

# GULF TIMES



0 668039 136499

SATURDAY Vol. XXXVI No. 13441

July 19, 2025  
Muhamarram 24, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Published in  
QATAR  
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QATAR | Page 12

Al Gharrafa Park,  
a destination for  
walking enthusiasts  
in summer



Amir sends cable  
of congratulations  
to UAE president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent cables of congratulations to UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan on the anniversary of the Union Pledge Day of his country. (QNA)

PM congratulates new  
Ukrainian premier

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Yulia Svyrydenko on her appointment as Prime Minister of Ukraine, wishing her success in carrying out her duties. (QNA)

Christian leaders in  
rare visit to Gaza

Two of the most senior Christian leaders in Jerusalem made a rare visit to war-torn Gaza yesterday, a day after Israeli fire killed three at the Palestinian territory's only Catholic church, provoking international condemnation. The Roman Catholic Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, and his Greek Orthodox counterpart, Theophilos III, greeted local Christians and toured the Holy Family Church in Gaza City. Both men, in full black clerical robes in the searing heat, arrived in two battered people carriers. (AFP) Page 3

Blast at LA sheriff's  
facility kills 3 deputies

An explosion at a Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department training facility yesterday killed three deputies, the sheriff said. The explosion took place at the Biscailuz Center Academy Training in East Los Angeles. Sheriff Robert Luna said at a press conference. Luna declined to disclose details but said the area where the explosion occurred had just been deemed safe for investigators to enter. The Los Angeles Times newspaper, citing unnamed law enforcement sources, reported that the blast took place when a bomb squad moved some explosives. Luna would not confirm that at the news conference. The names of the victims had not been released, but Luna said they were all veterans with a combined 74 years of experience. (Reuters) Page 7

## Hamas says Israel blocking truce, hostage release talks

AFP/Reuters  
Gaza/Cairo

**H**amas' armed wing yesterday accused Israel of blocking a deal in talks for a temporary ceasefire and the release of hostages in Gaza.

Negotiators from both sides have been in indirect talks in Qatar since July 6 to try to agree on a 60-day truce in the conflict, which would see 10 captives freed.

But after nearly two weeks, there has been no breakthrough and each side has blamed the other for refusing to budge on their key demands.

Hamas' armed wing spokesman said yesterday that while the group favours reaching an interim truce in the Gaza war, if such an agreement is not reached in current negotiations it could revert to insisting on a full package deal to end the conflict.

Hamas has repeatedly offered to release all the hostages held in Gaza and conclude a permanent ceasefire agreement, and Israel has refused, Abu Ubaida added in a televised speech.

"If the enemy remains obstinate and evades this round as it has done every time before, we cannot guarantee a return to partial deals or the proposal of the 10 captives," said Abu Ubaida.

Disputes remain over maps of Israeli army withdrawals, aid

### Qatar condemns Israeli plan to seize control of Ibrahimi Mosque

Qatar has condemned in the strongest terms the Israeli occupation plan to transfer the authority of the administration and supervision of the Ibrahimi Mosque from the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and the Municipality of Hebron to the Jewish religious council in Kiryat Arba settlement, describing it a blatant violation of international laws and legitimate international resolutions and a provocation to the feelings of Muslims around the world. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

confirmed, in a statement yesterday, Qatar's categorical rejection of attempts to alter the historical and legal status of the Ibrahimi Mosque and all holy sites in the Occupied Palestinian territories, and at the same time called on the international community to uphold its moral and legal responsibilities to protect religious sanctities in Palestine, and to compel Israeli occupation authorities to halt their criminal plans aimed at erasing the authentic identity of the Palestinian people. (QNA)

Mahmud Bassal said that Israeli fire killed nine people "near the US aid centre in the Al-Shakoush area, northwest of Rafah city in southern Gaza" yesterday.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 58,600 Palestinians, according to Gaza health authorities.

Sohail al-Hums, a medical doctor and director of the Kuwait Field Hospital in the Al-Mawasi area of Khan Yunis in the south, yesterday warned the medical facility was "witnessing an unprecedented influx of displaced persons".

Civil defence spokesman



A girl runs from the scene after Israeli strikes on a school sheltering displaced people at the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip.

WISE summit in Nov to focus on 'human values in education'

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

**T**he World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) has announced "Humanity.io: Human Values at the Heart of Education," as the theme for its upcoming summit to be held on Nov 24-25 at Qatar National Convention Centre.

WISE, the global education think tank of Qatar Foundation is holding its 12th summit this year, attracting a large number of academics, thought leaders as well as education policy makers from around the world.

WISE has noted that the theme for this year's summit focuses on a world facing transformative challenges and opportunities and



File photo: A session from the previous edition of WISE.

how education must evolve to empower people with the tools and mindsets needed to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape.

According to the announcement, WISE 12 will further the conversation on the purpose of education and its vital role in serving humanity even as it incorporates exciting new technologies and innovations. The "io"

in the theme serves as a symbolic bridge between technology and humanity, reminding that innovation in education must remain deeply human-centred.

At its core, the summit will examine how bold system-level change, anchored in human values, can ensure that education remains adaptable, accessible, and relevant. This theme places

equity, empathy, and human dignity at the core of how education is imagined in an artificial intelligence (AI) powered world.

The summit will have four major tracks with each one exploring various aspects of education in connection with the theme of this year's summit. The first track, "Putting Human Needs at the Heart of Education" examines how education balances innovation with human centred, culturally responsive approaches rooted in language and heritage.

The second track "Realising the Promise of Progressive Education" explores AI integration in K12 education, highlighting its potential to transform learning, empower educators and foster inclusive classrooms through learning innovations. [To Page 2](#)

## Amir reaffirms Qatar's solidarity with Syrians

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has reaffirmed Qatar's solidarity with the brotherly Syrian people and its support for all efforts aimed at strengthening Syria's unity, preserving its territorial integrity, and preventing any attempts to destabilise the country.

This came during a phone call held by His Highness the Amir with Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa. His Highness the Amir reiterated Qatar's firm position in condemning the Israeli attacks on Syrian territory, describing them as a flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty, international law, and the UN Charter, and as a threat to regional stability.

For his part, the Syrian president expressed his deep gratitude to His Highness the Amir and Qatar for their supportive stance toward Syria, praising the Amir's role in promoting security and stability in Syria and the wider region. (QNA)



## Qatar facilitates return of Afghan nationals deported from Germany

Qatar has announced that it facilitated the return of a second group of Afghan nationals from Germany to their country, as part of its ongoing commitment to mediating and facilitating communication between Afghanistan and the international community.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes that the second group, comprising 81 Afghan nationals, is the result of logistical co-ordination and pivotal diplomatic efforts undertaken by Qatar to bridge views by hosting a series of meetings in Doha. These efforts aimed to establish clear frameworks for safe and orderly returns, with a shared commitment to ensuring that all returnees are treated with the utmost dignity and provided with the necessary support for their re-integration.

The ministry also notes that the facilitation of the return of this group represents further confirmation of the success and sustainability of this initiative, following the repatriation of 28 Afghan nationals in the first group last year.

In this context, HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi, affirmed that to ensure the sustainability of this initiative, a specialised follow-up mechanism will continue after the repatriation process is completed. This mechanism aims to monitor the conditions of returnees, support reintegration efforts, and maintain open channels of co-ordination between all concerned parties.

HE Dr al-Khulaifi reiterated Qatar's commitment to effectively contributing to addressing the humanitarian issues related to the situation in Afghanistan through constructive co-operation with international partners, within the framework of its broader diplomatic approach, which is based on dialogue and co-ordination as a means of providing practical solutions to complex global challenges.

He also expressed his country's appreciation to the Afghan caretaker government and Germany for their confidence in Qatar's mediation and the speed with which it responded to the requirements for the success of this process. (QNA)

## UNHCR warns 11.6mn refugees at risk due to funding cuts

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

warned yesterday that about 11.6mn refugees are at risk of losing access to humanitarian aid due to significant reductions in foreign assistance from donor countries.

Director of External Relations at UNHCR Dominique Hyde said in a press briefing that this figure represents nearly one-third of the refugees they support and the funding situation is critical, and they fear that up to 11.6mn refugees and forcibly displaced persons may lose access to the humanitarian assistance they provide. Hyde explained that UNHCR has only been able to meet 23% of its \$10.6bn funding requirements since the beginning of this year. The crisis stems from major cuts in foreign aid from donor countries such as Sweden, France, and Japan, as well as substantial reductions in US assistance. UNHCR noted that it has been forced to halt or suspend aid programmes worth about \$1.4bn, including a 60% reduction in emergency relief supplies in several countries such as Sudan, Chad, and Afghanistan. Vital services now facing suspension include medical aid, education, shelter, nutrition, and protection programmes. (QNA)



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# Qatar calls for protecting Palestinian heritage

**QNA**  
Paris

**Q**atar, in its capacity as Vice-Chair of the Unesco World Heritage Committee and representative of the Arab Group, called on the international community to assume its moral and legal responsibilities to protect cultural heritage sites in the occupied Palestinian territories.

This call came at the conclusion of the World Heritage Committee's session, held at Unesco headquarters in Paris, emphasizing that the preservation of humanity's heritage is a collective responsibility that cannot tolerate complacency or neglect, especially in light of the growing threats facing this legacy in conflict areas.

In his remarks at the closing session, HE Qatar's Perma-

ment Representative to Unesco Dr Nasser bin Hamad al-Henzab said that this session has once again reaffirmed the importance of joint action and the need to strengthen international co-operation to protect World Heritage sites from the multiple threats they face, whether stemming from climate change, conflicts, or natural or human-induced deterioration.

He stressed that Qatar firmly believes that protecting humanity's heritage is a shared responsibility that requires effective partnerships and a comprehensive approach combining expertise, knowledge, and political will.

Dr al-Henzab pointed out that in the face of escalating conflicts around the world, global cultural heritage now faces unprecedented danger, with humanity's memory, which is rich in symbols and identity, becoming vulnerable to



HE Dr Nasser bin Hamad al-Henzab

destruction, looting, or marginalisation.

He added that this world heritage is a common legacy of all humanity, representing its story,

ers people's connection to their past, and undermines opportunities for reconciliation and recovery after conflict.

He affirmed that Qatar views the targeting of cultural heritage sites in Palestine, whether in Ramallah or Gaza, as a continued and blatant violation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention. He specifically highlighted the ongoing threats to the Ibrahim Mosque (Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi) due to Israeli occupation practices, including attempts to alter and seize it, calling on the international community and the World Heritage Centre to take immediate action to protect this historic site in accordance with relevant World Heritage Committee resolutions.

Dr al-Henzab explained that Qatar's position stems from a deep conviction of the need to preserve heritage as a fundamental pillar

of identity and cultural diversity, noting that Qatar has long paid great attention to protecting its own cultural and natural heritage and remains fully committed to the standards and principles of the 1972 Unesco World Heritage Convention.

He confirmed Qatar's keenness to support international efforts to preserve listed sites through unique initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the importance of heritage as a key component of sustainable development.

In conclusion, he renewed Qatar's unwavering commitment to the principles of the World Heritage Convention and expressed his aspiration for continued constructive co-operation with all international partners to safeguard this shared heritage and ensure its preservation and enhancement for future generations.

## QFFD stresses support for inclusive, sustainable growth

**QNA**  
Doha

**Q**atar Fund for Development (QFFD) reaffirmed its commitment to advancing inclusive, sustainable development through active engagement at the 2025 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), held at the UN headquarters in New York.

Led by QFFD Director-General Fahad bin Hamad al-Sulaiti, the Fund's participation emphasised the importance of addressing the needs of vulnerable communities by unlocking innovative financing, strengthening local systems, and delivering lasting impact in fragile and underserved contexts.

As the central platform for reviewing progress on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the HLPF convened global leaders, development institutions, and civil society organisations in a collective effort to accelerate sustainable development. During the

Townhall meeting titled "Unlocking Means of Implementation: Mobilising Financing and STI for the SDGs", al-Sulaiti emphasised the vital need to expand access to innovative and inclusive financing mechanisms, while underscoring the importance of investing in local capacity-building as a cornerstone for achieving the SDGs and fostering long-term resilience.

As part of its continued efforts to promote people-centred development, QFFD co-organised the side event "On the Road to Doha: From HLPF 2025 to the Second World Summit for Social Development", which underscored the pivotal role of social development in achieving sustainable outcomes. The session was opened by QFFD Director-General Fahad bin Hamad al-Sulaiti, alongside high-level leaders from the UN, member states, and key development institutions.

The discussion helped shape a collaborative and forward-looking agenda for the upcoming Second World Summit for Social Develop-

ment, to be hosted by Qatar.

In addition, QFFD actively participated in a range of side events spanning critical sectors and thematic areas, including youth employment, economic development, climate action, and innovative financing, demonstrating its role as a catalyst for cross-sectoral solutions and a contributor to global dialogue aimed at accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda.

On the sidelines of the forum, the QFFD director-general held meetings with several officials and senior figures, including Executive Secretary of ESCWA Rola Dashti, Director-General of IOM Amy Pope, Minister of Social Security of Finland Samni Grahn-Laasonen, and UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries Rabia Fatima. These meetings focused on enhancing co-operation and supporting development across various fields such as energy, economic empowerment, migration resilience, social welfare, and assisting the least developed countries.

## Qatar attends Arab traffic conference in Tunisia

Qatar, represented by the General Directorate of Traffic at the Ministry of Interior, participated in the 21st Arab Conference of Heads of Traffic Services, which was held at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers in Tunisia. The delegation of Qatar at the conference was headed by Director General of Traffic Colonel Jabor Ali al-Kubaisi. The conference discussed a number of topics on its agenda and made appropriate recommendations on them. (QNA)



## WISE summit in Nov to focus on 'human values in education'

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Furthermore, the third track "Navigating the Skills Revolution in Higher Education and Lifelong Learning" focuses on innovative strategies in higher education and lifelong learning, emphasising adaptability, equity, access and inclusion in workforce development amid automation and AI.

Meanwhile, the fourth track, "Catalysing Multi-Sectoral Systems Change to Transform Edu-

cation" highlights innovative EdTech and grassroots initiatives, leveraging AI, Virtual Reality (VR) and scalable solutions to transform education and bridge the digital divide.

WISE was established in 2009 by Qatar Foundation, under the leadership of its Chairperson, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. It is a dynamic platform that promotes innovation in education through a diverse portfolio of initiatives in policy engage-

ment, research, leadership, and practitioner programmes.

WISE has evolved into a thriving global, multi-sectoral community, which continues to generate fruitful dialogue and productive partnerships. The WISE community is a network of education stakeholders - from students to decision-makers - from about 200 countries who share ideas and collaborate to seek creative solutions to solve challenges facing education.

## Action over use of banned fishing tools near Halul Island

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Marine Protection Department has detected a number of environmental violations near Halul Island, involving the use and transportation of banned fishing tools, including multi-headed hooks and certain types of long fishing lines. The ministry said the necessary legal measures have been taken against the violators in accordance with applicable regulations and laws. It stressed that it will not hesitate to impose strict penalties on the offenders to help maintain the desired biodiversity within the local marine environment. Further, the ministry reaffirmed its commitment to protecting the marine environment and biodiversity, by intensifying monitoring and inspection campaigns and addressing any practices that harm the marine environment and its natural resources.



An array of family-friendly activities at Ice Cream Galleria. PICTURE: Joey Aguilar

## Ice cream-themed events in Qatar offer sweet summer escape

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

**I**ce cream-themed events, both indoor and outdoor, prove to be immense crowd-pullers, offering residents and tourists a refreshing and enjoyable escape during the summer.

The Scoop by the Sea 2025 at West Bay North Beach has witnessed a significant surge in guest numbers since its opening on June 18, it is learnt.

Expected to continue drawing crowds until August 13, the event is described as the "ultimate sundae of summer fun" packed with an exciting array of offerings. Attendees can enjoy live entertainment, concerts, thrilling competitions, and acrobatic air shows, promising non-stop excitement.

Intending to simply enjoy the beach, one of the guests shared his own experience with *Gulf Times*, stressing that he found it overwhelmingly crowded that he could barely sit.

He told that while weekends are undeniably packed, the venue still sees high attendance almost daily, expressing confidence that the diverse and attractive offerings will continue to draw even more guests in the coming days.

According to Visit Qatar, West



Arts and crafts at Ice Cream Galleria. PICTURE: Joey Aguilar

Bay North Beach provides an unparalleled blend of sports, music, learning, and non-stop family fun. The event ensures "something for everyone", from epic sandcastle battles and captivating kitesurfing shows to competitive volleyball tournaments and a delectable array of food trucks.

The extensive programme at The Scoop by the Sea includes:

The Water Fest, featuring kite-surfing and wing foil shows, alongside a colourful stand-up paddleboard costume fest show; unique activities such as a lively Family Foam Party and an immersive Virtual Reality (F1 car experience, allowing participants to step into a realistic F1 cockpit simulator with cutting-

edge VR technology); Eco Sport Competition, an innovative race on specially designed stationary bikes that convert kinetic energy into usable power; and The Air Show, delivering thrilling smoke and event flag demonstrations across the skies.

Meanwhile, providing a delightful indoor alternative, the Ice Cream Galleria opened its doors on Thursday, July 17, at Msheireb Galleries. This indoor activation offers visitors a wide range of wholesome and educational activities, interactive games, and other engaging, family-friendly experiences, including creative arts and crafts workshops. Scheduled to conclude on July 26, the Ice Cream Galleria, running daily from 4pm-11pm, continues to gather families and children due to its unique offerings and one-of-a-kind appeal. It features the "Galleria Ice Cream event", a vibrant celebration of frozen delights, alongside the "Arcade Hangout", a nostalgic gaming zone.

It is learnt that both The Scoop by the Sea and the Ice Cream Galleria have not only captivated local audiences but also successfully attracted a significant number of visitors from neighbouring GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain.



Screengrab from an event. Right: Non-stop family fun at Scoop by the Sea 2025 at West Bay North Beach.

## Libyan ICC war crimes suspect arrested in Germany

Reuters  
The Hague

German authorities have arrested a Libyan war crimes suspect accused of being a senior official for a notorious prison where inmates were routinely tortured and sometimes physically abused, the International Criminal Court said yesterday.

Khaled Mohamed Ali al-Hishri was arrested on Wednesday, German authorities said. The ICC said he would remain in German custody, pending the completion of national proceedings.

Prosecutors at the ICC accuse al-Hishri of war crimes and crimes against humanity including murder, torture and abuse from February 2015 un-

til early 2020, a period during which he was allegedly one of the most senior officials in the Mitiga prison.

According to the prosecution, Mitiga prison was the largest detention facility in western Libya, where thousands of detainees were held in cramped cells without basic hygiene and were systematically subjected to brutal interrogations and torture.

Men and women held there also faced physical violence including abuse, the prosecution said. It is a critical time for the ICC. Its prosecutor and four judges are facing US sanctions in retaliation for an arrest warrant it issued for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza conflict. A number of

European ICC member states, including Germany, have also been critical of the warrant for Netanyahu.

In January, Italy arrested another Libyan ICC suspect, Osama Elmasry Njeem, but released him back to Tripoli saying the arrest warrant contained mistakes and inaccuracies. Njeem was also accused of crimes committed against detainees in Mitiga prison. His release sparked outrage among Italian opposition parties and triggered a legal investigation into Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and several other government members.

The court has been investigating allegations of serious crimes committed in Libya since the country's 2011 civil war, following a referral by the UN Security Council.

## Gaza toddler dies of severe malnutrition

QNA  
Gaza

Medical sources in the Gaza Strip confirmed yesterday that a one-and-a-half-year-old girl has died due to severe malnutrition in Deir Al Balah, central Gaza.

According to the Palestinian News Agency (WAFA), hospitals in Gaza are currently treating hundreds of individuals suffering from acute hunger and malnutrition, many of whom are exhibiting severe symptoms of famine.

The sources indicated that around 17,000 children are suffering from severe malnutrition. Hospitals are also dealing with patients experiencing exhaustion and memory loss caused by extreme hunger. The medical facilities lack sufficient beds and medications to accommodate the overwhelming number of malnutrition cases.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) had previously warned that malnutrition among children under the age of five has doubled between March and June, due to the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip.

UNRWA confirmed that its health centres and medical points conducted nearly 74,000 screenings for children during this period, identifying approximately 5,500 cases of severe acute malnutrition and more than 800 cases of critical acute malnutrition. The Gaza Strip continues to face a worsening humanitarian catastrophe, with near-total destruction of infrastructure, and a complete blockade imposed by the Israeli occupation.

## Top clerics visit Gaza after deadly church strike

AFP  
Gaza City

Two of the most senior Christian leaders in Jerusalem made a rare visit to war-torn Gaza yesterday, a day after Israeli fire killed three at the Palestinian territory's only Catholic church, provoking international condemnation.

The Roman Catholic Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, and his Greek Orthodox counterpart, Theophilos III, greeted local Christians and toured the Holy Family Church in Gaza City.

Both men, in full black clerical robes in the searing heat, arrived in two battered people carriers, one with the yellow, white and cross-keys flag of the Vatican fluttering from the front window, before heading inside.

The Patriarchs met with families who have sought shelter there. They offered condolences,

## Israeli settlers accused of killing 117 sheep in West Bank attack

Reuters  
Jordan Valley, West Bank

Palestinian Bedouins accused Israeli settlers yesterday of killing 117 sheep in an overnight attack and stealing hundreds of others in an apparent effort to chase farmers off their land in the occupied West Bank.

The incident comes amid what the United Nations described this week as intensifying attacks by Jewish settlers and security forces against Palestinians in the West Bank and record mass displacements.

The Israeli army did not respond to a request for comment about the mass slaughter of the animals belonging to the Arab al-Kaabaneh Bedouin community, in the Jordan Valley.

Veterinarians were called in to treat a handful of sheep which had survived the knife and gun attack, some of the animals shaking uncontrollably and in apparent shock.

Salem Salman Mujahed, a resident of Arab al-Kaabaneh, said multiple groups of settlers working in co-ordination had orchestrated the assault, and accused the army of standing by.

"Settlers" came near the houses. I asked them what are you doing here then we started fighting with each other, he said. "The army detained me, and they handcuffed me."

He said other groups of settlers then attacked the sheep, which are vital to his community's survival.



Palestinians check wounded sheep after settlers attacked a Bedouin community in the Jordan valley, in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.



Palestinians load a truck to move out of a Bedouin community in the Jordan valley, in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

Reuters was unable to independently verify who was responsible for the attack.

Palestinian Minister Moayad Shaaban condemned the incident, calling it part of a broader strategy to displace Palestinians from the region.

"These sheep and animals were slaughtered and shot at," he told Reuters. "They are using these tools to terrify these people to leave these areas, which have been inhabited for dozens of years."

### MOVING AWAY

The attack prompted at least one family to begin relocating.

Bedouin Tareq Kaabaneh said he could no longer withstand

what he called settler intimidation.

"They were armed, they steal

donkeys and sheep. In the night they come here and start shooting toward us," Kaabaneh said.

"I am moving now from here, I want to protect my kids and my sheep, my livelihood... yesterday I was safe, but I don't know what will happen to me tomorrow," he added.

The United Nations reported this week that mass displacements in the West Bank had reached levels unprecedented since Israel first took military control of the territory nearly six decades ago.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva also said there had been 757 settler attacks on Palestinians or their properties since January - a 13% increase from the same period last year. At least 964 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces and settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since the start of the war in Gaza in October 2023.

The US ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee demanded this week a full investigation into the killing of a Palestinian American who was beaten to death by settlers in the West Bank on July 11, describing it as a "criminal and terrorist act".

The United Nations' highest court said last year that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, including the West Bank, was illegal and should end as soon as possible.

Israel disputes this, citing security needs as well as historical and religious ties to the land, which it captured in the 1967 Middle East war. The West Bank is among the territories Palestinians seek for an independent state.

## Medics appeal for aid at last working hospital in Sweida

Medics appeal for aid at last working hospital in Sweida

AFP  
Sweida

In the last barely-functional hospital in Sweida, bodies are overflowing from the morgue, staff said, amid violence that has wracked the Druze-majority southern Syrian city for nearly a week.

"It's not a hospital anymore, it's a mass grave," said Rouba, a member of the medical staff at the city's sole government hospital, weeping as she appealed for aid.

Dr Omar Obeid, who heads the Sweida division at Syria's Order of Physicians, said the facility has received "more than 400 bodies since Monday morning", including women, children and the elderly.

"There's no more space in the

morgue, the bodies are out on the street" in front of the hospital, he said.

Fighting erupted Sunday night between Druze fighters and local tribes before Syrian government forces intervened on Tuesday with the stated intention of quelling the violence. But in the subsequent events, those government forces were accused of grave abuses against the minority, according to rights organisations, witnesses and Druze groups.

The government forces withdrew from the city on Thursday following threats from Israel, which has vowed to protect the Druze. In the hospital yesterday, corridors were engulfed by the stench of the dead bodies, which had bloated beyond recognition, an AFP correspondent said.

## Bandits kill six, abduct more than 100 in Nigeria's Zamfara state

Reuters  
Maiduguri

Unmen killed at least six people and abducted more than 100 others, including women and children, in

an attack on Kairu community in Nigeria's northwest Zamfara state, a local lawmaker and residents said yesterday.

Zamfara is the epicentre of attacks by gangs of heavily armed men, known locally as bandits, that have wreaked havoc across Nigeria's northwest in recent years,

conveyed pastoral encouragement, and personally observed the damage sustained by the church during the recent strike," the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem said.

arity" to the displaced, in a visit the Greek Orthodox Jerusalem Patriarchate called a "powerful expression" of church unity.

Israel strictly controls access to Gaza, where the civil defence agency yesterday reported that further Israeli strikes killed more than 30 people, including nine

kidnapping thousands, killing hundreds and making it unsafe to travel by road or on farms in some areas.

The bandits stormed Kairu around 1040 GMT yesterday, firing indiscriminately, Abubakar Isa, a resident whose wife was abducted, told Reuters by phone.

Hamisu Faru, a local lawmaker, confirmed the attack to Reuters, saying the assailants took "no fewer than 100 people, including women and children".

"As I'm speaking to you right now, they are searching house-to-house, abducting people," Faru said by phone.

Another resident, Mohammed Usman, said the attackers laid siege to the town for nearly two hours before taking their captives. Thousands of residents have now fled the village, he said.

Zamfara police didn't immediately respond to requests for comments.



# 1bn Africans being harmed by cooking pollution: agency

AFP  
Paris

One billion Africans have to cook on open fires or with fuel that is hazardous to their health and the environment, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said yesterday.

The problem, which its report says can be easily solved, causes as much greenhouse gas emissions every year as the aviation industry.

Two billion people across the world still cook on open fires or with rudimentary stoves fed by wood, charcoal, agricultural waste or manure, the IEA report found.

"It is one of the greatest injustices of our time, especially in Africa," IEA head Fatih Birol said, where four out of five households rely on open fires and burning wood.

These fuels pollute the air both indoors and outdoors with fine particles that penetrate the lungs and cause multiple respiratory and cardiovascular problems, the report said.

It also adds to the destruction of forests, natural sinks that

trap carbon and help fight global warming.

The IEA estimates that 815,000 premature deaths occur each year in Africa alone due to poor indoor air quality, largely resulting from a lack of access to clean cooking methods.

Women and children suffer the most, spending hours each day searching for fuel and keeping the fire going.

This takes time away from paid employment or education, the report said.

A landmark IEA summit on the issue, held in Paris in May last year raised \$2.2bn in public and private sector commitments, as well as political pledges from 12 African governments.

Since then \$470mn has been distributed, with concrete results already being seen, Birol insisted, citing a stove factory under construction in Malawi and an affordable stove programme developed in Uganda and Ivory Coast.

The IEA report assesses the progress made a year after the summit and sets out a roadmap for African countries to be able to use clean cooking methods at low cost

before 2040. Since 2010, nearly 1.5bn people in Asia and Latin America, particularly in Brazil, India, and Indonesia, have got access to modern cooking stoves and fuels.

But the challenge remains immense in sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of people without access to clean cooking methods continues to grow.

"For once and for ever this problem can be solved with an annual investment of \$2bn per year," Birol said.

He stressed that the figure "is about 0.1% of global energy investment, which is nothing".

Alternative solutions are well known: electricity from solar panels, renewable gas and especially liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), a fossil fuel, which, while not ideal, is preferable than the loss of carbon sinks due to tree felling, Birol said. The IEA said this would prevent 4.7mn premature deaths in sub-Saharan Africa by 2040 and reduce the continent's greenhouse gas emissions by 540mn tons per year, as much as the equivalent of the annual emissions of the global aviation sector.

## Mandela Day celebrations



People react in front of a Mandela mural painted by Stefan Smit as part of Mandela Day celebrations, which marks the birthday of anti-apartheid icon and South Africa's first democratic president, Nelson Mandela in Cape Town, yesterday.

# Indian killed, one abducted in Niger attack: embassy

AFP  
Niamey

An Indian national was killed and another abducted in what India's embassy termed a "terrorist" attack in southwestern Niger, while a third is listed as missing, it said in a statement.

Local sources said unidentified armed attackers ambushed a Nigerien army unit providing security at a construction site for an electrical line in the Dosso region, around 100 kilometres from the capital Niamey. Urging Indian nationals in Niger to be "vigilant", India's embassy in Niamey said it was in contact with the employer and families of the victims as well as the Nigerian government to facilitate repatriation of the dead man's remains.

It said it was also working to secure the release of

the person abducted in the attack, which took place Tuesday near the Nigerian border. Local sources and social media posts suggested at least one Nigerien soldier was killed in the attack, which authorities had not yet commented yesterday.

Niger, under military rule following a 2023 coup, has faced around a decade of violence perpetrated by militants affiliated to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group. The Dosso region borders both Nigeria and Benin, where attacks regularly target civilians, the army and also a giant oil pipeline transporting crude from Niger to Benin. The authorities generally blame such attacks on "terrorists" or "bandits".

Dosso borders the western town of Tillaberi near the borders with Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, which has become a stronghold for militant groups. According to official Indian sources, five Indian technicians were kidnapped in an April 25 attack just north of the nearby town of Sakoira.

## Guinea reports more than 200 mpox cases since first detection

AFP  
Conakry

The number of mpox cases in Guinea since an outbreak was first detected has passed 200, health officials said yesterday, with several nearby countries witnessing recent increases in infections.

Last month World Health Organisation director Tedros Adh-

anom Ghebreyesus said the virus remains an international health emergency amid the rise in west Africa. Guinea has now recorded 206 total cases, spokesman Sory Keira of the National Agency for Health Security (ANSS) said.

The outbreak, which began last September, includes one death and 77 hospitalisations.

Mpox is caused by a virus from the same family as smallpox. It can be transmitted to humans by

infected animals but can also be passed between people through close physical contact.

The disease, which was first detected in humans in 1970 in the DR Congo, causes fever, muscular aches and large boil-like skin lesions, and can be deadly. It has two subtypes: clade 1 and clade 2. Long endemic in central Africa, the virus gained international prominence in May 2022 when clade 2 spread around the world.

# Kenya govt compensates election assault victims

AFP  
Nairobi

Kenya has paid compensation to four women victims of assault that erupted after the 2007 elections, in the first payment of its kind in the country, rights groups said yesterday.

Rights groups found at least 900 people had suffered assaults, including gang abuse and castration, during the wave of post-election violence that swept across the country more than a decade ago.

In 2020, a High Court ordered the government to pay compensation to four women, with rights groups confirming yesterday that in a "historic" move officials had released funds amounting to roughly \$31,000 to each victim.

"This signals a shift where state responsibility has been acknowl-

edged," said Demas Kiprono, Deputy Executive Director at the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Kenya, one of the groups involved.

"It gives hope to other victims of violations during conflict, or even during any other time, that they have human dignity and the government has a responsibility," he told AFP.

"This is really a break from the past, towards reparation, towards restoration," he added.

The victims - who all requested anonymity - expressed gratitude for the decision, despite the long wait.

"I thought I would die without seeing this money and justice being served," said one, communicating through her lawyer.

Another said simply: "I have no words to express my joy."

The ruling marks a "significant step forward", said the coalition,

which includes the ICJ, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, and Physicians for Human Rights.

But, in a statement, it said that more work remains to be done, notably in regards to the hundreds of others assaulted during the violence. In the 2020 ruling, the court dismissed the cases of another four people - two women and two men - as they had been "assaulted by non-state actors". The case is currently under appeal.

Following the 2007 violence, the International Criminal Court indicted the then-President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto for crimes against humanity, but both cases collapsed when witnesses failed to testify.

Assault continues to be endemic in Kenya, with women marching last year against femicide in the country. Police fired tear gas at the protesters.

Last month World Health Organisation director Tedros Adh-

# Ivory Coast farmers hope tech tempts jaded youth back to fields

AFP  
Abidjan

Stopwatch in hand, dozens of Ivory Coast students raced against the clock to design robots for the farms of the future in the world's top cocoa-producing nation.

With each team facing off to draw up the best bot blueprint, the competition is part of a broader push to tempt the west African nation's large population of young people, disillusioned with farming life, back to the plough.

Though farming has long been the pillar of Ivory Coast's economy, many young Ivorians have turned their backs on fruit-picking and tree-felling, discouraged by the hard labour and the slow pace of progress.

"I come from a family of farmers," 20-year-old student Pele Ouattara told AFP at the event in Abidjan, Ivory Coast's largest city.

"My passion for robotics grew out of my desire to improve the conditions in which my parents used to farm," he added.

On a rival team several metres away, fellow student Urielle Di-aidi, 24, feared that Ivorian farmers "risks dying out with time if modern technologies aren't adopted".

Dominated by the cultivation of cocoa, rubber and cashew nuts, nearly half of Ivorians with jobs work in agriculture in one way or another.

Yet the country's farms have

been slow to modernise. Less than 30% of farms are mechanised, according to the National Centre for Agricultural Research.

And although three-quarters of Ivorians are under the age of 35, the sector is struggling to refresh an ageing workforce.

Surrounded by a flurry of tiny white robots on their circuit rounds, digital transformation engineer Paul-Marie Ouattara said he has seen "a real enthusiasm from young people" for bringing agriculture into the 21st century.

This "agriculture 4.0" that the competition wishes to promote is "improved, enhanced through new technologies, whether they be robots, drones, artificial intelligence, or data processing", the 27-year-old said.

All these "will help the farmer", insisted Ouattara, who works for a private business which sponsored the contest.

Young people have not wholly given up on farming, however - just on the old way of tilling the land.

At the Ivorian digital transition ministry, Stephane Kounandi Coulibaly, director of innovation and private sector partnerships, said he had seen a boom in agricultural start-ups.

Most of them were founded by young people, he added.

The "agritech" trend mirrors that already in motion across the continent, including in Benin, Nigeria and Kenya, with Abidjan hosting a forum for African start-ups at the beginning of July.



A technician prepares a drone that will spray fungicides on passion fruit fields near Djekanou.

Ivory Coast's world-leading cocoa growers, who produce 40% of the global supply, are also climbing aboard.

"We have noticed the appearance of new technologies since four or five years ago," said Thi-beat Yoro, secretary-general of the national union of cocoa producers.

Yoro hailed how those shiny new gadgets helped lighten a "strenuous" job still riddled with "archaic practices".

"We dig, we hack through the bush, we harvest with machetes," he said, with planters suffering from "back aches and fatigue" as a result.

"These are things which could be changed with new technology," the trade union leader argued.

Who can afford those mod cons is another question altogether.

A pesticide-spraying drone with a capacity of 20 litres (five

US gallons) can cost nine mn CFA francs, or around \$16,000.

That is nine times what the average farmer, owning one hectare (two-and-a-half acres) of cocoa trees, would make in six months.

### 10 MINUTES VS TWO DAYS

To reduce those costs, out of the reach of most farmers, a number of Ivorian enterprises offering equipment and technology for hire have sprung up.

In the verdant countryside outside of Tiassale, around 125 kilometres outside of Abidjan, Faustine Zongo has called in a contractor to spray his field of passion fruit plants with pesticides.

Thanks to the drone, the job took 10 minutes per hectare to complete, for the cost of around \$27.

Using traditional methods, "it would take two days for each hectare," the farmer said.

By his side, Nozene Ble Binate,



A drone sprays fungicides in the passion fruit fields near Djekanou.



A technician pilots a drone to spray fungicides on passion fruit fields near Djekanou.

project manager for Investiv - the company Zongo hired - said that using up-to-date technology made farming "more attractive".

"More and more young people are returning to the land and reaching out to us," the 42-year-old said.

Back in Abidjan, Jool has made a business of offering ranchers software-powered analysis of their crops, with prices starting under \$100.

The start-up's 32-year-old founder, Joseph-Olivier Biley - the son of farmers himself - boasted of his tool's ability to "know what to plant, where and

how" and to "detect diseases before they strike".

With it, farmers could expect yields "optimised by more than 40%", Biley told AFP at Jool's offices, on the outskirts of the Ivorian economic capital.

At the digital transformation ministry, Coulibaly, the innovation chief, said the west African country plans to build a centre for manufacturing state-of-the-art inventions and training farmers in their use. That would mean Ivorian businesses would no longer have to import their technology from abroad, often from China, he added.

**'Camera's eye' view of the world**

A plane carrying children of Venezuelan migrants deported from the United States arrives at Simon Bolívar International Airport, in Maiquetía, Venezuela, yesterday.



People watch as an actor performs during a street theatre festival in Saint Petersburg, Russia, yesterday.



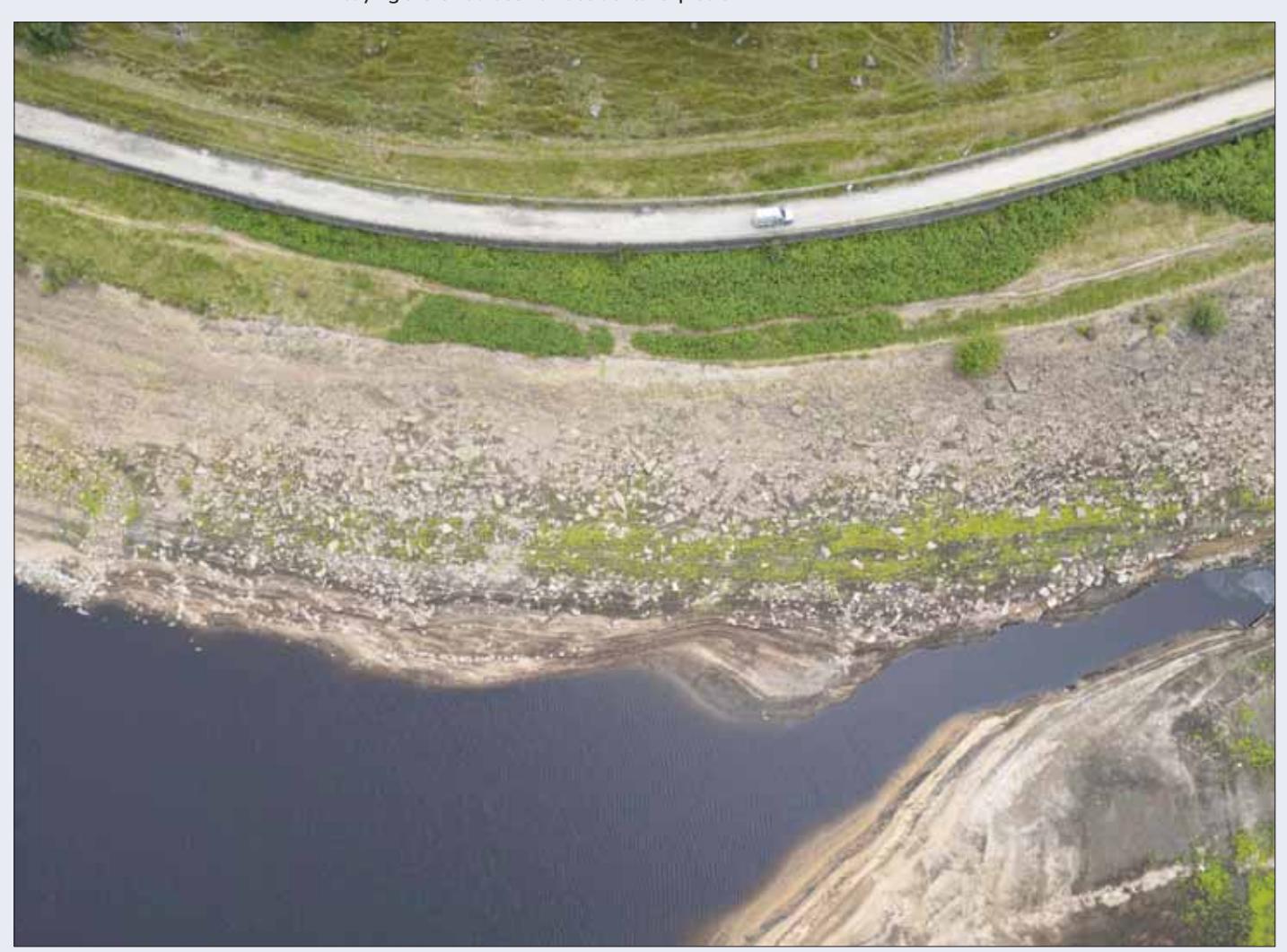
Firefighters work to extinguish a fire as smoke billows in the Broceliande forest, in Trehorenteuc, western France. A major fire broke out on Thursday afternoon in the Broceliande forest, west of Rennes, where around a hundred hectares of vegetation had burned by late afternoon, according to the Morbihan prefecture.



A US Department of Justice Explosive and Fire Investigations is seen following an explosion at the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department's Biscailuz Training Center in East Los Angeles, yesterday. Three people died in an "incident" at a police training facility in Los Angeles, the US government said, with media reports saying there had been an accidental explosion.



An aerial view shows smoke rising from a wildfire in Navalucenga, Ávila, Spain, yesterday, in this screen grab obtained from a social media video.



An aerial photo shows the banks of Butterley Reservoir which are partially revealed by a falling water level, near Oldham, northern England, yesterday. Extremes in temperature and rainfall in the UK are becoming increasingly frequent, the nation's meteorological service said this week in a report on Britain's changing climate. Records were now being broken "very frequently", said Mike Kendon, Met Office climate scientist and lead author of the Met Office's State of the UK Climate report.



Egrets rest on tree-tops in China's eastern Jiangsu province.



Participants attend a training course at the Pidpillya intensive training camp in the Kyiv region, amid the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Pidpillya is a camp, six-day intensive training for physical, psychological and mental hardening for active youth aged 16-24, where they learn to survive in the field and be civically active.



## US Congress approves \$9bn in cuts to foreign aid, public media

US Republicans have approved President Donald Trump's plan to cancel \$9bn in funding for foreign aid and public broadcasting, vowing that it was just the start of broader efforts by Congress to slash the federal budget.

The cuts achieve only a tiny fraction of the \$1tn in annual savings that tech billionaire and estranged Trump donor Elon Musk vowed to find before his acrimonious exit in May from a role spearheading federal cost-cutting.

However, Republicans – who recently passed a domestic policy bill expected to add more than \$3tn to US debt – said that the vote honoured Trump's election campaign pledge to rein in runaway spending.

"President Trump and House Republicans promised fiscal responsibility and government efficiency," House Speaker Mike Johnson said in a statement just after the vote. "Today, we're once again delivering on that promise."

Both chambers of Congress are Republican-controlled, meaning a mostly party-line House of Representatives vote of 216 to 213, moments after midnight, was sufficient to approve the Senate-passed measure.

Two House Republicans voted against the cut, Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick from Pennsylvania and Mike Turner from Ohio, along with Democrats.

"We are taking one small step to cut wasteful spending, but one giant leap towards fiscal sanity," said Representative Aaron Bean, a Florida Republican, advocating for a similar spending cut package from the White House every month.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries countered that the funding cut "undermines our ability to keep our people safe here and to project America's soft power all over the globe", and argued rural Americans' access to emergency information on public radio will be diminished.

The bill now heads to the White House

to be signed by Trump, who praised his backers in the House.

"REPUBLICANS HAVE TRIED DOING THIS FOR 40 YEARS, AND FAILED... BUT NO MORE. THIS IS BIG!!!" he wrote on Truth Social.

Most of the cuts target programmes for countries hit by disease, war and natural disasters.

However, the move also scraps \$1.1bn that the Corporation for Public Broadcast was due to receive over the next two years.

Conservatives say that the funding – which goes mostly to more than 1,500 local public radio and TV stations, as well as to public broadcasters NPR and PBS – is unnecessary and has funded biased coverage.

The bill originally included \$400mn in cuts to a global AIDS programme that is credited with saving 26mn lives, but that funding was saved by a rebellion by moderate Republicans.

The vote was a win for Trump and fiscal

hawks seeking to support the mission of the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), launched by Musk as Trump was swept to power, for radical savings.

Congress had already approved the cash that was clawed back, and Democrats framed the bill as a betrayal of the bipartisan government funding process.

They fear Trump's victory clears the way for more "rescissions packages" cancelling agreed spending.

"Instead of protecting the health, safety and well-being of the American people, House Republicans have once again rubberstamped Donald Trump's extreme, reckless rescissions legislation," Jeffries said in a joint statement with fellow top Democrats.

Republicans need some Democratic votes to keep the government funded past September, and the minority party had threatened to abandon any plans for cooperation if the DOGE cuts went ahead.

Yesterday Jeffries and fellow Democrats seemed to suggest as much.

"Tonight's vote... makes it clear that House Republicans are determined to march this country toward a painful government shutdown later this year," they said in the statement.

Although they are in the minority, Democrats have leverage in funding fights because a budget deal would need at least 60 votes in the 100-member Senate and Republicans only have 53 seats.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer called it "a dark day for any American who relies on public broadcasting during floods, hurricanes, tornados, and other disasters".

White House budget chief Russell Vought told an event hosted on Thursday by the Christian Science Monitor that the administration was likely to send another rescissions package to Congress.

– AFP/Reuters

## Trump threatens to sue WSJ, Murdoch over Epstein report

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

US President Donald Trump has threatened to sue the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) and owner Rupert Murdoch over a story about an alleged off-colour letter he wrote to Jeffrey Epstein, amid lingering political fallout over his administration's handling of the late financier's sex trafficking case.

The article in the WSJ says that the letter featuring a sketch of a woman in a state of undress and Trump's signature was part of a collection of notes for Epstein's 50th birthday in 2003.

The newspaper says it reviewed the letter but did not print an image.

"I told Rupert Murdoch it was a Scam, that he shouldn't print this Fake Story," Trump wrote on his Truth Social network. "But he did, and now I'm going to sue his ass off, and that of his third rate newspaper."

In an earlier post, Trump said *Wall Street Journal* editor-in-chief Emma Tucker "was told directly by (White House press secretary) Karoline Leavitt, and by President Trump, that the letter was a FAKE!"

The Republican president called the story "false, malicious, and defamatory".

"President Trump will be suing the *Wall Street Journal*, NewsCorp, and Mr (Rupert) Murdoch, shortly. The Press has to learn to be truthful, and not rely on sources that probably don't even exist," the post added.

Trump was already facing a firestorm over his past relationship with Epstein, and claims that his administration is covering up lurid details of Epstein's crimes to protect rich and powerful figures.

Epstein died by suicide in a New York prison in 2019 – during Trump's first term – after being charged with federal sex trafficking in a scheme where he allegedly groomed young and underage women for sexual abuse by his wealthy contacts.

He was previously required to register as a sex offender in Florida after pleading guilty to two felony prostitution-related charges.

On Thursday, Trump told Attorney-General Pam Bondi to release transcripts of grand jury testimony in the Epstein case, "subject to court approval".

Bondi had pledged months earlier to reveal major revelations about Epstein, including "a lot of names" and "a lot of flight logs".

Murdoch, who controls the NewsCorp global media company, was in Trump's suite on Sunday at MetLife Stadium outside New York City for the FIFA Club World Cup final.

The media mogul also owns conservative Americans' preferred TV news channel, Fox News, which scored the first TV interview with Trump upon his return to the White House in January.

The president has regularly praised Fox and its presenters over the years – and even hired some to his administration.

The Trump-supporting far-right has long latched



Trump called the *Wall Street Journal* story 'false, malicious, and defamatory'.

onto the Epstein scandal, claiming the existence of a still-secret client list and that he was murdered in his cell as part of a cover-up.

Trump supporters expected the Republican to answer their questions on his return to office in January but now find themselves being told the conspiracy theories are false.

The Justice Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) said in a memo made public this month that there is no evidence that Epstein kept a "client list" or was blackmailing powerful people.

They also dismissed the claim that Epstein was murdered in jail, confirming his suicide, and said they would not be releasing any more information on the probe.

That could change if grand jury testimony or evidence is released.

On Thursday, US media reported that a federal prosecutor who handled Epstein's case, who is the daughter of a prominent Trump critic, was abruptly fired.

Maureen Comey, whose father is former FBI director James Comey, was dismissed on Wednesday from her position as an assistant US attorney in Manhattan, the reports said.

Comey also prosecuted Ghislaine Maxwell, the only former Epstein associate who has been criminally charged in connection with his activities.

Maxwell is the person who compiled the leather-bound book of letters for Epstein in 2003, the *Journal* reported.

"The WSJ should be ashamed for publishing it. Where is this letter? Would you be shocked to learn they never showed it to us before publishing it?" Vice-President J D Vance wrote on X.

Meanwhile, Democratic lawmaker Pat Ryan wrote: "I think we now know EXACTLY why Donald Trump refuses to release the Epstein files."

## Judge tosses lawsuit seeking to shield names of FBI agents on Capitol riot probe

A US judge has dismissed lawsuits brought by FBI agents seeking to prevent President Donald Trump's administration from publicly identifying those who worked on the investigation into the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol by Trump supporters.

US District Judge Jia Cobb in Washington found that the risk of Justice Department leadership disclosing the names of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents is "too speculative" to allow them to sue.

"They do not plausibly allege that Defendants are about to engage in any of the conduct agents are worried about," Cobb wrote in her ruling, which granted the Trump administration's bid to dismiss the cases.

The FBI Agents Association, a plaintiff in one of the lawsuits, said it was disappointed in the ruling and reviewing its legal options.

"Agent safety has and will always be our paramount concern. We filed this case to support and

protect the dedicated FBI agents and employees who were assigned to investigations related to activities on January 6, 2021," the group said in a statement.

A spokesperson for the Justice Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Justice Department has said it is conducting an internal review of potential misconduct in the probe, which led to more than 1,500 criminal cases against Trump supporters accused of storming the Capitol in a failed attempt to stop certification of his 2020 election loss.

Justice Department officials have not ruled out publicly naming agents, but have said they have no immediate plans to do so.

Two groups of FBI agents

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Justice Department officials have said that agents who were assigned cases and followed orders will not be disciplined.

Department lawyers argued the agents had not produced sufficient evidence that their names were at risk of being disclosed. –

Reuters

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Reuters

## Brazil court orders raids, restraints on Bolsonaro for Trump collusion

Reuters/AFP  
Brasilia



Brazil's Supreme Court has issued search warrants and restraining orders against former president Jair Bolsonaro (pictured), banning him from contacting foreign officials over allegations that he had courted the interference of US President Donald Trump.

Federal police raided Bolsonaro's home and put an ankle monitor on him, an escalation in the legal pressure that he is already facing and that Trump has tried to relieve with a steep tariff on Brazilian goods.

Bolsonaro told Reuters that he believed the court orders were a reaction to Trump's criticism of his trial before the Supreme Court.

The court's crackdown on Bolsonaro added to evidence that Trump's tactics are backfiring in Brazil, compounding trouble for his ideological ally and rallying public support behind a defiant leftist government.

Bolsonaro was banned from contacting foreign officials, using social media or approaching embassies, according to the decision issued by Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who cited a "concrete possibility" of him fleeing the country.

In an interview with Reuters at his party's headquarters yesterday, Bolsonaro called Moraes a "dictator" and described the latest court orders as acts of "cowardice".

"I feel supreme humiliation," he said, when asked how he felt about wearing the ankle monitor. "I am 70 years old, I was president of the republic for four years."

Bolsonaro denied any plans to leave the country, but said he would meet with Trump if he could get access to his passport, which police seized last year.

Both men have claimed to be victims of political persecution, and Trump has stepped in to defend his ally, to the anger of Lula who has labelled the tariff

on Brazilian goods a "big fat bribe".

The former army captain denies he was involved in an attempt to wrest power back from Lula as part of an alleged coup plot that prosecutors say failed only for a lack of military backing.

Bolsonaro is on trial before Brazil's Supreme Court on charges of plotting a coup to stop President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva from taking office in January 2023.

The case against Bolsonaro carries echoes of Trump's failed prosecution over the January 6, 2021, attacks by his supporters on the US Capitol to try and reverse his election loss.

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on Brazilian goods a "big fat bribe".

Trump's political opponents and other critics drew attention to the timing of the decision.

"CBS canceled Colbert's show just THREE DAYS after Colbert called out CBS parent company Paramount for its \$16M settlement with President Donald Trump as 'a big fat bribe'."

Trump celebrated the cancellation, writing on his Truth Social platform: "I absolutely love that Colbert got fired. His talent was even less than his ratings."

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## Pakistan bans construction of new hotels around tourist lakes

AFP  
Gilgit

Pakistan will ban for five years the construction of new hotels around picturesque lakes in the north that attract tens of thousands of tourists each year, a government agency said.

Unregulated construction of hotels and guest houses in Gilgit-Baltistan – which boasts around 13,000 glaciers, more than any other country on Earth outside the polar regions – has sparked major concerns about environmental degradation.

The natural beauty of the region has made it a top tourist destination, with towering peaks looming over the Old Silk Road, and a highway transporting tourists between cherry orchards, glaciers, and ice-blue lakes.

However, in recent years construction has exploded led by companies from outside the region, straining water and power resources, and increasing waste.

"If we let them construct hotels at such pace, there will be a forest of concrete," Khadim Hussain, a senior official at the Gilgit-Baltistan Environmental Protection Authority told AFP yesterday.

"People don't visit here to see concrete; people come here to enjoy natural beauty," he added.

Last month, a foreign tourist posted a video on Instagram – which quickly went viral – alleging wastewater was being discharged by a hotel into Lake Attabad, which serves as a freshwater source for Hunza.

The next day, authorities fined the hotel more than \$5,000.

## Artwork worth millions gets devoured, again

A visitor to a French museum bit into a fresh banana worth millions of dollars taped to a wall last week, exhibitors said yesterday, in the latest such consumption of the conceptual artwork.

Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan – whose provocative creation entitled *Comedian* was bought for \$6.2mn in New York last year – said that he was disappointed the person did not also eat the skin and the tape.

After the hungry visitor struck on Saturday last week, "security staff rapidly and calmly intervened", the Pompidou-Metz museum in eastern France said.

The work was "reinstalled within minutes", it added. "As the fruit is perishable, it is regularly replaced according to instructions from the artist."

Cattelan noted the banana-eater had "confused the fruit for the work of art".

"Instead of eating the banana

# Germany, EU allies push for asylum crackdown and more deportations

Reuters/AFP  
Berlin

Germany's Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt and five European counterparts agreed on a set of goals yesterday to tighten asylum rules in the bloc, including allowing deportations to Afghanistan and Syria.

The meeting at Germany's highest peak, the Zugspitze, follows Berlin's decision in May to reject asylum seekers at the border, a policy it said was co-ordinated with neighbouring countries but drew significant criticism.

It comes almost exactly a decade after former German Chancellor Angela Merkel opened the country's borders to nearly a million refugees fleeing war and persecution, a landmark decision that reshaped European politics.

Dobrindt met counterparts from France, Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic and Denmark, as well as EU Home Affairs Com-

missioner Magnus Brunner.

The agreed asylum policy goals, which require approval from Brussels, include removing legislative obstacles to transferring rejected asylum-seekers to secure centres outside the EU and enabling asylum procedures in third countries.

Germany's new government has already placed curbs on migration including suspending family reunification and resettlement programmes, as it seeks to regain support from voters drawn to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which made historic gains in February's federal election.

Yesterday Germany deported 81 Afghan men to Afghanistan.

"We are all concerned that the overburdening of our countries by illegal migration is also contributing massively to the polarisation of society. We want to push back this polarisation," Dobrindt said.

Deportations to countries such as Afghanistan and Syria should be reinstated as standard practice, with citizens from countries failing to co-operate on deportations

to face visa restrictions, a joint declaration said.

Trade, and development aid will also be used as leverage to boost returns and strengthen migration co-operation, the document said, pressing for increasing deployment of drones and more EU funding for border infrastructure and personnel.

The countries agreed to combat smugglers and work to dismantle human trafficking networks.

Asylum-seekers who have already been granted protection in another EU country will be quickly rejected if they claim asylum elsewhere in the bloc.

"Once we seal the external border, there will be no need for internal border controls," Polish Interior Minister Tomasz Siemoniak said.

Siemoniak said he discussed the border controls that Germany introduced unilaterally at its border with Dobrindt, adding that Poland is ready to waive the controls at its border once Germany does the same.

Following the latest expulsions by Ger-

many, the United Nations said no one should be sent back to Afghanistan, whatever their status.

The UN human rights commissioner called for an "immediate halt to the forcible return of all Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly those at risk of persecution, arbitrary detention or torture upon their return", spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva.

Amnesty International directly criticised the deportations, saying that the situation in Afghanistan was "catastrophic" and that "extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and torture are commonplace".

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz defended the expulsions at a press conference, saying that he was "grateful" to be able to deliver on a promise he had made when entering government.

None of those deported "had a residence status anymore. All asylum applications were legally rejected without further legal recourse," he said. "This is why this deportation and this flight were possible."

## Disinformation catalyses anti-immigrant unrest in Spain, experts say

By Sonia Gonzalez  
AFP

The rare anti-migrant violence that recently rocked a Spanish town demonstrated how online disinformation feeds xenophobic hate speech, which leapt from screens to real life with the support of politicians, experts said.

Last weekend's unrest in the southeastern town of Torre Pacheco pitted far-right groups against immigrant residents, mainly of Moroccan origin, but a heavy police presence prevented serious confrontations.

The altercations were sparked after a 68-year-old pensioner said three men of North African origin attacked him without provocation on July 9.

Two days later, the conservative-led city council organised a protest against insecurity, which quickly escalated when far-right groups joined with hostile slogans against immigrants.

That day, and for several nights, riots broke out in the streets of the southeastern city of 40,000.

Authorities have arrested 14 people, including three suspected of involvement in the attack on the retiree.

Also among those detained is the leader of the far-right "Deport Them Now" group, who allegedly called for a "hunt" of migrants on social media.

The sudden outbreak of violence took Spain by surprise but anti-migrant discourse had already been brewing, partly due to disinformation circulating on social media.

AFP's digital verification team in Spain has debunked many false claims linked to immigrants, mostly concerning public benefits they supposedly receive and alleged attacks by foreigners on Spanish customs.

For Alexandre Lopez Borrull, a professor in communication and information science at the Open University of Catalonia, disinformation in such cases is "the fuel and the spark at the same time".

The narrative "is fuelled over a long period of time" and when a specific event occurs, it can act as a spark in scenarios like the one that played out in Torre Pacheco, he said.

A video purporting to show the assault on the pensioner, along with a list of alleged at-

tackers, quickly circulated online – both debunked by AFP.

Elisa Brey, a sociology professor at Madrid's Complutense University, likened the phenomenon to criminals setting off wildfires.

"It's hot, there's a temperature alert, and an arsonist passes by and throws a match. That is what happens with disinformation," she said.

Experts also emphasised the role of politicians, particularly the far-right Vox party, in fanning the flames of anti-migrant rhetoric.

Vox has long connected immigration to crime and recently proposed, echoing other EU political parties and far-right activists, that some migrants be deported as part of a broad "remigration" plan.

Foreigners make up 14% of Spain's population, up from only 1.6% in 1998.

In events like the violent protests in Torre Pacheco, malicious discourse seeps through different layers of social media before erupting into the public sphere, Brey explained.

First, it simmers at an "underlying" level on less visible platforms like Telegram, before jumping to more popular networks such as X and TikTok.

Politicians then amplify the message through public statements, she said.

Vox's leader in the southeastern Murcia region, which includes Torre Pacheco, blamed the unrest on "illegal immigration" claiming that migrants had assaulted the elderly and committed sexual violence against women.

Prosecutors have opened an investigation into his comments to determine if they constitute a hate crime.

Social media was used in a way that, "in the end, it led to these events", added Marcelino Madrigal, an expert in online platforms and cybersecurity.

Madrigal also detected that parties were shifting their position on immigration with an eye on political gain at a time of speculation about early elections in Spain.

"With disinformation about immigration, the aim is to destabilise a government or a country as well as present yourself as an alternative to save us from a problem that does not exist," he said.

## Only 16% of Italians would fight for their country: poll

Almost a third of Italians believe the country will be directly involved in a war within five years, but only 16% of those of fighting age would be willing to take up arms, a survey showed yesterday.

The survey by the Centre for Social Investment Studies (CENSIS) showed 39% of Italians aged 18-45 would declare themselves as pacifist conscientious objectors, 19% would try to evade conscription another way, and 26% would prefer Italy to hire foreign mercenaries.

After years of escalating geopolitical tensions and two ongoing nearby wars, in Ukraine and the Middle East, Italy has joined other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) nations in pledging to ramp up national defence spending.

Most Italians remain sceptical of rearmament.

Just 26% believe that military deterrence is a good way to ensure peace, while only 25% support increased

military budgets even if it means cutting welfare.

A mere 11% would like the country to have nuclear weapons.

Despite a 46% rise in defence spending over the past decade, per capita expenditure in Italy remains comparatively low at \$586, the survey said.

That compares with \$686 in Greece and over \$2,000 in countries such as the United States or Norway.

To ensure Italy's security, 49% of all Italians are in favour of strengthening Nato, while 58% would like to see an integrated European Union defence system, with a single army, under a unified command and joint weapons procurement.

Another poll published last month by the European Council of Foreign Relations showed that only 17% of Italians support increasing defence spending, the lowest proportion among 12 European countries surveyed. – Reuters



This picture taken in May shows a visitor looking at the *Comedian* artwork by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan during the press preview of the exhibition 'Dimanche sans fin. Maurizio Cattelan et la Collection du Centre Pompidou' ('Endless Sunday. Maurizio Cattelan and the Collection of the Pompidou Centre') at the Centre Pompidou-Metz in Metz. – AFP

an 18-carat, fully functioning gold toilet called *America* that was offered to Donald Trump during his first term in the White House.

A British court in March found two men guilty of stealing it during an exhibition in 2020 in the United

Kingdom, from an 18th-century stately home that was the birthplace of wartime prime minister Winston Churchill.

It was split up into parts and none of the gold was ever recovered. – AFP

Kingdom, from an 18th-century stately home that was the birthplace of wartime prime minister Winston Churchill.

It was split up into parts and none of the gold was ever recovered. – AFP

Countries have until today to lodge reservations about the amendments.

Conservative activists and vaccine sceptics in Britain and Australia have waged public campaigns against the changes.

The amendments came about when the Assembly failed at a more ambitious goal of sealing a new global agreement on pandemics.

Most of the world finally sealed a treaty this May, but the US did not participate as it was in the process of withdrawing from the WHO. – AFP/Reuters

The amendments included a stated "commitment to solidarity and equity" in which a new group would study the needs of developing countries in future emergencies.

The amendments came about when the Assembly failed at a more ambitious goal of sealing a new global agreement on pandemics.

Most of the world finally sealed a treaty this May, but the US did not participate as it was in the process of withdrawing from the WHO. – AFP/Reuters

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Most



## PEOPLE

**Indonesia court jails former trade minister in graft case**

An Indonesian court yesterday sentenced a former trade minister to 4.5 years in jail for improperly granting sugar import permits that authorities said had caused nearly 600bn rupiah (\$36.84mn) in state losses. Thomas Trikasi Lembong served as trade minister in 2015 and 2016 under president Joko "Jokowi" Widodo. Once seen as Jokowi's close aide, Lembong turned into one of the government's staunchest critics after leaving office. Judges at the corruption court in the capital Jakarta said Lembong, as minister, was guilty of improperly granting import permits for sugar to private companies when the country had a surplus of sugar.

## LAW AND ORDER

**Cambodia cybercrime arrest tally hits 2,000**

The number of suspects arrested in a Cambodian crackdown on Internet scam centres has risen to 2,000, a minister said yesterday. The United Nations has described Southeast Asia as the "ground zero" of cybercrime centres. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet this week issued a directive telling law enforcement and the military to clamp down on the Internet sweatshops or risk losing their jobs. Information Minister Neth Pheaktra, a member of a committee to combat online scams, said authorities had expanded the scope of their raids to nine of the country's 25 provinces. "So far some 2,000 suspects have been arrested," he said.

## DECISION

**Myanmar junta offers cash rewards to anti-coup defectors**

Myanmar's junta yesterday said it is offering cash rewards to fighters willing to desert armed groups defying its rule and "return to the legal fold" ahead of a slated election. The country has been consumed by civil war since a 2021 coup, with the embattled junta facing an array of pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic armed rebels. After suffering major battlefield reverses, the military has touted elections around the end of the year as a pathway to peace. State media The Global New Light of Myanmar said yesterday "individuals who returned to the legal fold with arms and ammunition are being offered specific cash rewards".

## COMMENT

**North Korea claims Japan seeking to be a 'military giant'**

A Japanese defence policy white paper showed the country was seeking to be a major military power. North Korean state media reported a foreign ministry official as saying yesterday, who justified Pyongyang's nuclear programme on that basis. The policy section chief of the Institute for Japan Studies described the Japanese defence white paper, as "a war scenario for realising its ambition for reinvocation from A to Z." The Korean Central News Agency said. The white paper was approved by the cabinet of Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba. It said North Korea's activities pose a "more grave and imminent threat to Japan's national security than ever before".

# Malaysians protest against Trump's 'loyalist' nominee for US envoy

AFP

Kuala Lumpur

**D**ozens of Malaysians protested near the US embassy in the capital yesterday, calling for President Donald Trump's nomination as envoy to the south-east Asian nation to be rejected.

Trump nominated right-wing commentator Nick Adams, known for his outspoken views and strong pro-Israel stance, as ambassador to multicultural, Muslim-majority Malaysia a week ago.

Protesters chanted "Reject Nick Adams" and "Destroy America" and held up posters depicting Adams with a red cross over his face.

Other placards read: "No space for racists and Islamophobes in Malaysia."

The marchers, organised by the youth wings of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) coalition, submitted a memorandum to the US embassy near the centre of Kuala Lumpur.

They urged the US government to withdraw Adams's nomination and "consider a candidate who is more professional, moderate, and attuned to the importance of southeast Asia's regional stability".

Around 90 police officers watched the peaceful demonstration and redirected traffic.

Adams, 40, was born in Australia and is a naturalised US citizen.

"Single, Alpha Male. Wildly successful. President Trump's favourite author," Adams has described

himself on social media platform X.

Malaysia has no diplomatic ties with Israel and has repeatedly condemned its actions in Gaza and elsewhere.

Kuala Lumpur and Washington are also locked in tariff negotiations after the Trump administration threatened to slap a 25% tariff on imports from Malaysia.

Diplomats agreed that Adams's nomination, which has yet to be confirmed, has placed Anwar's government in a delicate position.

It must negotiate a trade deal with Washington as an August 1 deadline approaches while also trying to mitigate growing calls to reject Adams's appointment to the country of 34.5mn people.

Anwar said it was too early for his government to decide whether to accept Adams's nomination.

"The government will surely give consideration (to the public's views) and to also preserve the dignity as well as the good relations between Malaysia and the US," Anwar told *The Star* newspaper.

Raja Ahmad Iskandar Fareez, a 36-year-old protester, said: "The ambassadorship to Malaysia is not a paid holiday job for any loyalist... or any Tom, Dick or Nick."

"In a very uncertain world that we are living in today, we need a skilful diplomat with a steady hand that understands the culture, that understands the nuances of Malaysia," Adams said online shortly after his nomination that it was "nothing short of a lifetime's honour to take the President's goodwill and spread it to the great people of Malaysia".

## Three Lankan elephants killed in blow to conservation efforts

At least three wild elephants were found dead across Sri Lanka yesterday, officials said, a day after six young rescued elephants were returned to the jungle under a conservation drive.

Wildlife officials said one elephant was run over by a passenger train in the island's northeast, while two others were found shot dead in the central and eastern regions.

Elephants are protected by law and considered sacred due to their significance in Buddhist culture, but farmers often kill them to protect their crops.

Human-elephant conflict in Sri Lanka has resulted in the deaths of nearly 200 elephants and 55 people so far this year.

"We have launched investigations into the shootings of the two elephants, it looks like the work of local farmers," a police spokesman in the capital Colombo said.

The train accident occurred in Gallella, the same area where seven elephants were killed by a locomotive in February, the worst incident of its kind in Sri Lanka.



People gather near the dead body of an elephant killed in a train accident in Gallella, in the northeast of Sri Lanka, yesterday.

The ruling coalition needs to win 50 seats of the 125 up for grabs in order to retain its majority.

While the vote will not directly determine whether Ishiba's government falls, investors are nervous it will leave him beholden to opposition parties advocating fiscal largesse that could exacerbate mass selling of Japan's government bonds.

In a worst case scenario, some analysts say Ishiba may have to resign, unleashing political drama as Tokyo heads for an August 1 deadline to win reprieve from punishing import levies set by its largest trading partner, the US.

"If he had an overwhelming loss,

I think he would have to resign," said David Boling, director for Japan and Asian Trade at political risk consultancy Eurasia Group.

"That then creates a lot of questions about who replaces him and what impact that has on the US-Japan trade negotiations."

Other financial and political analysts, such as Joseph Kraft of Rorschach Advisory in Tokyo, say the LDP is unlikely to opt for a leadership change at a pivotal moment in talks on tariffs hammering key industries such as automakers.

In a sign of that urgency, Ishiba took a break from campaigning yesterday to hold talks with Washington's chief tariff negotiator and

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who is visiting Japan for the World Expo in Osaka.

More likely is that Ishiba will seek to either broaden his coalition or strike informal deals with opposition parties to keep his government functioning after the election, Kraft said.

That prospect has made investors nervous.

Inflation has been a killer issue for Ishiba, as it recently has been for incumbents elsewhere. The price of rice, which has doubled since last year, has become a lightning rod for voter discontent.

In response, opposition parties have promised tax cuts and welfare

spending to soften the blow, while the LDP, with one eye on a very jittery government bond market, has been calling for fiscal restraint.

Any opposition deals to weaken that restraint will only heighten investor nervousness about Japan's ability to refinance the world's largest debt pile and hamper the Bank of Japan's long-held goal of normalising monetary policy.

But not only parties advocating for more spending have chipped away at LDP support. The far-right Sanseito, espousing anti-foreigner rhetoric once confined to the political fringe, has been the surprise performer of the campaign.

Birthed on YouTube spreading

## Taiwan 'not seeking' confrontation with China

Reuters

Taipei

Taiwan does not seek conflict with China and will not provoke confrontation, but Beijing's "aggressive" military posturing is counterproductive, Vice-President Hsiao Bi-khim said yesterday.

China considers Taiwan as part of its own territory and calls President Lai Ching-te a "separatist". Taiwan's government disputes China's claim.

Speaking to the Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club in the capital Taipei, Hsiao said Chinese pressure on Taiwan had escalated over the past few years but that the island's people were peace-loving.

"We do not seek conflict; we will not provoke confrontation," she said, reiterating Lai's offer of

talks between Taipei and Beijing. For decades, Taiwan's people and business have contributed to China's growth and prosperity, which has been possible only in a peaceful and stable environment, Hsiao added.

"Aggressive military posturing is counterproductive and deprives the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait of opportunities to pursue an agenda of growth and prosperity," she said.

"Defending the status quo (with China) is our choice, not because it is easy, but because it is responsible and consistent with the interests of our entire region."

In 2023, China put sanctions on Hsiao for the second time, but they have little practical effect as senior Taiwanese officials do not travel to China and Chinese law has no jurisdiction on the entirely separately governed island.

# Japan's govt faces poll snub as economic storm brews

Reuters

Tokyo

Japan's shaky minority government is poised for another set-back in an upper house vote tomorrow, an outcome that could jolt investor confidence in the world's fourth largest economy and complicate tariff talks with the US.

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has ruled for most of the post-war period, and its partner Komeito, are forecast to lose their majority in a repeat of last year's election for the more-powerful lower house.

The ruling coalition needs to win 50 seats of the 125 up for grabs in order to retain its majority.

While the vote will not directly determine whether Ishiba's government falls, investors are nervous it will leave him beholden to opposition parties advocating fiscal largesse that could exacerbate mass selling of Japan's government bonds.

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Birthed on YouTube spreading

anti-vax conspiracy theories five years ago, the party may win 10 to 15 seats, polls show.

That would herald the arrival of a new force of populist politics that has yet to take root in Japan as it has in the US and Europe.

One reason the LDP has stayed so long in power, analysts say, is because it has served as a "broad church" for political views. But bringing into the fold the likes of Sanseito may trigger a deeper crisis of faith.

"If the party (LDP) goes too far right, it loses the centrist," said Tsuneo Watanabe, a senior fellow at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation think tank in Tokyo.

# UK, India likely to unveil trade deal next week

**Reuters**  
New Delhi/London

India and Britain are expected to seal a long-awaited free trade deal next week, two Indian government sources said, granting Indian textiles and electric vehicles some duty-free access to the UK

market and easing British exports of cars and food.

In May, both countries announced the conclusion of trade negotiations after three years of stop-start negotiations, aiming to increase bilateral trade, remove trade barriers and allow duty-free entry of goods.

The countries are now prepar-

ing to formally sign the agreement, and the announcement could coincide with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's expected visit to London next week, one of the Indian officials said.

The trade pact will take effect in about a year, after it is approved by the British parliament and India's federal cabinet, the official added.

Officials spoke on the condition of anonymity as the details are not public.

"The trade agreement offers a win-win for both countries," the second Indian source said, adding that Indian consumers would gain access to UK spirits at lower prices, as import tariffs will drop to 75% from 150% immediately, and fur-

ther to 40% over the next decade.

On cars, India will cut duties to 10% from 100% under a quota system that will be gradually liberalised, the sources said. In return, Indian manufacturers are expected to gain access to the UK market for electric and hybrid vehicles, also under a quota regime, they added.

India's commerce ministry did

not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. Britain's trade ministry said that the countries were working to finalise the deal.

"We have been working with India on a landmark trade deal that will deliver for British people and business," a UK government spokesperson said.

## India think-tank 'urges easing investment rules for Chinese firms'

**Reuters**  
New Delhi

The Indian government's top think-tank has proposed easing rules that de facto require extra scrutiny for investments by Chinese companies, arguing that the rules have meant delays for some sizeable deals, three government sources said.

Currently, all investment by Chinese entities in Indian companies need to gain a security clearance from both India's home and foreign ministries.

The think-tank, NITI Aayog, has proposed that Chinese companies can take a stake of up to 24% in an Indian company without any approval being required, said the sources who were not authorised to speak to media and declined to be identified.

The proposal is part of a plan to boost foreign direct investment in India and is being studied by the trade ministry's industries department, the finance and foreign ministries, as well as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office, the sources said.

And while not all of NITI Aayog's ideas are necessarily taken up by the government, the proposal comes at a time when India and China are seeking to mend ties that have been particularly strained since border clashes in 2020.

Any decision to ease might be months away and will be taken by political leaders, two of the sources said. They added that the industries

department is in favour of easing, but the other government bodies are yet to give their final view.

NITI Aayog, the ministries, the industries department and the prime minister's office did not reply to requests for comment.

The rules were put in place in 2020 after border clashes, including hand-to-hand fighting between the two neighbours.

They only apply to land bordering nations, which affects Chinese companies the most. By contrast, companies from other countries can freely invest in many sectors such as manufacturing and pharmaceuticals, while some sensitive sectors such as defence, banking and media have restrictions.

Deals such as a 2023 plan by China's BYD to invest \$1bn in an electric car joint venture have been shelved due to the rules, sources have said.

While foreign investment has slowed globally since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the rules hampering Chinese investment in India have been seen as a significant factor behind a large drop in the South Asian country's FDI.

Net foreign direct investment in India tumbled to a record low of just \$353mn in the past financial year, a fraction of the \$43.9bn logged in the year ended March 2021.

An easing in military tensions since October has led to more efforts by both countries to mend ties, with plans for the resumption of direct flights and India seeking a "permanent solution" to their decades-old border dispute.

### Heavy rains in Pushkar



People gather near the Pushkar Lake after a rise in the water level following heavy monsoon rainfall in Pushkar, in India's state of Rajasthan, yesterday.

## US declares Resistance Front as 'terrorist' group; India hails move

**Reuters**  
Washington

The US government designated the Resistance Front, considered an offshoot of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, as a "foreign terrorist organisation" over the April 22 militant attack in Kashmir that killed 26 men, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said.

The Resistance Front, also known as Kashmir Resistance, initially took responsibility for the attack in Pahalgam before denying it days later.

Lashkar-e-Taiba, listed as a "foreign terrorist organisation" by the US, is a militant group accused of plotting attacks in India and in the West, including the three-day deadly assault on Mumbai in November 2008.

TRF's designation by Washington as a "foreign terrorist organisation" and "specially

designated global terrorist" enforced President Donald Trump's "call for justice for the Pahalgam attack," Rubio said in a statement.

Rubio called TRF, which emerged in 2019, a "front and proxy" for Lashkar-e-Taiba. It is considered an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, a Delhi-based think tank.

India said it appreciated the move, with Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar calling it a "strong affirmation of India-US counter-terrorism co-operation," in a post on X.

Pakistan said it "condemns terrorism in all forms and manifestations".

"Any linkage with LeT, a defunct organisation banned in Pakistan, belies ground realities," the foreign ministry said yesterday. "Pakistan has... dismantled concerned outfits, arrested and prosecuted the leadership, and deradicalised its cadres."

The April attack sparked heavy fighting between India and Pakistan. New Delhi blamed the attack on Pakistan, which denied responsibility while calling for a neutral investigation. Washington condemned the attack but did not directly blame Islamabad.

Michael Kugelman, a Washington-based South Asia analyst and writer for *Foreign Policy* magazine, said in designating TRF, "Washington is flagging its concern about the terrorist attack that provoked the recent India-Pakistan conflict, and siding with New Delhi's view that the group is linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba."

He added: "This can be a shot in the arm for a US-India relationship looking to rebound after a few tough months."

India is an increasingly important US partner in Washington's effort to counter China's rising influence in Asia, while Pakistan is a US ally.

### Hyper Japan festival in London



Content creators Yuna and Ashley Michael, pose for a photograph during the Hyper Japan festival at Olympia, London, Britain, yesterday.

## UK hunts anti-migrant protest suspects

**AFP**  
Epping, United Kingdom

Police yesterday promised to track down suspects behind violence at a protest outside a southeast England hotel believed to house asylum seekers, after officers and vehicles were attacked.

The violence followed several demonstrations in recent days in the town of Epping which flared after police charged an asylum seeker with sex offences.

Eight police officers were injured and three vehicles were damaged, Essex police said.

The unrest, which police blamed on people from "outside of our community", comes a year after anti-immigration riots rocked the UK in the wake of the fatal stabbings of three young girls in the northern town of Southport.

Then, rioters targeted hotels housing asylum seekers in several different English cities, infamously attempting to set fire to one in Rotherham, northeast England.

Essex police yesterday insisted officers would "continue to support those communities that want to peacefully protest" but would not tolerate "acts of violence and vandalism".

"After last night I've got a team of specialist detectives today that are combing through the body-worn video CCTV to identify those who are responsible," assistant chief constable Stuart Hooper said.

"And what I can say is if you're one of those individuals you can expect a knock on the door."

Hooper said the "selfish individuals" behind the violence were mostly "from outside of the area" and had travelled to Epping "intent on causing criminality".

## UK to set out water reforms as Thames Water faces crisis

**Reuters**  
London

Britain is on Monday expected to set out measures to fix its broken water sector as Thames Water teeters on the brink of failure, saying it needs a "reset" of regulation to have any chance of avoiding nationalisation.

The country's biggest water company has been fighting for its survival for the last 18 months. If it fails the government would have to step in, adding billions of pounds to already stretched

public finances. Britain commissioned a review last year into the privatised water industry in England and Wales, which needs huge investments to fix ageing infrastructure and stem sewage spills into rivers and lakes that have angered the public.

Former Bank of England deputy governor Jon Cunliffe, who is leading the review, has recommended overhauling regulation to lower investment risk, merging regulators to give companies clearer direction and new rules on river bathing standards.

"Water companies must be made more attractive to stable,

long-term investors," Cunliffe said in his interim report in June, adding that the sector required more predictable regulation.

Launching the review last October, Environment Minister Steve Reed said there had been "very severe failures of regulation", raising the prospect that Ofwat, the water industry's financial regulator, could be scrapped.

Thames Water's creditors have offered it a rescue deal worth about £5bn (\$6.7bn), and they, along with Thames Water, are in talks with Ofwat.

But in return they want a regulatory reset, which could mean flex-

ibility on pollution targets, clemency on penalties and more time to deliver improvements.

Data released yesterday showed the scale of the sewage problem in England, with serious pollution incidents up 60% in 2024 compared to the previous year.

Thames Water was responsible for 44% of the most serious incidents, the environment agency said, but all nine companies showed "consistently poor performance".

Thames Water chief executive Chris Weston told lawmakers on Tuesday that the company was "extremely stressed and operating

in very difficult circumstances" after it reported a £1.65bn annual loss. Thames Water suffered a setback in June when US private equity firm KKR - its preferred bidder - pulled out of an earlier rescue plan.

KKR told lawmakers in a letter published on Tuesday that regulatory risk played a part in its decision, and it would not have been "able to manage and meet the understandable expectations on the timing of improvements, risking falling short in the eyes of the public and stakeholders".

Thames Water, which has 16mn customers in southern England, forecasts it will face £1.4bn in pol-

lution fines and penalties over the next five years.

While the government wants to cut water pollution, it can ill afford a Thames Water bankruptcy that would add the company's £17bn debt onto government books, at a time when Finance Minister Rachel Reeves is already close to breaking her fiscal rules.

The government has repeatedly said it is keeping a close eye on Thames Water. Environment Minister Steve Reed said in June that his department had "stepped up" preparations for its special administration regime, a form of temporary nationalisation.

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**GULF TIMES**

# Global banking rules are failing emerging markets

In an era of shrinking resources for development finance, global policymakers must shift their focus to making better use of existing funds. Identifying and removing regulatory barriers that hinder the efficient deployment of capital to emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) is a good place to start.

The Basel III framework, developed in response to the 2008 global financial crisis, has played a crucial role in preventing another systemic collapse. But it has also inadvertently discouraged banks from financing infrastructure projects in EMDEs.

At the same time, advanced economies, with debt-to-GDP ratios at historic highs, face mounting fiscal pressures. Servicing these debts consumes a growing share of public budgets just as governments must ramp up defence spending and boost economic competitiveness, resulting in cuts to foreign aid.

Together, these pressures underscore the urgent need to mobilise more private capital for investment in EMDEs. Building resilient and sustainable economies will require transformational investments across the developing world in infrastructure, technology, health, and education. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), EMDEs must raise more than \$3tn annually beyond what they can raise through public revenues to meet critical development and climate targets.

Amid these challenges, prudential regulation impedes the ability of EMDEs to raise private capital. This issue can be traced back to the global financial crisis, which wiped out \$15tn in global GDP between 2008 and 2011. Since the crisis stemmed from weak capital and liquidity controls, as well as the unchecked growth of innovative and opaque financial products, Basel III was designed to close regulatory loopholes and bolster oversight, particularly in response to the rise of the non-bank financial sector.

While the revised framework addresses the vulnerabilities that triggered the 2008 crisis, its focus on advanced economies and systemically important financial institutions inadvertently imposes several requirements that restrict capital flows to EMDEs.

For example, Basel III requires banks to hold disproportionately high levels of capital to cover the perceived risks of financing infrastructure projects in EMDEs.

But these risks are often overestimated. The riskiest period of an infrastructure project is typically the pre-operational phase. By the fifth year, when projects begin generating revenue, risks tend to decline significantly.

In fact, the data suggest that by year five, the marginal default rates for development loans are lower than those for corporate loans extended to investment-grade borrowers. But despite the lower risk profile, banks are required to hold more capital against development-finance loans than they do against loans to unrated companies over the life of the project.

Insurers encounter similar regulatory barriers. Under the European Union's Solvency II framework, an insurer investing in an EMDE infrastructure project faces a capital charge of 40% – nearly double the 25% required for a comparable project in an OECD country. Yet there is no empirical justification for this unequal treatment. Historical data show that infrastructure loans in EMDEs perform just as well as those in advanced economies.

The significantly higher capital costs that banks incur when making infrastructure loans to EMDEs deter them from supporting transformative, high-impact projects, steering capital toward safer, low-impact investments.

Blended finance – often touted as a promising path to de-risking EMDE investments – is also hampered by prudential regulations that impede effective collaboration between multilateral development banks and private-sector entities. MDBs, backed by guarantees from developed-economy shareholders and AAA credit ratings, can help reduce capital costs by co-financing EMDE projects and providing lenders with additional assurances. But even when MDBs share the risk, the resulting exposures often remain subject to a 100% capital charge, undermining the very benefits that multilateral engagement is meant to provide. – Project Syndicate

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# Britain and Europe are changing together

By Mark Leonard  
Berlin

Many state visits are empty, symbolic acts that have little to no policy content or lasting significance. But every now and then, such a visit changes the shape of international relations. Could French President Emmanuel Macron's recently concluded trip to London be one of them?

Macron's three-day trip, the first state visit to the United Kingdom by a European Union head of state since Brexit in 2020, had plenty of pomp and pageantry. But it also focused on policy and politics, which reflects a profound shift in the UK's circumstances since leaving the EU.

During the upheaval of the Brexit psychodrama, there was little interest in constructive exchange, and the UK's relationship with Europe remained defined by its lurching departure from the bloc. But nearly a decade on, Donald Trump is back in the White House and has launched a trade war on the world. Russian President Vladimir Putin has shredded the European security order. And Chinese President Xi Jinping has resorted to threats of economic coercion – a striking reversal from the "golden era" of UK-China relations proclaimed in 2015.

Even more dramatic, perhaps, are the changes in the EU. The big policy initiatives launched during Macron's UK visit reflect the forces that are turning the bloc on its head.

First, the EU is moving from a peace project to a war union. For most of its existence, the EU sought peace through economic integration. But Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 reoriented the bloc toward security – a goal that has taken on greater urgency since Trump cast doubt on the United States' commitment to collective security on the continent.

There is broad support for this new orientation. According to a recent opinion poll conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations, many Europeans favour increased defence spending, conscription, and the development of a European or national nuclear deterrent.

Against this backdrop, Macron and British Prime Minister Keir



UK Prime Minister Starmer with French President Macron.

Starmer took a bold first step toward establishing an independent nuclear deterrent with the Northwood Declaration, in which they agreed that "there is no extreme threat to Europe that would not prompt a response by our two nations."

A second major change is the development of "securometrics." The EU economy is under pressure from Trump's tariffs and China's export restrictions on magnets and critical minerals. EU policymakers now talk of de-risking, diversifying, and deepening the single market, rather than pursuing free-trade agreements. While the UK has made it clear that it will not rejoin the single market or the customs union, the question is whether it can persuade the EU that it can be counted on to help the bloc achieve its new trade goals, or whether it will be given unfriendly treatment because it is seen as posing a risk to those objectives.

Domestic politics in Europe has also undergone a rapid transformation. It has been fascinating to watch Macron – once a poster boy for liberal universalism – reinvent himself as a champion of secure borders and protectionism, while taking a tougher stance on crime. This volte-face has seen mainstream European politicians shift focus toward defending national

sovereignty – from Russia, China, Trump, and migration – while they try to contain populist parties such as Marine Le Pen's National Rally and Alternative für Deutschland.

That is the backdrop for the groundbreaking deal that Starmer and Macron signed on migration returns.

Starmer's approach to Europe is a marked improvement from that of former Conservative prime ministers Boris Johnson (who compared the EU to Napoleon and Hitler) and Liz Truss (who questioned whether Macron was a friend or a foe). Starmer has proved himself, particularly with his deft diplomacy on Ukraine, to be a reliable partner and stakeholder, regaining the trust of EU institutions and member states. One senior German policymaker told me how impressed he was by the UK filling the leadership vacuum created by Trump's disregard for Ukraine.

In other words, the UK is widely seen in Europe as being "part of the team" again. The EU-UK summit in May provided a clear framework for deepening the relationship, not least through a Security and Defence Partnership that paves the way for British participation in European defence programmes.

But the UK government has remained far too cautious in other areas. Most notably, Starmer has

been careful not to cross the Labour Party's self-imposed red lines: no freedom of movement, no customs union, and no single market. Future historians may well wonder why Starmer did not aim higher.

The changing international environment offers Starmer a clear opportunity to redraw Europe's political map, which would establish him as one of Britain's most consequential leaders. But to do so, Starmer must convince British voters that today's Europe is a different creature from the one they imagine: a defence community that is more focused on safeguarding the continent than on transcending the nation-state. And he must explain how the UK can help build this new European security order, so long as it banishes the Brexit mindset.

As a post-liberal Europe emerges, Britain must stop clinging to the past and seize the chance to shape the continent's future in a way that advances its interests. That requires acknowledging that both the EU and the UK have entered a new era. – Project Syndicate

• Mark Leonard, Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, is the author of *The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict* (Bantam Press, 2021).

# The Sino-American battle for brains

By Jong-Wha Lee  
Seoul

Around the world, governments are racing to build world-class universities. From Germany's Excellence initiative to India's "Institutes of Eminence", the goal is the same: to cultivate institutions that attract and nurture top global talent, conduct cutting-edge research, and drive innovation and growth. But the stakes are particularly high in the US and China, given the escalating competition between the world's two largest economies.

The struggle to lead in higher education is about more than prestige. Elite universities affect economic performance in myriad ways, including by fostering innovation, boosting productivity, and increasing individual earnings. Graduates from top-tier institutions are more likely to become scientists, inventors, and entrepreneurs. At the national level, countries with higher average university quality tend to enjoy faster technological development and stronger productivity.

A few years ago, any comparison of US and Chinese higher education would have been no contest. For decades, US universities have dominated global rankings, with institutions like MIT, Stanford, and Harvard forming the core of the innovation hubs that have been integral to the country's global scientific leadership and entrepreneurial dynamism. Many of the world's most valuable companies – including Google, Meta, Nvidia, and Tesla – were built by graduates of elite US universities.

As often as not, those graduates were not American. Over half of America's billion-dollar startups have at least one immigrant founder, and a quarter were launched by individuals who first arrived in the US as international students. This points to a key strength of America's university system: its ability to



attract the world's top talent.

International students account for 14% of enrolment at America's top research universities, and 28% at elite institutions, such as the Ivy League universities, Stanford, and MIT. In the 2023-24 academic year, international students contributed nearly \$44bn to the US economy and supported more than 378,000 jobs.

But America's continued dominance in higher education is far from guaranteed. While US (and European) institutions still lead in global rankings, Chinese universities have been rapidly gaining on them in recent years. In the QS and Times Higher Education rankings, Peking and Tsinghua universities have now broken into the top 20. And in the 2025 Nature Index, eight of the top ten global research institutions are based in China, with Harvard and Germany's Max Planck Society being the only Western institutions that made the cut.

Moreover, Zhejiang University, which has modelled itself on Stanford, has helped to transform Hangzhou into a Chinese Silicon Valley, with a vibrant startup ecosystem underpinned by strong government support and active university-industry collaboration. The AI powerhouse DeepSeek emerged in Hangzhou.

Chinese universities are particularly strong in the so-called STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). China now produces some 2mn

science and engineering graduates annually, more than double the number in the US. Engineering degrees comprise 33% of all undergraduate qualifications in China, compared to just 8% in the US, and more than 600 Chinese universities now offer undergraduate programs in AI. Today, nearly half of the world's top AI researchers are of Chinese origin – and a growing number of them are choosing to work in China.

These developments are no accident. Rather, they reflect three decades of sustained government commitment, exemplified by initiatives like Project 985 and the Double First-Class Construction programme. And continued progress is virtually guaranteed: earlier this year, China released a national strategy aimed at turning the country into an "education power with global influence" by 2035, particularly in areas like AI, semiconductors, and robotics.

To be sure, China's push to lead in higher education will face considerable headwinds. Cutting-edge research and breakthrough innovation demand intellectual and academic freedom – the freedom to question prevailing ideas, explore new concepts, and update modes of thinking. As critics have warned, the Communist Party of China's tight control over universities and the media is not conducive to any of this.

Nonetheless, China's commitment to strengthening higher education is clear. The

same cannot be said for the US, where President Donald Trump's administration has effectively declared war on leading universities in the name of combating alleged ideological bias. This has included freezing billions of dollars in research funding and demanding sweeping reforms by institutions like Harvard and Columbia, from curricula changes to the elimination of diversity programs. Meanwhile, the Trump administration has sought to revoke and restrict visas for international students.

Though the Trump administration's attacks have been met with some resistance from universities, there has been at least as much capitulation. Now, trust in higher education is plunging, and foreign applications are falling sharply – a trend that is no doubt compounded by Trump's broader immigration crackdown. These developments jeopardise not only US academic freedom, but also America's long-standing economic, scientific, and technological edge.

One can only hope that the Trump administration's assaults on higher education will prove to be short-lived, and the US will recommit to promoting academic freedom, welcoming international students, and supporting universities as incubators of groundbreaking ideas. With China investing heavily in building world-class universities, courting foreign talent, and strengthening ties between industry and academia, the US cannot afford to take its academic primacy for granted. How the global "brain race" unfolds will affect technological leadership, economic power, and geopolitical influence for decades to come. – Project Syndicate

• Lee Jong-Wha, Professor of Economics at Korea University, is a former chief economist at the Asian Development Bank and a former senior adviser for international economic affairs to the president of South Korea.

# US airlines reap rewards from premium travel strategy amid demand slump

- Bigger-spending travellers offset spending pullback by price-sensitive customers
- Airline executives see premium cabins as 'profit differentiator'
- Premium seat growth has outpaced main cabin sales growth since 2019
- Risk of supply glut in premium seats as airlines expand offerings

By Rajesh Kumar Singh/Reuters  
Chicago

**U**S airlines doubled down on high-end travel after the pandemic to drive up profits and reduce their vulnerability to economic swings.

The strategy is paying off as the margins of carriers selling premium seats have held up despite a slump in overall travel demand. Strong demand from affluent travellers is helping airlines offset a pullback in spending by price-sensitive customers.

Delta Air Lines last week reported a 5% year-on-year jump in its second-quarter premium ticket revenue, compared to a 5% decline in main cabin revenue. The 10-percentage-point gap was the widest since the pandemic, helping it post a double-digit margin in the April-June quarter. Similarly, premium cabin revenue helped United Airlines mitigate the financial hit from operational constraints at Newark airport near New York City — one of its largest hubs — and increase its earnings in the latest quarter. United's premium revenue rose 5.6% in the June quarter from a year ago. Its overall passenger revenue grew just 1.1%. The industry saw a similar trend in the first quarter when President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs raised the spectre of an economic recession, hammering airline bookings.

"Premium capacity remains resilient," said United's Chief Commercial Officer Andrew Nocella.

Airline executives have attributed the resilient demand for premium travel to the healthy financial conditions of US households with earnings of \$100,000, which account for 75% of air travel spending.

While an April sell-off in financial markets after Trump announced tariffs raised the risk of undermining that demand, a sharp rebound in US stocks since then has eased those concerns.

"Our core consumer is in good shape and continues to prioritise travel," Delta CEO Ed Bastian said last week.

In contrast, lingering uncertainty about the



broader economy and rising living costs have taken a toll on demand from less-affluent customers.

Bank of America data shows, while spending by middle- and higher-income households held up in June, lower-income household spending turned negative. Low-fare carrier JetBlue Airways last month told staff that it was planning new cost-cutting measures as soft demand made achieving a breakeven operating margin in 2025 "unlikely," according to an internal memo seen by Reuters.

Summer travel season tends to be the most

profitable for carriers. But weak demand for main cabin seats has forced airlines to offer sales to fill planes.

Discount carriers such as Frontier and Spirit Airlines are aggressively slashing flights to prevent more discounting pressure.

Airline executives say premium cabins have become "the profit differentiator" in the industry. Since premium travellers tend to be less price-sensitive, carriers expect them to be less affected by economic shifts, making their spending more stable

and offering a buffer in a downturn.

At Delta, premium revenue accounted for 43% of passenger revenue in the June quarter, up from 35% in 2019. It has helped the Atlanta-based carrier become a pre-tax margin leader post-pandemic. The company expects its revenue from premium cabins to surpass that from main cabins in 2027.

Diversified revenues, including from premium cabins, have helped shares of Delta and United outperform the broader industry in the past two years.

Encouraged by the payoff, carriers are further ramping up investments to make their premium offerings more attractive.

United has unveiled new premium suites with privacy doors on its new Boeing 787-9 planes. The suites will have 27-inch screens, luxury skincare amenities, and caviar and wine pairings.

Alaska Airlines is on track to increase the share of premium seats on its flights to 29% by next summer from 26% currently.

Faced with weak margins, budget airlines are now also trying to tap into the high-end market.

JetBlue, which has reported a profit in just two of its last nine quarters, is putting first-class seats on domestic flights and opening its first airport lounges in New York and Boston.

Frontier is retrofitting the first two rows of its aircraft with first-class seats. Spirit, long known for its no-frills service, is seeking to rebrand itself as a premium airline to turn around its business.

The number of premium seats in the US domestic market has increased by 14% since 2019, more than three times the growth in main cabin seats, according to data from Visual Approach Analytics. The rush to add premium seats is hampering aircraft deliveries. It also risks causing a supply glut, hurting pricing power.

But Alaska CEO Ben Minicucci downplayed those concerns, saying premium travel is more about an experience than a seat.

"We see it as an end-to-end premium experience that people will pay for and people expect," Minicucci said in an interview.

## The cost of capital is a public-health emergency for Africa

By Serah Makka and Rosemary Mburu  
Washington, DC

**M**ay's 78th World Health Assembly (WHA) — the annual meeting of the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s member states — ended on a self-congratulatory note. From an agreement on pandemic preparedness to increases in assessed contributions to the WHO, there were plenty of achievements to tout. But there was an elephant in the room, hiding behind a banner reading "One World for Health" (the event's theme): the high borrowing costs faced by African countries.

Despite being the world's youngest continent, Africa bears 24% of the global disease burden. Yet it accounts for less than 1% of global health spending. In 2001, African countries decided to take matters into their own hands, pledging to devote at least 15% of national budgets to health. Yet, more than two decades later, only two countries have reached that target. On average, governments on the continent allocate a mere 1.48% of their GDP to health, while 37% of health spending comes directly out of citizens' pockets.

Borrowing costs are a major reason why. Whereas high-income countries borrow at an interest rate of 2-3%, their African counterparts can face rates above 10%. This discrepancy — which reflects investors' perception of heightened risk in African economies — means that governments on the continent often must choose between making debt payments or buying medicines, hiring doctors, and building health clinics. The cost of capital costs lives.

Consider Kenya's ill-fated Managed Equipment Services (MES) programme, a public-private partnership aimed at enhancing service availability at hospitals through the provision of modern equipment. The programme did provide high-tech equipment to many hospitals. But, given the cost of capital for investment, Kenya could not deliver the infrastructure or personnel to use it.

In Ghana, where debt-service costs have left little fiscal space, nearly 75% of the government's health budget now goes to healthcare workers' wages, leaving little funding for other crucial expenses, from medicines to maternal-health programmes. In 2023, a shortage of antimalarial drugs forced some rural clinics to direct patients to purchase the medicine they needed directly from private

pharmacies. Many families thus faced a harrowing choice between being driven further into poverty and sending a loved one to an early grave.

For many African countries, high borrowing costs have contributed to dependence on the goodwill of foreign donors. But aid-dependent health-care systems are fundamentally fragile. We saw this during the Covid-19 pandemic, and we are seeing it now, as European countries scale back their development spending to free up space for other priorities, and the US dismantles its entire aid apparatus, beginning with the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

In Malawi, those cuts have already forced critical programmes, such as for HIV treatment and prevention, to scramble for funds. Local NGOs have been forced to lay off outreach workers, and patients with tuberculosis or HIV have gone without care. As one community health nurse in South Africa lamented, "My fear is mortality is going to be very high."

Africans' health cannot depend on the generosity of others. Governments must be able to invest in stable, resilient, self-sustaining health systems. To raise funds, Senegal and Zambia are experimenting with "health taxes" on alcohol and sugary drinks. Debt-for-health swaps in countries like Seychelles have shown promise. Nigeria's diaspora health bonds could unlock billions in financing if they are matched with concessional capital and guarantees from multilateral banks.

Ultimately, there is no substitute for affordable, predictable capital. That is why lowering borrowing costs must be a key priority at the G20 summit this November.

This means, first, tackling structural factors such as outdated international regulations and biases in risk assessments. It also means delivering timely and meaningful debt relief. This will require innovative mechanisms, such as debt-for-health swaps, and increasing the use of pause clauses in existing loans and new debt contracts that allow for debt payment suspension when a pandemic strikes.

A third priority must be to secure continued political support for multilateral health programmes — such as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria — thereby ensuring continuity in the delivery of the relevant health services. Finally, the G20 must seek to expand African countries' access to concessional financing for health infrastructure through multilateral development banks.

The G20 is the right forum for these actions. Its mandate includes addressing global challenges, promoting economic co-operation, and fostering global stability. The cost of capital is beyond any one country's capacity to address, and it is producing a destabilising global-health emergency. The upcoming G20 summit, the first to be held in Africa — and the second with the African Union as a permanent member — represents a particularly fitting moment for such action.

Within African countries, mechanisms — based on civil-society engagement — for ensuring accountability for how funds are spent are also essential. But the first step must be to free up the funds. To achieve "One World for Health," all countries must be able to access the means to invest in healthcare. — Project Syndicate



● Serah Makka is Africa Executive Director at The ONE Campaign. Rosemary Mburu is Executive Director of WACI Health.

## Brazil's moment to lead on forest conservation

By Keith Tuffley  
Ollon, Switzerland

**W**ith greenhouse-gas emissions still rising globally and nature loss continuing apace, the Amazon rainforest is approaching a tipping point. To avert climate catastrophe, the world must make rapid and significant progress on protecting forests and building a sustainable, inclusive bio-economy. And Brazil must lead the way, starting at this November's UN Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Belém.

The Amazon represents one of the planet's most powerful defences against climate change. It is more than a carbon sink; it is a reservoir of biodiversity, a regulator of rainfall across South America, and a vital component of our planet's climate system. As the custodian of nearly 60% of the Amazon, Brazil has not only a responsibility to be a good steward, but also an opportunity to demonstrate global leadership at a pivotal moment for people and the planet.

Brazil seems to recognise this. The government's renewed commitment to forest protection, under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's administration, is reflected in a sharp decline in deforestation rates. But this is just the beginning. Brazil is also working to deliver the bold ideas, scalable finance, and robust partnerships that the global green transformation demands.

Nature-based solutions — which simultaneously advance environmental imperatives and ensure sustainable economic growth — are central to this effort. Recognising that the preservation of existing nature produces the fastest, most cost-effective results, these solutions are typically based on three pillars: protect, restore, and manage.

To protect forests, Brazil is advancing innovative approaches, both domestically and internationally. At home, the country is helping to pioneer a jurisdictional approach, which links carbon finance to state-level action to protect forests, as part of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's framework for "reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries" (REDD+).

Brazil's jurisdictional REDD+ programmes reward regions for reducing deforestation, enhancing forest carbon stocks, and ensuring that benefits reach indigenous peoples and local communities. The state of Tocantins is a worthy example: its forest-protection programme, which aims to generate high-integrity carbon credits, has been shaped by inclusive public consultations and features strong governance. An initial issuance of jurisdictional REDD+ credits is expected early next year.

At the international level, Brazil has proposed a \$125bn Tropical Forest Forever Facility, which would reward developing countries with historically low rates of deforestation and compensate them for upholding good stewardship. Unlike carbon markets, which focus on verified reductions in emissions, the TFF would provide predictable, long-term payments to countries based on the number of hectares



conserved.

These two approaches are highly complementary. Jurisdictional programmes address the imperative of reducing deforestation now through performance-based finance, while the TFF offers the steady, long-term support that is needed to sustain those gains. Together, they correct a critical market failure: the undervaluing of standing forests.

Forest protection is not easy: it demands rigorous oversight, transparent benefit-sharing, and unwavering community engagement. But when done right, it can unlock significant climate finance, catalyse private-sector participation, and drive sustainable development. The Race to Belém initiative, of which I am CEO, aims to make the most of this potential by mobilising a huge amount of private-sector investment for forest protection in advance of COP30.

But protection is only the first pillar. Brazil is also making strides in nature restoration and sustainable land management. It has set a number of ambitious goals, including restoring 12mn hectares of forested areas by 2030; converting 40mn hectares of degraded pastureland into productive systems for food, biofuels, and high-productivity forests over the next decade; and promoting a bioeconomy that respects nature and people. The Brazil Restoration and Bioeconomy Finance Coalition, which seeks to mobilise \$10bn in private investment by 2030, underscores the growing role of the business sector in this process.

Far from just another diplomatic gathering, COP30 is shaping up to be a defining moment for climate action — and, in particular, forest protection, restoration, and management. With Belém located on the edge of the Amazon, delegates will be immersed in the landscape they seek to protect. More important, their host will present them with a menu of proven nature-based solutions — behind which political momentum and private-sector support are already building — that address the many causes of forest loss.

The foundations for transformative action are already in place. The challenge will be for Brazil to build on its success in harnessing national policy, subnational action, and private-sector engagement to accelerate progress and spearhead a new global model of climate action. — Project Syndicate

● Keith Tuffley, a former head of investment banking, partner, and board member of Goldman Sachs Australia, is CEO of Race to Belém, a group campaigning to raise finance for forest protection in Brazil.



Al Gharrafa Park is one of the top summer destinations for everyone seeking to follow a healthy lifestyle. **PICTURES:** Thajudheen

## Al Gharrafa Park a cool destination for everyone in summer

By Shafeeq Alingal  
Staff Reporter

**D**ue to high temperatures and humidity during summer, going out for a walk and engaging in outdoor physical activities are not often a desired choice in Qatar.

However, many find that Al Gharrafa Park, where there are air-conditioned pedestrian and jogging tracks, allows them to stay active and engage in outdoor sport even during the height of summer.

With beautifully landscaped gardens, cycling paths, children's play areas, shaded seating and facilities for people with special needs, Al Gharrafa Park is one of the top summer destinations for everyone seeking to follow a healthy lifestyle.

"The air conditioned outdoor walking track here is one of the innovative ideas that encourage the public to exercise in the summer," said park regular Abdul Rahman Abdul Kareem. "It provides a respite from humidity and heat, while drawing many towards physical engagement. The walkway is witnessing increasing numbers of walkers and joggers."

Al Gharrafa Park boasts of the region's first air-conditioned pedestrian and jogging tracks.

It offers a 657m air-conditioned walking and running track, designed in a circular shape to encompass the entire park.

An integrated cooling and air

conditioning system is also provided for the walking and running paths throughout the park to make sure that the temperatures remain between 26-28°C.

"The plant fence and the lush green lawn further add to the beauty and the vibe at the park while imparting an atmosphere and a space to refresh," Abdul Kareem, a resident of Madinat Khalifa, said. "The plants here also contribute to mitigating the summer heat."

The Islamic Mashrabiya-style structures are installed to allow air circulation from air conditioners.

Solar panels along the corridor generate electricity and provide a plant fence at a suitable height.

Fast-growing climber veins cover the pedestrian tracks from all directions.

The solar panels generate electricity to operate air conditioners if the ambient temperature does not exceed 37°C, without the need to use conventional air conditioners, thus saving 60% of electricity.

The park has 343 trees, two exercise areas with fitness equipment, and two children's play areas for age groups from 2-5 years and 6-12 years, as well as children with special needs.

The park has four restaurant kiosks, a bicycle rental kiosk, green wall on the facades of male and female toilet buildings, bicycle parking, as well as garden furniture from locally manufactured fibre-concrete benches, garbage cans, shades and drinking water basins.

