia is pushing to accelerate these cuts and gain better ac-

cess for dairy products - including cheese, high-protein whey concentrate, lactose and processed items - currently taxed between 20% and 30%.

Karl Ellis of Dairy Australia said India's vast and culturally sensitive dairy sector limits mainstream exports, but niche products like high-protein whey, lactose, and select cheeses offer promise.

"Current tariffs are prohibitive," he said, adding lower duties could help Australia tap into the \$30-40mn market now served by European exporters.

Despite the impasse, officials on both sides remain hopeful.

India is open to offer cutting tariffs on non-agricultural goods, including industrial items, while seeking more access for services and visas, a second official said.

The Australian department of foreign affairs said the talks for CECA are backed by both prime ministers, and conclusion of the pact would boost two-way trade, while building a more resilient economic partnership.

## 'Chennai Metro Rail' project work



Labourers work at a construction site of the 'Chennai Metro Rail' project in Chennai, India, yesterday.

## Tesla marks formal India entry with Mumbai launch event

Reuters  
Mumbai

Tesla will open its first India showroom in Mumbai next week, having imported \$1mn worth of cars and merchandise, marking its entry into the world's third-largest car market despite CEO Elon Musk's complaints about high import tariffs.

In an invitation to media, the carmaker said the July 15 event was the "launch of Tesla in India through the opening of the Tesla experience centre at Bandra Kurla Complex," located in the city's leading commercial

business district. Grappling with excess manufacturing capacity at its other factories and falling sales, Tesla has pivoted to selling imported cars in India on which it will need to pay about 70% import duty and other levies.

Commercially available custom records from January to June showed Tesla imported vehicles, chargers and accessories into India worth close to \$1mn, mainly from China and the US.

The vehicles included six of Tesla's best-selling Model Y at a shipment value of \$32,500 each for five cars, and \$46,000 for the long-range version, as well as several Superchargers.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has for years wooed Tesla, including forming a new policy to attract the carmaker to build its EVs locally.

Last year, Musk had planned to visit India where he was expected to announce an investment of \$2-3bn, including in local EV manufacturing. But he cancelled the trip at the last moment.

Tesla has hired for several of the three dozen positions it advertised in India earlier this year, bringing on board store managers, sales and service executives. It is looking for supply chain engineers and vehicle operators for its autopilot ambitions.

## London's Heathrow eyes higher fees for £10bn upgrade

London's Heathrow Airport yesterday said it plans to invest £10bn (\$14bn) over the next five years in upgrades to boost passenger numbers, largely funded by higher charges to airlines. A statement said the plans, which are subject to approval by the UK's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), would add an additional 10mn passengers per year by 2031 at Europe's busiest airport. Of the £10bn, £2bn will come from shareholders, while the remainder will be financed through higher charges paid by airlines - costs that are often passed on to passengers.

Heathrow said it plans to increase the fee levied on airlines to an average of £33.26 per passenger. The CAA, which first needs to agree the plans, has previously asked Heathrow to reduce fees charged to carriers. "This major infrastructure programme marks Heathrow's most significant transformation in a decade," said chief executive Thomas Woldbye.

## Dal Lake cleanup drive



A man rows a boat loaded with waste materials collected during a cleanup drive led by Dutch national Ellis Hubertina Spaander in Dal Lake in Srinagar, India, to raise awareness among the locals.

## Scheme to help exploited migrant carers 'failing'

Reuters  
London

A multi-million-pound British government scheme to help exploited migrant care workers find new work has largely failed due to barriers including high visa costs, research showed yesterday.

The research by the London-based Work Rights Centre comes after the charity found last month that only 3.4% of the more than 27,000 carers who were contacted through the so-called re-matching scheme had found work.

Nearly a third of carers in England - workers who support the elderly and other vulnerable people - are migrants. Many have faced abuse or exploitation since arriving to fill severe labour shortages following Britain's exit from the EU. Charities have called on

the government to reform work visas, which are tied to employers or "sponsors", which they say creates a power imbalance that leads to exploitation, including fraudulent fees being charged, debt bondage and modern slavery.

The government launched the £16mn (\$22mn) scheme last year to support migrant care workers who found themselves out of a job after sponsorship licences were revoked from care firms amid a crackdown on exploitation.

The government had no specific target set for how many workers would be helped.

The Work Rights Centre said that exploited migrant workers, often facing financial constraints, were unable to afford the high visa costs required to move into a new job through the scheme, or meet the expectation from employers that they have access to a car in order to visit private homes.

# Indian brands tap heritage pride to boost sales

Reuters  
Mumbai/Milan

Indian footwear sellers and artisans are tapping into nationalist pride stoked by the Prada 'sandal scandal' in a bid to boost sales of ethnic slippers with history dating back to the 12th century, raising hopes of reviving a struggling craft.

Sales are surging over the past week for the 'Kolhapuri' sandals that have garnered global attention after Prada sparked a controversy by showcasing similar designs in Milan, without initially crediting the footwear's origins.

After viral photos from a fashion

show drew criticism from Indian artisans who make the sandals - named after a historic city in Maharashtra state - Prada was forced to acknowledge that its new open-toe footwear was inspired by ancient Indian designs.

"Prada 0: Kolhapur 1," said an Instagram post by e-commerce website Shopkop, whose founder Rahul Parasu Kamble's open letter to Prada pointing out the footwear is "soaked in tradition" was reshared 36,000 times on social media.

"I saw the controversy as a way to promote Kolhapuri," said Kamble, 33, who has seen sales of sandals he sources from local artisans touch Rs50,000 rupees (\$584) in three

days, five times the average.

Social media has been abuzz in recent days with criticism and sarcastic memes, with politicians, artisans and a trade body demanding due credit to Indian heritage.

Prada has said it will arrange follow-up meetings with artisans. In a statement it added the Italian group intends to make the sandals in India in collaboration with local manufacturers, if it commercialises them.

India's luxury market is small but growing, with the rich splurging on Lamborghini cars and pricey watches. Prada does not have a single retail store in India and its products are usually reserved for the su-

per rich - its men's leather sandals start retailing at \$844, while Kolhapuris can be priced as low as \$12.

But linking of the Prada name to the Kolhapuri sandals, which are made by around 7,000 artisans, is providing a business opportunity for some.

Mumbai-based Ira Soles is running new Facebook and Instagram advertisements which proclaim its \$32 "Tan Handcrafted Kolhapuris just walked the ramp at Prada ... Limited stock. Global spotlight. Own a piece of what the world is applauding."

E-commerce website Niira is offering up to 50% discounts on its Kolhapuri slippers it says are "root-

ed in tradition". Its sales of \$18 sandals, that looked like the one Prada showcased in Milan, have tripled, founder Nishant Raut said.

"Why can't an Indian Kolhapuri brand become as big as a Birkenstock," he said.

Handmade in small factories, Kolhapuri sandals, or chappals as they are called in Hindi, are often paired with Indian attire. Similar designs are sold in big outlets of Bata India and Metro Brands and also on Amazon and Walmart's Flipkart.

In 2021, India's government said the sandals could achieve \$1bn a year in exports. Though latest estimates are not available, artisans say

the business has struggled as consumers increasingly opt for more fashionable, upmarket footwear.

Still, the Prada controversy is breathing new life into a craft that Lalit Gandhi, president of Maharashtra's main industry lobby group, says is "a dying art". Gandhi said he is in talks with Prada to develop a co-branded, limited-edition sandal.

Kolhapur craftsmen Ashok Doiphode, 50, is pinning hopes on a Prada boost. He hand-stitches sandals for nine hours daily but can sell a pair for just Rs400 (\$5).

"If big companies like Prada come, craftsman like me can get a good price."



CHAIRMAN

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

Deputy Managing Editor

K T Chacko

Production Editor

Amjad Khan

✉ P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar  
✉ editor@gulf-times.com  
☎ 44350478 (News),  
☎ 44466404 (Sport),  
☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)  
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GULF TIMES

Jet fuel demand falters as Chinese curb overseas trips

The recovery in global jet fuel demand is set to slow and stall below pre-pandemic levels this year and next as the Chinese travel abroad less, stringent US immigration policies deter some tourists and aircraft fleets become more fuel-efficient. Jet fuel accounts for around 7% of global fuel use and softer consumption leads to lower overall demand for oil and ultimately weaker oil prices. Less use of aviation fuel also reduces a source of 2.3% of greenhouse gas emissions.

Aviation fuel consumption has lagged the recovery seen in fuel oil and gasoline since the pandemic, held back largely by a decline in long-haul flights from Asia, particularly China, with tight consumer spending curbing travel budgets.

The International Energy Agency forecast in June that jet fuel consumption would reach 8mn barrels per day in 2027, above 2019's level of 7.9mn bpd, having earlier predicted it would recover to the pre-pandemic rate last year.

Demand grew by 5.6% last year, but the IEA expects a slowdown to 1.32% in 2025 and 1.29% next year.

US President Donald Trump's crackdown on immigrants and his orders to tighten border policy are deterring some people from flying to the US — one of the most visited countries in the world — over fears of being detained.

The aviation industry is also concerned that Trump's tariffs may dampen global growth and, therefore, demand for air travel. J.P. Morgan expects global jet fuel demand to hold steady this northern hemisphere summer — usually a peak time for air travel. It sees US demand flat at 1.7mn bpd through 2026, after surpassing 2mn bpd in May for the first time since 2019. Demand in Europe is also expected to be steady in the third quarter.

Improved efficiency and mileage in newer aircraft is another factor curbing jet fuel demand

analyst Natasha Kaneva said in a note. Analysts at consultancy BMI, a Fitch group company, estimate a decline of 16.3% in US arrivals for 2025. Data from aviation analytics company Cirium shows a 1.2% fall in passengers expected from the United Kingdom to the US in 2025 compared to last year. Other Europeans have been booking fewer trips there too.

Domestic air travel is also showing signs of stagnation, with internal flights contracting 1.7% year-on-year in May, the only domestic market to do so, according to data from the International Air Transport Association.

China, the world's second biggest economy, was one of the last countries globally to come out of lockdown restrictions and its citizens still prefer domestic tourism, partly due to fears over longer-haul flights after the pandemic left some people stranded in multiple countries. International flight capacity is relatively smaller at 9% compared to 29% in the US, according to data compiled by consultancy Kpler.

While domestic travel has rebounded to 2019 levels, overall flight growth in China is expected to remain tepid year-on-year, Macquarie Group strategist Vikas Dwivedi said.

Meanwhile in Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest market, the number of seats on domestic and international flights in June declined 4.1% on the year, data from aviation consultancy OAG showed. They have declined year-on-year since January.

Improved efficiency and mileage in newer aircraft is another factor curbing jet fuel demand, as planes carry more passengers over longer distances while burning less fuel, energy and industry analysts say. The world's largest planemaker Airbus says its new airplane would be 20-30% more fuel-efficient than the current A320neo family. The new plane, which has yet to be given a name, will enter service in 10-15 years. When A320neo was introduced in the mid-2010s it already cut jet fuel use by nearly 15%.

Boeing's current 737 Max, the fourth generation of 737s, is also about 15% more fuel-efficient than the previous line.

Koen Wessels, head of demand at Energy Aspects, said not a lot of change is expected next year from the trends of increasing jet efficiencies and more uncertainty over the global economy affecting travel. — Reuters

What Europe's AI strategy should look like

By Edoardo Campanella  
Cambridge

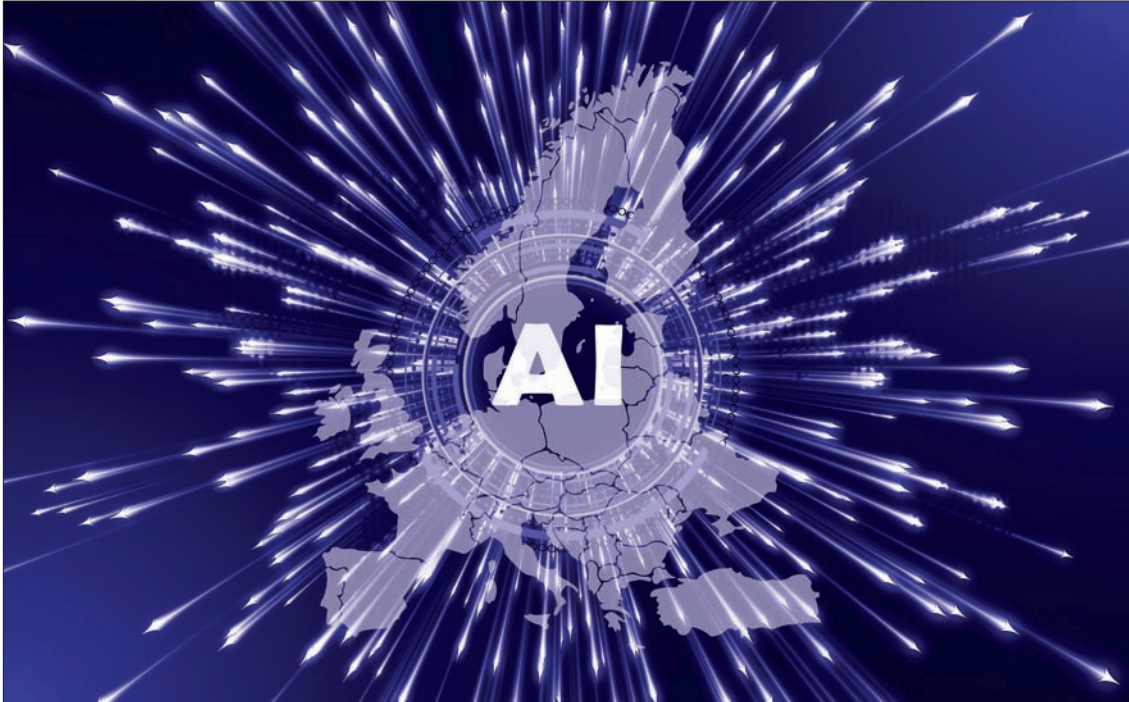
The global "AI race" now seems to have been reduced to a head-on clash between China and the US. But even if well-known structural deficiencies are preventing Europe from developing its own AI giants and pioneering seminal innovations, it could still win the race in the long term by promoting the diffusion of AI technologies across its economy.

In a great-power competition, leveraging technologies at scale is more important than inventing them. Historically, each industrial revolution was propelled by a general-purpose technology (GPT) that had wide-ranging applications across sectors. Since the steam engine drove the first wave of industrialisation, electricity the second, and information technologies the third, most expect AI to usher in the fourth industrial revolution.

A GPT is pervasive by definition. But technological diffusion does not happen overnight. It takes time for firms, especially those that are relatively less technologically advanced, to understand a new technology's potential and adapt production processes accordingly. Moreover, the broader economy needs to build a sufficiently large stock of new capital and complementary assets, both tangible and intangible.

In the US, it took more than 20 years for electricity to surpass steam's share of total horsepower in manufacturing, and almost 40 years to become the undisputed source of power generation. Similarly, it took more than 20 years for information and communications technology (ICT) equipment to exceed 1% of the capital stock. In 1987, nearly two decades after Intel launched the microprocessor that gave rise to the IT revolution, Nobel laureate Robert Solow famously quipped: "You can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics." But then, between 1991 and 2001, the ITC share of the capital stock rose to 5%, before jumping to 8%, where it has roughly stabilised.

Slow adoption also seems to be a feature of the AI revolution. Even though one can access sophisticated AI chatbots with a click, most organisational processes have not been adapted to integrate the



technology. In the European Union, the share of small enterprises that use at least one AI tool is still below 12%, compared to around 40% of larger companies. A survey by the US Federal Reserve Bank of New York painted a similar picture last September, finding that only 25% of service firms, and 16% of manufacturers, in its region reported using AI.

Of course, technological diffusion is less exciting than pioneering scientific breakthroughs. But Europe is too far behind to become a cutting-edge innovator. It should focus, instead, on leveraging AI technologies in those sectors that represent the largest chunk of any economy (the EU's "Apply AI Strategy" is a good first step). Doing so would confer the competitive advantage needed to exercise geopolitical power and advance European interests over the long term.

Promoting the widespread adoption of digital technologies is a markedly different challenge than developing the next generation of AI models. Instead of channelling financial support toward frontier research in elite labs or universities, European governments should focus on widening the AI skills base (emphasising industry-specific skills,

rather than general ones); developing the appropriate digital infrastructure; adapting legal and ethical frameworks to accommodate AI; and building professional bridges between AI engineers and scientists.

Standardising AI best practices is also crucial. Here, judging by the International Monetary Fund's AI Preparedness Index, some EU countries are already off to a good start, with Estonia on par with the US.

Pursuing a pragmatic strategy to capitalise on innovation does not mean abandoning any ambition to innovate. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is right to point out that, "We are only at the beginning. The frontier is constantly moving. And global leadership is still up for grabs."

But Europe will need to address its dependencies. In a world undergoing geoeconomic and geopolitical fragmentation, with the US turning its back on close allies, AI laggards could — in the worst-case scenario — be deprived of frontier technologies altogether. According to a 2023 study, 73% of AI foundation models developed since 2017 came from the US, and 15% from China.

So, while strengthening incentives for AI diffusion in the medium term, Europe should also create a more accommodating regulatory

environment (such as by relaxing some provisions of the AI Act, like computational-power thresholds for generative AI models), financial landscape (such as through a savings and investments union), and scientific ecosystem (with more bridges between academia and the private sector).

Former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi's landmark report on EU competitiveness is full of recommendations to move EU policy in this direction. But since these proposals will take time to debate, enact, and implement, let alone to bear fruit, the EU should pursue a two-pronged approach, focusing on technological diffusion now and on technological disruption in the future.

When I asked Grok whether Europe can become an AI giant, it sarcastically responded: "Nothing screams 'AI revolution' like a 500-page compliance checklist." Can Europe prove Elon Musk's chatbot wrong? — Project Syndicate

• Edoardo Campanella, Senior Fellow at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, is co-author (with Marta Dassù) of Anglo Nostalgia: The Politics of Emotion in a Fractured West (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Europe's quantum moment

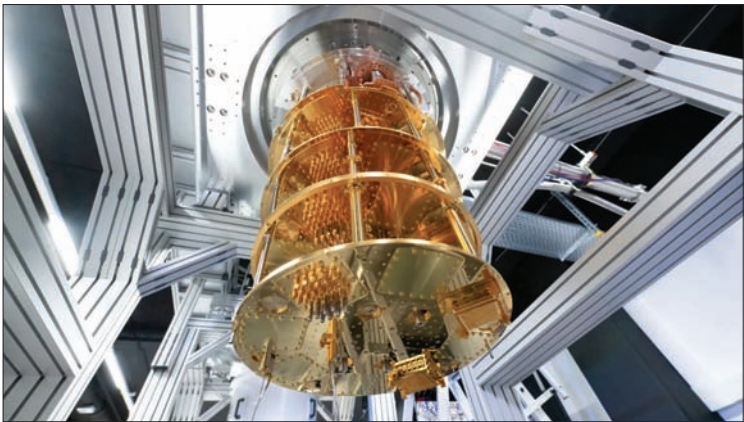
By Sona Muzikarova  
Boston

By now, it is obvious that the European Union must confront its lack of military might and economic competitiveness. US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has declared that America is no longer "primarily focused on Europe's security." Mario Draghi's 2024 report on European competitiveness warned that the EU must foster innovation to maintain its industrial relevance. Clearly, relying on past alliances and inherited advantages is no longer a viable option for Europe.

Addressing these challenges will require building new alliances and developing new advantages — especially in quantum computing. While much has been said about AI's ability to shift the balance of global power, the quieter quantum revolution promises to generate equally meaningful breakthroughs in industry, cybersecurity, and defence strategy. And whereas the EU lags far behind China and the US in AI and advanced semiconductors, it still has a chance to lead in quantum technologies. But the window is closing fast.

Quantum computing isn't just a faster version of classical computing — it is an entirely new form of information processing. Instead of relying on binary code, quantum computers use qubits that can hold multiple states at once, allowing them to solve complex problems concurrently, rather than sequentially.

While these supercharged computers remain years away from maturity, owing to instability and high error rates, several other types of quantum technology are already in use. Quantum sensors, due to their remarkable precision, are reshaping military operations and nuclear deterrence. Communications backed by quantum cryptography are protecting against increasingly advanced and frequent cyberattacks on critical infrastructure and intellectual property. And quantum algorithms are driving gains in industrial logistics and military simulations.



A quantum computer being built by the startup IQM, in a data centre in Germany. Shown on 5 December, 2024. (AFP/File photo)

Developing quantum capabilities would enable Europe to bolster its defences. Along Nato's eastern flank, and particularly in Ukraine, such computing could power navigation systems that work even in GPS-denied environments, sensors that can detect stealth aircraft and submarines, and monitoring tools that expose hidden enemy activities. Recognising quantum technologies' potential for improving intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has indicated a willingness to develop these technologies. Europe must not be caught flat-footed.

From a competitiveness standpoint, quantum tech could revitalise Europe's ailing automotive sector, with advanced modelling accelerating battery innovation. Quantum computing could also increase the continent's energy competitiveness, by stabilising its renewable-heavy power grids, and boost its strong pharmaceutical sector, by supercharging drug discovery and improving early disease detection. These developments would also drive progress toward climate goals, reduce reliance on fossil-fuel imports, and ease the burden on healthcare systems.

Fortunately, Europe is entering the quantum race in a strong position. Its research institutions — including

QuTech in the Netherlands and Forschungszentrum Jülich in Germany — are globally competitive. The continent trains more quantum engineers than any other, hosts nearly one-quarter of the world's quantum-tech companies, and is a global leader in quantum sensing and communications.

The EU has also built a political consensus around the strategic importance of quantum technologies. The Quantum Flagship, the Commission's €1bn (\$1.2bn) research-and-development initiative, has backed commercial ventures such as Paspal and IQM, both of which build quantum hardware.

The Union has also allocated billions of euros to programs such as the European Quantum Communication Infrastructure Initiative and the European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking. When it comes to scaling up production of quantum hardware, Europe's precision manufacturing base — from German machines to Dutch lithography — may prove advantageous.

But a familiar obstacle — the so-called "valley of death" between lab breakthroughs and market success — may negate these advantages. Europe's quantum start-ups receive less private financing than their counterparts in the US, forcing many to relocate to North America and Asia in search of capital. Compared to America's private investment -

and defence-driven approach, or China's state-backed strategy, the EU's fragmented funding and governance landscape could be lethal, offsetting the Union's myriad technical strengths.

To convert quantum tech's potential into a strategic advantage, several principles should guide EU policy. First, when it comes to R&D, the bloc should focus on use cases that will enable it to achieve quick wins in legacy sectors such as pharmaceuticals, the automotive industry, and green energy. At the same time, a European version of DARPA should be established to fund high-risk, dual-use quantum technologies with immediate defence and cybersecurity applications.

Second, EU member states should establish protective safeguards — from export controls to investment-screening mechanisms and IP protection — for sensitive quantum research that is vulnerable to espionage or foreign acquisition. This may require the EU to form partnerships with other trusted democracies. Deeper quantum alliances could also allow the bloc to have a greater impact in global standard-setting, while reducing its dependence on supply chains in adversarial countries.

Most importantly, realising Europe's quantum ambition demands more than technical excellence; it requires political courage. For too long, Europe has watched from the sidelines as the US and China defined the rules of emerging tech. Quantum computing presents the continent with a rare chance to take the reins. But to seize it, European policymakers must embrace a culture of deliberate risk-taking. The outcome of the quantum tech race will ultimately come down to whether Europe still believes in its capacity to lead. — Project Syndicate

• Sona Muzikarova, a former economist at the European Central Bank, former diplomat at the OECD, and a former senior adviser to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, is a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.

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Containers of pesticides lay on an agricultural spraying machine in the village of Agia in Thessaly region, Greece.



Empty pesticide and fertiliser containers are disposed on the ground near the village of Metamorfosi, in Thessaly region, Greece.



Alberto, a local farmer, pours pesticides into an agricultural spraying machine, in the village of Agia in Thessaly region, Greece.

# Europe's illegal pesticide trade surges as farmers cut costs

By Karolina Tagaris/Reuters  
Thessaly, Greece

As the cost of spraying crops with pesticides becomes increasingly expensive, farmers in Greece's agricultural heartland have turned to a cheaper alternative: liquids in unlabelled plastic bottles smuggled over land and sea.

The products are more effective, a dozen farmers across the Thessaly plain said. They are also potentially more harmful: laboratory tests shared with Reuters show the bottles contain pesticides banned in the European Union for several years because of suspected risks to humans or the environment.

The situation in Greece, explained by farmers, elected officials, law enforcement officers and pesticide industry experts, is echoed across the EU, where authorities say the use of banned and counterfeit pesticides is higher than ever. This comes as the bloc is seeking to reduce even the use of permitted crop Aids as part of its green transition.

At least 14% of pesticides used on EU fields today are illegal, up from around 10% in 2015, EU data shows. In some areas of Greece, that number hits 25%, said Greece's Crop Protection Association ESYF, which represents pesticide companies in the country.

A record 2,040 tonnes of illegal pesticides were seized by police in Europe in 2022, the latest available data by Europol from an EU-wide operation shows, four times higher than in 2019.

The problem is likely even larger because so much smuggling goes undetected, said authorities in Greece and in several of Europe's main agricultural producers: France, Germany and Spain.

Agriculture Minister Kostas Tsiras told Reuters Greece was working to protect public health, support farmers, and promote safe, legal agricultural production.

"The fight against illegality is a priority for us," he said.

The EU Commission did not respond to Reuters' questions.

## LIVELIHOODS THREATENED

Greek farmers are vulnerable to the illegal pesticide trade because of the lingering impacts of the 2010-18 financial crisis and climate change,

- Use of illegal pesticides on the rise in EU
- Goods are smuggled into Greece from Bulgaria, Turkiye
- Farmers say they are cheaper, more potent
- Lab tests detect dozens of banned substances



Thanasis Kostis, 62, a local cotton farmer, sprays a cotton field with pesticides, in the village of Metamorfosi, in Thessaly region, Greece.

which has parched their land and brought pest outbreaks. Pesticides can amount to up to 50% of annual costs, some farmers said. A litre of a popular Greek insecticide costs up to €380 euros (\$445). A counterfeit can be found on the black market for €200-230, they added. The high prices threaten livelihoods in Thessaly, a key breadbasket in central Greece, which produces apples, almonds, grains and cotton. Orchards in the region have been abandoned as farmers seek work elsewhere.

"To survive, a farmer must become a criminal," said Giorgos Zeikos, a fourth-generation apple farmer who heads a co-operative in the village of Agia.

"It's one thing to break the law to profit; it's another to do it just to survive," Zeikos said he has refused offers to use illegal pesticides. But farmers in six villages across the hot valley said they, or their relatives or neighbours, had tried them.

Another temptation is the perceived effectiveness of the illegal pesticides.

On a break from the fields, farmers in the cotton-producing village of Metamorfosi recounted

how older, now-banned pesticides were so potent that birds would not fly over their fields after they sprayed. Now, they said, they apply twice the recommended dose of the legal product.

George Pontikas, president of ESYF, the crop protection association, dismissed farmers' claims that pesticides were expensive and inefficient. He said authorities were not doing enough to punish lawbreakers.

"Someone who poisons our food supply to make a profit should be treated as a felon," said Pontikas, who is also chief executive of the Greek branch of Swiss agrochemicals giant Syngenta.

## ILLICIT TRADE

The products are smuggled into Greece overland from Bulgaria in spare tyres or ferried on rafts traffickers use to bring migrants into Europe from Turkiye, farmers and officials said.

In one village, an almond farmer said he once drove to Bulgaria and bought five boxes of counterfeit products for himself and his neighbours. In another, a farmer said locals act as intermediaries for

a man known as "the Bulgarian". When he is expected, they take orders from others in the village.

Farmers pay in cash, spray at night and burn the empty containers to erase all evidence, they said.

"If you want it, you'll find it," said Thanasis Kostis, a farmer in Metamorfosi. Kostis said he has not used illegal products.

Farmers who told Reuters they had used the illegal pesticides asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals from authorities.

Bulgaria's Food Safety Agency said it has stepped up inspections since October to combat the trade and use of unauthorised products.

Turkiye's Trade Ministry did not respond to a request for comment. The trade is increasingly structured, resembling organised economic crime, a senior Greek police official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Roles are divided into import, storage and distribution. Meanwhile, police act largely on tip-offs, three police and industry officials told Reuters.

Dimitris Stavridis, head of Thessaly's General Directorate of Regional Agricultural Economy,



Evangelia Tinana, farmer, empties a crate of cherries during a product inspection by agronomists from the Larissa's Directorate of Regional Agricultural Economy at the local farmers' market in the city of Larissa in Thessaly region, Greece.

acknowledged that more checks could be carried out in farmers' markets but said that some regions struggled with understaffing.

## HEALTH RISKS

Seized products go to the Benaki Phytopathological Institute in Athens for analysis. Many arrive with Bulgarian, Turkish, or handwritten labels. Some counterfeits look like EU-approved products but may contain harmful substitutes, including unknown solvents. Under Greek law, only pesticides with Greek labels are legal.

Greek police and Europol say many of these substances originate in China.

China's Foreign Ministry said in an email it has always asked companies to abide by the laws in the countries in which they operate and that Beijing is willing to strengthen cooperation with the EU on customs enforcement.

The EU bans have been partly due to what regulators identified as health risks, including links to liver, kidney and lung damage, or as possible carcinogens. However, some of these chemicals are used legally in other countries, including the US. Over a dozen banned pesticides — some since 2009 — were detected in Greece alone in 2024, tests seen by Reuters show.

"This is serious," said Thessaly Governor Dimitris Kouretas, a toxicology professor, referring to research on the possible health impact.

In the past year, 10 banned pesticides were detected in Greek produce including olives, cherries, tomatoes, grapes and oranges, Agriculture Ministry data shows.

While the World Health Organisation says consumer risk from low pesticide levels is minimal, farmers using illegal chemicals may face greater danger.

In the early 2000s, respiratory physicians at Larissa University Hospital in Thessaly observed that many patients who smoked and were exposed to pesticides were developing a rare form of lung scarring. In 2006, their published findings alongside similar research in France, helped to formally recognise a disease now known as Combined Pulmonary Fibrosis and Emphysema (CPFE).

"Nearly all such patients exposed to both smoking and pesticides developed this distinct entity," said doctor Ilias Dimeas.

Elsewhere in Greece's farming regions, doctors say they have seen a rise in respiratory diseases in recent years potentially linked to pesticide exposure and are beginning to take note of their patients' occupational history.

Farmers greet the risks with a shrug.

"All pesticides have consequences," said Kostis, the farmer in Metamorfosi. "I had a mask, but this year I haven't worn it at all."

## Isolated and fearing a ban, Germany's far-right tones down the rhetoric

- AfD shifts strategy to avoid ban over extremist position
- Party omits 'remigration' from policy paper
- Commentators see tactical shift by party which came second in February's election
- Others refuse to work with AfD

By Thomas Escritt and Sarah Marsh/Reuters  
Berlin

Last weekend, Germany's far-right lawmakers vowed to dress smartly, minimise parliamentary cat-calling, and signed up to a short manifesto notably omitting a call for repatriation of some immigrants that helped fuel their February election success.

The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is trying a tactical pivot away from the mix of attention-grabbing shock policies and provocative rowdiness that helped it become the second-largest parliamentary party, in a bid to go more mainstream and translate popularity into power, political commentators and a party insider said.

Being the largest opposition party has conferred privileges like being able to respond first to the government in parliament, but in Germany power comes from being in coalitions, and every other party rules out governing with the AfD.

Other parties have also prevented it from taking key positions on parliamentary committees as calls grow across the political spectrum for a ban on the

AfD on account of its extremism.

So far, conservative Chancellor Friedrich Merz has opposed such a ban, which must be requested by either house of parliament or the government, and then examined by the Constitutional Court. The court has only banned a party twice in 1952 and 1956.

A senior party official who declined to be named said the new rules were all about "professionalising" the party — although some, especially founding figures in the party's eastern heartlands who are not members of the national parliament, oppose changing a successful formula.

At stake is the 2029 election, which the party, four points behind Merz's conservatives in some polls, could have a credible shot of winning. In the weeks following February's election where it won 20.8% of the vote, it briefly surged to first place.

The AfD leadership hopes to follow hard-right parties like Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy into the political mainstream, from where they could reshape the politics of Germany and Europe.

Far-right essayist Goetz Kubitschek, a mentor and close ally to Bjoern Hoecke, leader of the party's most radical wing from the eastern state of Thuringia, said on his podcast: "I don't understand why a party polling at 20% should change its agenda." The manifesto or position paper agreed to by all 152 legislators omitted the word "remigration" — used heavily by leader Alice Weidel in the election campaign and widely understood as a call for unassimilated non-ethnic-German citizens and migrants to leave the country.

The word was cited as evidence by a court that recently upheld a security service assessment that the AfD might be an extremist and therefore an unconstitutional party. To be banned in Germany, a political party must not only be deemed to take a



Co-leaders of the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla sit together at the German lower house of parliament Bundestag during the 2025-2029 budget session in Berlin.

position that undermines the functioning of Germany's democratic order, it must also be acting on it with a chance of success.

The remigration phrase had become "toxic," said one legislator present at the weekend gathering, who did not want to be named, adding that averting a ban was another goal.

An official spokesperson for the AfD did not immediately respond to a request for comment on any connections between the policy document and a desire to professionalise or head off a ban.

"The word remigration has been found to be unconstitutional and has no future," wrote AfD legislator Maximilian Krah, once considered one of the party's most radical figures. "Case closed. The court has spoken." Nevertheless, Weidel still lashed out at

Germany's migration policies in parliament this week.

## A REAL CHANGE?

Many commentators are sceptical that the shift is any more than cosmetic.

"This ongoing discourse about a possible ban is getting under their skin," said political scientist Oliver Lembcke, adding: "They are trying to be more palatable to other parties: it's about getting a share of the power and seeking not to be marginalised." The AfD reorganised its youth organisation last year when its campaigns were criticised for being racist.

The regional politician Matthias Helferich, who was shown in leaked emails to have used language associated with the Nazis, was expelled from the party this week. He said he was a victim of a "show trial" by the party tribunal that expelled him. He denied being an extremist.

Merz's conservatives remain committed to a policy of never governing with the AfD, but conservative parliamentary leader Jens Spahn suggested it was time to treat the AfD as an "ordinary" opposition party, which could see it get more access to non-partisan steering committees.

Merz, having concluded that former Chancellor Angela Merkel's strategy of ignoring them was a failure, has started attacking Weidel in parliament directly, on Tuesday accusing her of trying to spread "bitterness" and "despair".

It is unclear if all members will follow the party through its pivot. Hoecke pointedly posted an essay on remigration the day after the new strategy document was floated. "The AfD has given up the fight against population replacement," wrote Paul Brandenburg, a prominent activist, on Telegram. "This is causing uproar among sympathisers."





The fully renovated Dahl Al Hamam Park was reopened recently. **PICTURES:** Shaji Kayamkulam



# Dahl Al Hamam, a revamped green oasis

The Dahl Al Hamam Park, reopened recently by the Ministry of Municipality after a full renovation and redevelopment in co-ordination with the Public Works Authority (Ashghal), is a green oasis. The park features a wide range of amenities, including four children's play areas, a tiered outdoor theatre that accommodates around 900 seats, a celebration area, and a multi-purpose hall for community events. There are a 390m running track, three fitness zones, a basketball court, three food and beverage kiosks, a full-service cafe, and 220 parking spaces. Additional features are separate prayer areas for men and women, an administrative building for operations and maintenance supervision, facilities for people with disabilities to ensure ease of access and mobility, family seating areas, modern restrooms, a plant irrigation tank, an electricity station, and three solar-powered charging units, making it an ideal destination for recreation and leisure. The reopening of the park follows a comprehensive redevelopment aimed at strengthening green infrastructure and enhancing service and recreational facilities. This initiative is part of the ministry's 2024-2030 strategy and aligns with the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030, which seeks to expand green spaces, improve quality of life, and provide a sustainable and healthy environment for citizens and residents.

