



Qatar Insurance Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written
Premiums (GWP)

9%
QAR 9.9B

Net Profit
Before the Impact of
Pillar Two Taxes

19%
QAR 874M

Net Profit
Profit attributable to
QIC shareholders

9%
QAR 791M

Earnings
Per Share:

10%
QAR 0.188

qic-group.com

GULF TIMES



SATURDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13665

February 28, 2026
Ramadan 11, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Published in
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BUSINESS | Page 1

Qatar Islamic Bank's \$750mn sukuk oversubscribes 2.3 times

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Amir condolences with Kuwait Amir

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 condolences to Kuwait Amir Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah on the passing of Sabika Duaij al-Salman, the widow of the late Sheikh Jaber al-Ali al-Salem al-Sabah. (QNA)

Minister holds phone call with Pakistan's deputy prime minister

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi held a phone call yesterday with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan Muhammad Ishaq Dar. The two sides discussed efforts to de-escalate tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the aim of promoting security and stability across the region. HE al-Khulaifi reaffirmed Qatar's full support for all efforts aimed at resolving conflicts through peaceful means and reinforcing the foundations of peace and stability at both the regional and international levels. (QNA)

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PM receives phone call from Turkish FM



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received a phone call from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkiye Hakan Fidan. During the call, the two sides discussed bilateral co-operation relations and ways to enhance them, in addition to the latest regional developments and issues of mutual interest. The two sides underscored the importance of intensifying regional and international efforts to de-escalate tensions through dialogue and peaceful means, in a manner that contributes to strengthening regional security. (QNA)

Qatar, Saudi enhance bilateral ties



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi met with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Engineer Walid bin Abdul Karim al-Khuraiji, on the sidelines of the extraordinary open-ended meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) at the level of foreign ministers, held in Jeddah. During the meeting, the two sides discussed bilateral co-operation and ways to support and develop it, in addition to a number of topics of common interest. (QNA)

Friday prayers at Al-Aqsa

Worshippers offer Friday prayers at the Al-Aqsa compound in the Old City of Jerusalem yesterday. Approximately 100,000 worshippers performed the second Friday prayer of Ramadan yesterday amid tightened security. The Taraweeh prayers have seen between 35,000 and 50,000 attendees daily over the past week.



Qatar slams rights violations in occupied Palestinian territories

Calls on international community to ensure accountability for crimes against Palestinian people; OIC foreign ministers condemn Israeli settlement moves

QNA
Geneva

Qatar has called for an end to the protection and support provided to Israel, urging the international community to take all necessary measures to ensure accountability for crimes and human rights violations against the Palestinian people. The statement was delivered by HE Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah, Qatar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva, during an interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner's remarks on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The session was held as part of the 61st regular session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.

HE al-Muftah said the world was witnessing daily scenes of grave crimes and violations committed by Israeli forces against Palestinians in the occupied ter-

ritories and the Gaza Strip. She cited killings, starvation, mass forced displacement, the suffering of women and children, and the targeting of civilian facilities, schools, hospitals and journalists, as well as the destruction and confiscation of property, arbitrary arrests and torture. She also referred to policies of apartheid and ethnic cleansing, saying the situation had reached an unprecedented level of severity and had rendered Gaza uninhabitable, in violation of international law.

The State of Qatar urged the international community to move beyond "double standards" and assume its legal and moral responsibilities to protect the Palestinian people, end the Israeli occupation and advance the peace process. It reiterated support for the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent, fully sovereign state on the June 4, 1967 borders.

Meanwhile, foreign ministers of the Organisation of Islamic

Co-operation (OIC), at a meeting in Jeddah yesterday, condemned Israel's recent settlement expansion and what they described as illegal annexation measures in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. In a final statement, ministers rejected steps aimed at altering the status of Palestinian territory and denounced remarks by US ambassador Mike Huckabee, as well as a US Embassy decision to provide consular services to settlers.

The OIC called for advancing the next phase of President Donald Trump's plan, securing a permanent Gaza ceasefire, full Israeli withdrawal, and unrestricted humanitarian access. The ministers reaffirmed support for Palestinian reconstruction and the territorial unity of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

They also voiced concern over rising regional tensions, including threats against Iran, while welcoming renewed diplomacy between Tehran and Washington.

Qatar delegation attends OIC Executive Committee meeting

Qatar has participated in an extraordinary open-ended meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) at the level of foreign ministers, held at the group's General Secretariat headquarters in Jeddah. HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi led the Qatari delegation to the meeting. The agenda included discussions on Israeli occupation authorities' illegal measures aimed at expanding settlements,



pursuing annexation policies and attempting to impose Israeli sovereignty over the occupied West Bank. (QNA)

Sidra highlights precision medicine breakthrough for rare genetic condition

Sidra Medicine, a member of Qatar Foundation, has highlighted the real-world impact of precision medicine on a six-year-old patient with a rare genetic condition. Marking Rare Disease Day observed today (Feb 28), the case shows how genomic research can directly inform clinical care and support early diagnosis and guided targeted treatment. "Precision medicine at Sidra Medicine is not confined to the laboratory – it is embedded into everyday clinical care, particularly for children with rare genetic conditions," said Prof Khalid Fakhro, chief research officer at Sidra Medicine. "This case exemplifies how research and care work together to deliver earlier diagnoses, better outcomes, and truly personalised medicine for children and their families." A six-year-old, patient S (name withheld), was presented with velopharyngeal insufficiency, significant speech delay, and distinct craniofacial features. While these symptoms were

initially managed through specialist clinical services, the combination and complexity of findings raised concerns that they may be part of an underlying genetic condition requiring further investigation. "For years, we knew something was not right, but we did not have clear answers," said the young girl's family. "The uncertainty was difficult, and we were worried about her future. Receiving a definitive diagnosis helped us understand what she needed and gave us reassurance that she was finally receiving the right care." The patient was enrolled in Sidra Medicine's Mendelian research programme, where she underwent Whole Genome Sequencing as part of a research-led diagnostic pathway designed to identify rare and complex genetic disorders. Genomic analysis confirmed a diagnosis of 22q11.2 deletion syndrome, also known as DiGeorge syndrome – a rare genetic condition that can affect multiple body systems. It is

often challenging to diagnose due to its highly variable clinical presentation. The definitive diagnosis brought an end to prolonged diagnostic uncertainty and provided clinicians with a clear framework to anticipate associated health risks, enabling proactive clinical planning and long-term preventive care. With a confirmed genetic diagnosis, Sidra Medicine's teams co-ordinated a comprehensive, multidisciplinary care pathway tailored to the known health risks associated with 22q11.2 deletion syndrome. "The genetic diagnosis fundamentally changed how we approached this case," said Prof Ibrahim Janahi, chief medical officer at Sidra Medicine. "It gave us clarity about the underlying condition and the risks associated with it. With that insight, our medical teams were able to intervene early and plan treatment with precision. Instead of waiting for complications to develop, we acted proactively." To prevent further complications from emerging, the patient



was proactively referred for targeted screening and consultations across multiple sites at Sidra Medicine. This included cardiology, immunology, ophthalmology, and craniofacial services – enabling early identification and management of potential concerns. The patient underwent specialised craniofacial surgery to treat velopharyngeal insufficiency, a condition in which the soft palate does not close properly during speech. The procedure significantly improved her speech

clarity and communication, addressing one of the primary challenges that initially led her family to seek medical care. She was also referred for non-cleft-related velopharyngeal insufficiency, which affected her speech and caused hypernasal resonance. "Although there was no cleft, the velopharyngeal insufficiency significantly affected her speech," said Dr Mitchell Stotland, vice-chair of Surgery at Sidra Medicine. "In May 2025, we performed a sphincter pharyngoplasty,

The improvement in her speech clarity was immediate and transformative, as the intervention significantly enhanced her communication and confidence." Today, the young girl continues to receive co-ordinated, preventive follow-up care tailored to her genetic condition. Early diagnosis and timely intervention, combined with ongoing multidisciplinary support, have significantly improved her day-to-day quality of life and reduced the likelihood of future complications.

Time for sharing



Residents gather at a park in Qatar to share Iftar at sunset, spreading mats on the grass as families and friends come together in a spirit of community and reflection during Ramadan. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen

Lebanese PM meets Qatar's ambassador



Lebanon's Prime Minister Dr Nawaf Salam met yesterday with Qatar's ambassador to Lebanon Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations and the latest developments in Lebanon and the region. - **QNA**

OFFICIAL

Amir congratulates Dominican leader

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani sent a cable of congratulations to Dominican Republic's President Luis Rodolfo Abinader on the occasion of his country's independence day. 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 similarly sent cables of congratulations to Abinader on the occasion of his country's independence day. - **QNA**

Dr al-Khulaifi takes phone call from Afghan minister

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi received a phone call yesterday from Afghanistan's Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi. During the call, they discussed ways to de-escalate tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, in a move that supports security and stability in the region. HE Dr al-Khulaifi reiterated Qatar's full support for all efforts aimed at resolving disputes through peaceful means and strengthening the foundations of peace and stability at both regional and international levels. - **QNA**

Ministry launches initiative for MIA cleaning workers

The Ministry of Municipality, represented by the Public Cleanliness Department, in co-operation with the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, organised on Thursday a community initiative for cleaning workers at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA). The initiative comes within the framework of highlighting the human and social dimension of municipal work and promoting a culture of appreciation for the field workers

who contribute directly to maintaining public cleanliness and quality of life. It also aims to integrate this group into the country's cultural landscape, in line with the societal values embodied by the holy month of Ramadan. Approximately 400 workers from the Public Cleanliness Department, participated in the initiative. The programme featured a lecture that addressed the importance of work integrity



and cleanliness, linking professional excellence with religious values and highlighting the role of cleaning workers in showcasing the country's civilised image. The visit included a tour of the museum. Muqbil al-Shammari, the director of the Public Cleanliness Department at the Ministry of Municipality, said that this initiative expresses genuine appreciation for the

sanitation workers who work daily in the field. He emphasised their essential role in maintaining public health and the civilised appearance of the country, noting that involving these workers in major cultural events strengthens their sense of belonging and reinforces a culture of respect for their work. - **QNA**

Auction of six fancy plate numbers nets QR88,000

The Department of Evictions and Judicial Auctions at the Supreme Judicial Council conducted an auction for fancy vehicle licence plate numbers on February 25, generating QR88,000 in proceeds for the benefit of six cases. The number of bids in the online auction for the six plate numbers, all of which were sold, was 88.

Qatar's permanent mission in Geneva co-organises event on youth and AI

The Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations Office at Geneva, in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Tajikistan and under the auspices of the Permanent Mission of the Co-operation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), organised a side event on Wednesday on "Youth and Artificial Intelligence: Shaping a Human Rights Future" on the sidelines of the 61st session of the Human Rights Council. The event was attended by representatives of diplomatic missions in

Geneva, international and regional organisations, civil society organisations concerned with youth and human rights issues, as well as experts and specialists in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital policies. In her opening remarks, First Secretary of Qatar's Permanent Mission in Geneva Sarah Abdulaziz al-Khater noted that the Human Rights Council, in Resolution 59/11 on "New and Emerging Digital Technologies and Human Rights" adopted last year, called upon Member States and other stakeholders to prevent harm to individu-

als caused by emerging technologies, including AI systems. She added that the resolution also urged refraining from using AI applications that cannot be operated in accordance with international human rights law or that pose an unjustifiable risk to the enjoyment of human rights, or to cease their use until adequate safeguards are in place to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. QatarDebate youth advocate Hamad al-Mahdi meanwhile emphasised the importance of collective reflection on the trajectory of AI technologies, noting that

society stands at a critical juncture in this field. He said that young people should not be passive users of AI, but active partners in shaping its development and guiding its future. The side event highlighted the opportunities presented by AI in empowering youth and enhancing education and access to knowledge, while also addressing challenges related to privacy protection, reducing algorithmic bias, and ensuring a safe and responsible digital environment. - **QNA**

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S.N	CUSTOMER NAME	AMOUNT IN QAR	S.N	CUSTOMER NAME	AMOUNT IN QAR	S.N	CUSTOMER NAME	AMOUNT IN QAR
1.	AHMED LARBI	15.85	26.	SARDAR AND BROTHERS FOR CONSTRUCTION AND	550.96	51.	DHAKA TRADING SHOWROOM CO WLL	435.12
2.	THREE CONTRACTORS FOR CONTRACTING	625.00	27.	INCEPTION LANGUAGES CENTER W.L.L	22.21	52.	ADROIT EVENT SOLUTIONS CO WLL	1,577.82
3.	EVANGELINE BILAOEN LAPITAN	289.06	28.	MOHAMED ELSAYED	192.92	53.	AL REMAIHI GROUP	7,111.23
4.	ROMEL LONGOY MASCARINAS	300.00	29.	AL-ASIL COMPUTERS & SERVICES	976.00	54.	EMPOWER TRADING AND CONTRACTING WLL	393.00
5.	BRONZE FOR STATIONERY TRADING WLL	743.00	30.	SHAMSHEER THANISSERY KANDY	881.50	55.	SAMI AHMED IBRAHIM ABOUEITA	278.59
6.	AHMED BAYOUMY MOHMED BAYOUMY	78.24	31.	MOSES DHASON	1.38	56.	SUPREME COUNCIL OF HEALTH	20,000.00
7.	NOUSHAD NARIKOT	1,635.29	32.	ICODE TRADING AND CONTRACTING WLL	115.91	57.	BENJIE SALAZAR TURLA	353.55
8.	DENNIS CATALAN DOCTO	216.75	33.	MUHAMED ASRAF VAYALIL	162.42	58.	NIZAR CHOMAYIL	242.73
9.	DANILO SAGUN ALVIAR	286.92	34.	MAHMOUD MOHAMMAD M ABU ARAB	1,281.11	59.	FRANSIL LEON MORATO MAYOR	171.75
10.	INFOSAT LIMOUSINE WLL	4,006.38	35.	ANWAR BAPPUTTY	71.92	60.	REHAB BEAUTY SALOON	10,738.00
11.	INFRASTRUCTURE SOLUTIONS ALM WLL	768.95	36.	FARAZ AHMED YAR KHAN	0.19	61.	MARWAN NIMER AL AYYOUSH	7,726.80
12.	ABILITY LOGISTICS WLL	257.35	37.	ANOOP KARIPAKULAM ALI	71.33	62.	GREEN EARTH INTERNATIONAL TRAD & CONT WLL	2,821.00
13.	HAIR AND MORE WLL	470.00	38.	ANSAR VALIYAKATH ASHRAF	38.59	63.	PURE WATER TECH	98.40
14.	JIN HYOK PAK	129.42	39.	UNNIKRISHNAN BANANGADU	339.78	64.	SPACE PLANNING INTERNATIONAL ADMIN	6,930.00
15.	IMANE BOUAOUINA	100.00	40.	GABY ENTOWAN EL MARDINI	1,266.00	65.	CRESCENT TECHNICAL SERVICES & CONTRACTING	504.48
16.	BASSEM HOSSNY YAAKOUB HANNA	678.47	41.	GRANT MART TRADING CO WLL	25,975.00	66.	Q MIX TRADING	12,423.38
17.	KARIM SAFWAT	28.26	42.	REEM QATAR TRADING AND GENERAL CONT	27,457.00	67.	ABSOLUTE TRADING	4,174.94
18.	JACQUILINE RIZADA	3.64	43.	ZEN ELABEDIN AHMED ELSAYED DESOUKI	80.33	68.	GREAT QATAR TRADING & ENGINEERING CO	1,742.80
19.	SYED ALI AGHFAR RIZVI	0.79	44.	MUHAMMAD YOUSAF	45.00	69.	FAYCAL MEKNI GHANMI	669.19
20.	LEO JR LOPEZ ROSELLO	121.34	45.	SUBAIR CHEMBA CHARU VEETIL	72.57	70.	FAHAD NASSER AL MANA	5,975.00
21.	LEO JR LOPEZ ROSELLO	6.47	46.	AMMAN TRADING & CONTRACTING	175.00	71.	EMPIRE GROUP WLL	116.92
22.	INDIKA SHAMAN WELAGEDARA	0.89	47.	CENTRAL TENDERS COMMITTEE	2,000.00	72.	VILAMBATH SANKARA NARAYANAN	3,550.00
23.	BENSHI TRADING AND CONTRACTING WLL	354.26	48.	BISWANATH RASINDRA NATH HALDER	84.06	73.	MOHAMED M PAKANCHI KINATTIN KA	362.41
24.	REAL TRACK RENT A CAR REAL ESTATE A	908.80	49.	DREAMS HYPER MARKET WLL	1,111.00	74.	MINISTRY OF INTERIOR FINANCE AFFAIRS DEP	2,890.00
25.	AL MOHSEN ENGINEERING WLL	1,468.05	50.	PROFESSOR RECONSTRUCTION DEVELOPMENT	8,235.00			

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Winners of Bithrah Platform Awards for 2025-2026 honoured

HE the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Subaie honoured the winners of the 2025-2026 "Bithrah" (Seed) Platform Awards during a ceremony organised by the ministry to mark Qatar Environment Day 2026. The recognition celebrated participants who presented innovative solutions and initiatives supporting environmental sustainability across the country.

Among those in attendance were HE Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture, Dr Ghanem bin Mubarak bin Ghanem Mohamed al-Ali; CEO of Msheireb Properties, Engineer Ali Mohamed al-Kuwari; Assistant Undersecretary for Protection and Natural Reserves Affairs, Dr Ibrahim Abdul Latif al-Musallamani; and Assistant Undersecretary for Environmental Affairs, Youssef Ibrahim al-Hamar.

The awards drew strong participation from across society, underscoring growing environmental awareness and a deepening culture of innovation in Qatar. A total of 193 submissions were received, including 51 entries for the Environmental Creativity and Innovation Award, 132 for the Environmental Photography Award, and 10 for the Sustainable Eco-Camp Award.

The Bithrah Platform Awards span a broad range of environ-



mental themes, including climate change and its impacts, biodiversity, sustainable environmental solutions, the circular economy and recycling, pollution reduction, environmental awareness, and the aesthetic appreciation of Qatar's natural landscape. The diversity of topics reflects alignment with national environmental priorities and the country's long-term sustainability vision.

Dr Farhoud Hadi al-Hajri, director of Public Relations and Communication at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, said the Bithrah platform continues to transform creative ideas into practical projects by fostering an innovation-friendly

ecosystem, supporting promising initiatives, and empowering individuals to propose solutions that address environmental challenges and advance sustainability in Qatar. He commended the high calibre of submissions, noting a marked rise in public awareness and engagement in environmental preservation.

He reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to launching initiatives and programmes that encourage environmental innovation and support sustainable development goals, inviting the public to visit the Bithrah digital platform through the ministry's official website to explore upcoming initiatives and competitions.

Virtues of voluntary night prayer

Qiyam (voluntary night prayer) is one of the best acts of worship that bring one closer to Allah The Almighty. It is highly recommended at all times of the year, and even more so in the holy month of Ramadan. The texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Prophetic tradition) urge Muslims to perform it and they state its unique status and great reward from Allah The Almighty.

Allah The Almighty praises the people of faith with certain characteristics and deeds, and one of the most noble of these deeds is their night prayer. Allah The Almighty Says (what means): { Only those believe in Our Ayat (proofs, evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.), who, when they are reminded of them, fall down prostrate, and glorify the Praises of their Lord, and they are not proud. Their sides forsake their beds, to invoke their Lord in fear and hope, and they spend (in charity in Allah's Cause) out of what We have bestowed on them. No person knows what is kept hidden for them of joy as a reward for what they used to do.} [Qur'an 32:15-17]

Allah The Almighty describes His faithful slaves Saying (what means): { And those who spend the night in worship of their Lord, prostrate and standing (in prayer).} [Qur'an 25:64] He describes the righteous people as the ones who pray at night and seek His forgiveness before dawn; He Says (what means): { Verily, the Muttaqun (the pious) will be in the midst of Gardens and Springs (in the Paradise), Taking joy in the things which their Lord has given them. Verily, they were before this Muhsinun (doers of good). They used to sleep but little by night (invoking their Lord (Allah) and praying, with fear and hope). And in the hours before dawn, they were (found) asking (Allah) for forgiveness.} [Qur'an 51:15-18]

The night prayer plays a significant role in making one's faith firm and helping one bear the burden of calling to Allah The Almighty. Allah The Almighty ordered His Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, to adhere to it Saying (what means): { O you who wraps himself (in clothing) Arise (to pray) the night, except for a little - half of it - or subtract from it a little. Or add to it, and recite the Qur'an with measured recitation. Indeed, We will cast upon you a heavy word. Indeed, the hours of the night are more effective for concurrence (of heart and tongue) and more suitable for words.} [Qur'an 73:1-6]

There are many Hadiths (narrations) that show the virtues of the voluntary night prayer and that it is the habit of the righteous people of all nations. The

Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Adhere to the night prayer, for it was the habit of righteous people before you, a means of seeking closeness to your Lord, an expiation for sins, and a deterrent against committing sins." [Al-Haakim]

It is the best prayer after the obligatory prayer. In an authentic Hadith the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The best prayer after the prescribed prayers is praying in the middle of the night." [Muslim] He, , also said: "The closest a person gets to his Lord is in the middle of the night, so try to be one of those who remember Allah at that hour." [At-Tirmithi]

One of the greatest causes of having one's supplication answered is praying at night; 'Amr ibn 'Anbasah As-Sulami said:

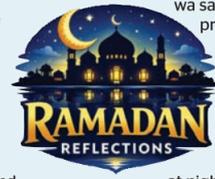
"I asked the Messenger of Allah in which part of the night is one's supplication more likely to be accepted? He replied: 'In the last part of the night, so pray as much as you like, for the prayer is witnessed and recorded (by the angels) till you offer the dawn prayer.'" [Abu Daawood] And also Jaabir said that he heard the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, saying: "There is an hour during the night in which no Muslim individual will ask Allah for good in this world and the next without His giving it to him; and that applies to every night." [Muslim]

The night prayer is one of the means of entering Paradise and attaining its high grades; Abu Maalik al-Ash'ari said: The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "There are chambers in Paradise, its outside can be seen from its inside, and vice versa, Allah prepared them for those who speak tenderly, feed others, fast continuously, and pray at night while people are sleeping." [Ahmad]

Dear reader, be sure to perform the night prayer on a daily basis, even if it is little so as not to be one of the heedless; the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever observes the night prayer even with the length of reciting 10 verses he will not be recorded as heedless." [Abu Daawood] Be sure to pray Taraweeh (voluntary night prayer) during this holy month, and do not leave until the Imam leaves so as to receive the reward of praying the whole night; the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Whoever prays the night prayer with the Imam until he finishes the prayer, will receive the reward of praying the whole night." [At-Tirmithi]

May Allah The Almighty accept our prayer and fasting, and help us to obey Him at all times.

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



National Paints Factories honours distinguished clients at gathering

In a special celebration reflecting the depth of its ties with partners in success, National Paints Factories - Doha held its annual dealers' gathering and honoured its distinguished clients on February 15 at the "Giovana" Hall, Radisson Blu Hotel.

The gathering was attended by Nasser bin Ahmed al-Khulaifi (partner), Mohammed bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, and Ahmed bin Saleh al-Khulaifi (deputy general managers), along with broad participation from representatives of the local press, TV and radio correspondents, and the company's management team.

Celebrating 2025 achievements and the 2026 vision

The event commenced with a welcome speech delivered by Mohammed bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, who greeted the attendees and announced the honouring of the company's Distinguished Clients for 2025, in appreciation of their outstanding performance and valuable contributions to the company's success.

Al-Khulaifi also highlighted the objectives of the gathering, which focused on: Updating clients on the company's strategic vision for 2026; showcasing the latest developments and new products through technical presentations by the company's engineering team; and strengthening communication channels and enhancing the level of co-operation with all partners



Honouring loyalty: A Quarter-century of dedication

In a gesture of appreciation, the company's management dedicated part of the event to honouring several employees who have served the company for more than 25 years. They were presented with commemorative shields in recognition of their sincere contributions and prominent role in the company's journey spanning a quarter-century.

Closing ceremony and awards distribution

The gathering concluded with the distribution of awards to distinguished clients, followed by a dinner banquet held in their honour. The evening was marked by a warm, mutual appreciation between the company's management and its partners, reaffirming the continuity of their shared success journey.

A tale from a bygone era: The Ramadan table - a reflection of life in Qatar

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

In traditional Qatari homes, the Ramadan table was a direct reflection of the lifestyle and environment. The dishes were limited, yet consistent and deeply rooted. Harees, Thareed, and Luqaimat were the centrepieces, along with dates, water, and milk.

The ingredients were mostly local, and the entire meal was prepared within the home. There wasn't much variety, but there was a sense of order. Every household knew what to prepare, and every neighbourhood knew the aroma of its dishes as sunset approached.

Harees, (traditional Qatari Harees consists primarily of a slow-cooked mixture of washed and soaked wheat grains (crushed or whole) and fresh meat (often lamb or fatty veal). The two ingredients are cooked together for an extended period until the wheat is tender, then the mixture is blended until smooth and seasoned with salt and authentic Qatari ghee), in particular, was a central dish, requiring time and effort to prepare, and cooked in quantities sufficient for the family and perhaps even the neighbours.

Thareed (Thareed is distinguished by the fact that it combines bread, meat, and vegetables in one, making it a complete meal both nutritionally and tastefully)



A typical Qatari Iftar.

was also a prominent feature, being a dish deeply rooted in Islamic and Gulf culture.

Luqaimat (Qatari dumplings) were the evening sweets after Taraweeh prayers, prepared at home and distributed to the children.

With the expansion of trade and increased imports in the 1970s and 80s, the table began to gradually change. New dishes have been introduced: a variety of soups, salads featuring imported ingredients, and a range of Arabic sweets. Later, dishes from Asia, Levant, and North African cuisines have emerged, reflecting the diverse communities in Qatar. The Iftar (Arabic for breaking the fast) table, which once consisted of three or four main courses, now includes ten or more.

The presentation style has also

changed. From a communal floor spread to large dining tables, and then to a buffet-style meal in some modern homes. Iftar is no longer a simple meal to be eaten and then cleared away; it has become an event that extends even after Taraweeh prayers.

Despite this expansion, some dishes remain steadfast. Harees is still present in many homes, even if only once or twice a week. Thareed remains an indispensable Ramadan symbol. Luqaimat are still fried on certain nights to maintain family traditions. Children and grandchildren may add pizza or international dishes, but ultimately, they still request "the Harees of the old days". Interestingly, the change has not been a replacement, but rather an addition. The new has entered, but it hasn't eliminated the old traditional dishes.

UDC launches 3rd The Pearl Island Ramadan Padel Tournament

Continuing its established Ramadan sporting tradition, United Development Company (UDC), the master developer of The Pearl Island and Gewan Island, officially launched the third edition of The Pearl Island Ramadan Padel Tournament for Men, taking place from February 22-March 3.

The tournament brings together 32 teams competing for the championship title in one of the most anticipated community sporting events of the holy month.

Each evening at 9pm, The Pearl Island's padel courts in Fanar Fayrouz come alive with dynamic competition, as skill, strategy, and determination unfold in an atmosphere defined by the spirit of unity and shared experience of Ramadan. Building on the strong momentum of previous editions, the tournament continues to strengthen its position on the community sporting calendar, particularly amid the growing popularity of padel as one of

the region's fastest-rising sports, known for its energy and spectator appeal.

The tournament reflects UDC's broader vision of cultivating an integrated and vibrant community through thoughtfully curated sporting initiatives that enhance quality of life. By providing well-organised, safe, and engaging environments for residents and visitors, UDC reinforces its commitment to investing in sports infrastructure, promoting healthy lifestyles, and fostering positive competition that strengthens social bonds.

Engineer Abdullatif Ali al-Yafei, executive director of Public Services at UDC, stated: "This third edition of the tournament reaffirms UDC's commitment to supporting sporting initiatives that bring our community together, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan.

"Through events such as our Ramadan football and padel tournaments, we continue to promote active lifestyles, social engage-



ment, and meaningful shared experiences. We wish all participating teams the best of success and look forward to welcoming residents and visitors to enjoy the

vibrant atmosphere of this special Ramadan event."

The tournament is expected to draw strong attendance throughout its duration, as The Pearl Is-



land's Ramadan sporting evenings offer families and sports enthusiasts an ideal setting to enjoy competitive matches in a distinctive and lively atmosphere.

UDC invites the public to attend the matches, support their favourite teams, and follow its official channels for the match schedule and ongoing updates.



Expatriate forum organises grand Iftar gathering in Doha

Qatar Tamizhar Sangam (QTS) organised a grand Iftar gathering for its members at Ashoka Hall, Indian Cultural Centre, recently.

The event witnessed an overwhelming participation of more than 250 people, including QTS members, sponsors and special invitees. The occasion was graced by the chief guest, Sandeep Kumar, deputy chief of the Indian embassy in Qatar. Other distinguished guests included AP Manikantan, president of the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC); Shanavas Bava, president of the Indian Community Benevo-

lent Forum (ICBF) and Azmy Ameer, president of Oryx University. Management committee members from ICC and ICBF, along with community leaders and representatives of various community organisations, were also present. Renowned Islamic scholar Imadhutheen Umari delivered a talk on the spiritual importance of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. Dr Rubaiya Rahmath Kifayathullah, general physician at Aster Clinic, spoke at a session on good health during Ramadan.

In keeping with the true spirit of Ramadan, QTS extended spe-

cial invitations to around 100 fishermen and blue-collar workers, reaffirming its commitment to compassion and inclusivity. As part of its welfare initiatives, QTS also provided free ICBF Life Insurance coverage to 50 low-income workers during the event. QTS also honoured Shaffi Nouman Hydress, Shajahan Rawther, and Jaseer JM with mementos, in recognition of their noble and selfless service with regard to the mortal remains of deceased individuals.

The event proceedings were conducted by QTS benevolent secretary Brama Kumar. QTS president Muniyappan welcomed the dignitaries and members, while the vote of thanks was delivered by QTS general secretary Narayanan. QTS has appealed to community members to join hands with the organisation and contribute towards serving the Indian community in Qatar. Those interested may contact QTS via WhatsApp at 33521857. More information about QTS and its activities is available at www.qatar-tamizharsangam.org



UK withdraws embassy staff from Iran temporarily

Germany advises 'urgently' against travel to Israel; Italy urges its citizens to leave Iran; France maintains advice to citizens not to travel to Israel, West Bank

Agencies
London

Britain said yesterday it had temporarily withdrawn its staff from Iran and closed its embassy, citing the security situation in the region.

US President Donald Trump briefly laid out his case for a possible attack on Iran in his State of the Union speech on Tuesday, underlining that while he preferred a diplomatic solution, he would not allow Tehran to obtain a nuclear weapon, Reuters reported.

"We have temporarily closed the British Embassy in Tehran, this will now operate remotely," a government spokesperson said in a statement.

Britain's foreign office said its ability to assist British nationals was now extremely limited, and there was no in-person consular support available even in emergencies.

Germany's foreign ministry

yesterday "urgently" advised nationals not to go to Israel as it sharpened its travel advice over increasing tensions in the Middle East, AFP reported from Berlin.

"Travel to Israel and East Jerusalem is urgently discouraged," the ministry said in an advisory on its website.

The advice had previously applied only to certain parts of Israel but now takes in the whole country, a ministry source confirmed.

Earlier, the US authorised the departure of non-emergency embassy staff from Israel as it threatened strikes on Iran and pressed its biggest military build-up in the Middle East in decades.

The move came a day after latest Oman-mediated talks between Iran and the US seen as a last-ditch bid to avert war. Initial optimism was tempered by Tehran warning Washington must drop "excessive demands" to reach a deal.

The German foreign ministry source told AFP its embassy in Tel Aviv remained "fully operational".

Germany is "in close contact with our embassy in Tehran, including regarding the security situation of our colleagues on the

ground", the source added.

However, due to diplomatic tensions with Iran, "our embassy in Tehran has not been fully staffed for some time" and is "only able to provide very limited consular assistance on the ground", the source said.

Italy's foreign ministry has urged its citizens to leave Iran and advised extreme caution across the Middle East, citing persistently unstable security conditions, Reuters reported.

"Italians in (Iran) for tourism or whose presence is not strictly necessary are urged to depart," the ministry said in a statement, adding that travel to Iraq and Lebanon was also strongly discouraged.

It advised Italian nationals in Israel to exercise maximum caution and remain vigilant.

French foreign ministry reiterated its advice to nationals not to travel to Israel, Jerusalem and the West Bank even for tourism or family visits as a result of the security situation in Iran, Reuters reported from Paris.

On its website, the ministry also recommended French citizens already there to show great vigilance and prudence and stay away from demonstrations and rallies and identify shelters.

QVVF members gather for annual Iftar get-together

Qatar Vanimal Pravasi Forum (QVVF), a socio-cultural organisation of Indian expatriates from Vanimal Panchayat in Kerala, hosted its annual Iftar gathering at the Asian Town Cricket Stadium recreation hall, bringing together over 800 community members.

The event was widely praised for its excellent organisation and strong turnout, reflecting the enduring unity and vibrancy of the Vanimal diaspora in Qatar.

For the past 25 years, QVVF has

been a cornerstone of community engagement, promoting arts, culture, education and public service across Qatar.

The Iftar gathering highlighted the forum's ongoing commitment to fostering connections within the diaspora. Wajid Wafi Chembrassy delivered an inspiring Ramadan message, emphasising the significance of such communal gatherings.

ICBF secretary Jafar Thayyil extended his greetings, while QVVF general secretary Sadath Saga of-

icially welcomed attendees. President Subair K K presided over the function, and treasurer Faisal V P expressed the vote of thanks to the community.

A special highlight of the evening was a session by Zaneeya, a renowned mind coach in Qatar, who addressed hundreds of women members on personal growth and empowerment.

Selika Amjad welcomed the gathering. Former Panchayat president Suraiyya Teacher also spoke.



TV artiste Sudhan Kaiveli honoured



Renowned television and stage artiste Sudhan Kaiveli was given a warm reception by the Qatar Kadathanadu Koottayma. He arrived in Qatar to perform at the 'Reconnect 26' programme, organised by GMAQ. The reception turned into a proud and memorable moment in recognition of his notable contributions to the cultural field.

IAEA report says Iran must allow inspections, points at Isfahan

Reuters
Vienna

The UN nuclear watchdog issued a confidential report yesterday urging Iran to let it inspect all its nuclear sites and pointing at Isfahan as a place of interest because of a new enrichment plant and near-bomb-grade uranium that was stored there.

The report was sent to members of the International Atomic Energy Agency ahead of a quarterly meeting next week of its 35-country board, amid nuclear talks between the US and Iran, the latest round of which was held on Thursday with no breakthrough.

Like previous IAEA reports, it could be used by Washington to support its argument that Tehran has not been transparent about its nuclear activities, at a time when US President Donald Trump has massed forces in the region and threatened new military action.

The US and Israel bombed Iranian nuclear sites last June, and Iran has since refused to show what happened to its stockpile of highly enriched uranium or allow

IAEA inspectors access to sites where enrichment took place.

"While the Agency acknowledged that the military attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities had created an unprecedented situation, it is critical for it to conduct verification activities in Iran without any further delay," the report seen by Reuters said.

INDISPENSABLE AND URGENT

Allowing inspections was "indispensable and urgent", it said. It also said a successful outcome in the US-Iranian negotiations would have a "positive impact on the effective implementation of safeguards in Iran and the resolution of issues described in this report".

The IAEA estimates that Iran had 440.9 kg of uranium enriched to up to 60% before last year's Israeli-U.S. attacks — enough, if enriched further, for 10 nuclear weapons, according to an IAEA yardstick. The agency and Western powers believe the bulk of that is still intact. Washington wants Tehran to give it up.

The report provided new details about activity at Isfahan, where

diplomats have said much of the Islamic Republic's most highly enriched uranium has been stored in a tunnel complex that appears to have averted destruction last June. For the first time, the report confirmed that material enriched to up to 20% and 60% had been kept there.

In satellite imagery, the IAEA had observed "regular vehicular activity around the entrance to the tunnel complex at Isfahan in which (uranium) enriched up to 20% and 60% U-235... was stored," it said. The US-Israeli attacks are believed to have destroyed or badly damaged the three uranium enrichment sites known to have been operating at the time.

Shortly before Israel launched its attack, Iran said it was setting up a fourth enrichment plant in Isfahan, though the IAEA still does not know its precise location or whether it is operational, the report said.

"It is a matter of increasing concern that Iran has never provided the Agency with access to its fourth declared enrichment facility since it was first declared by Iran in June last year," the report said.

Gaza civil defence says Israeli strikes kill at least five

AFP
Gaza City

Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli strikes killed at least five people yesterday, the latest violence despite a US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

The agency, which operates as a rescue force under Hamas authorities, told AFP that an air strike in the early hours of yesterday morning killed at least two people and seriously injured one in central Gaza.

A drone strike in the south of the strip shortly after midnight killed three and injured several more people, the agency added. Violence has continued in the

Palestinian territory despite the ceasefire entering its second phase last month, with Israel and Hamas trading accusations of violations.

Under the terms of the ceasefire, which took effect on October 10, Israeli troops withdrew to positions behind a so-called "Yellow Line", though they remain in control of more than half of the territory.

The Israeli military said it struck armed Hamas members in the Rafah area of southern Gaza overnight yesterday in response to what it said was a "violation of the ceasefire agreement".

In a statement, it said troops "identified several armed fighters who emerged from the underground infrastructure in eastern Rafah."

"Shortly after, the troops alongside the Israeli Air Force struck and eliminated some of the fighters in order to remove the threat," it said.

"In response to the violation, the (Israeli military) precisely struck overnight (Friday) several armed Hamas fighters in the Rafah area."

Gaza's health ministry, which operates under Hamas authorities, says at least 618 Palestinians have been killed since the truce began. The Israeli military says at least five of its soldiers have been killed in the same period. Media restrictions and limited access in Gaza have prevented AFP from independently verifying casualty figures or freely covering the fighting.



Relatives of Palestinian policeman Khaled al-Zayan, who was killed in an Israeli strike on a checkpoint, according to medics, mourn during his funeral in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. **Right:** Son of Palestinian policeman Khaled al-Zayan, who was killed in an Israeli strike on a checkpoint, reacts during his funeral in Khan Younis.

Ramadan shopping



People buy strawberries from a produce vendor after the second Friday noon prayers of the holy month of Ramadan in the old city of Jerusalem, yesterday. **Right:** A woman shops for bread from a bakery after the second Friday noon prayers of the holy month of Ramadan in the old city of Jerusalem.



Russia's closer ties with the Gulf deliver an Arabic-speaking tourism boom

Reuters
Moscow

In sub-zero temperatures outside Moscow, teams of husky dogs pull tourists from Oman and the United Arab Emirates across picturesque snow-covered fields in sleds, delighting their passengers who have never experienced a Russian winter before.

Nearby, a couple from Qatar feed a small herd of deer and other tourists from the Middle East drive a hovercraft at high speed across a snowy lake.

"It was like drifting in the desert but here on ice," said Badreya Almarooqi, a tourist from the UAE at the Nazariev Husky Park — 45km west of central Moscow — where signs are written in Arabic as well

as Russian. North of the city, another group of Gulf tourists crowd into a hot air balloon to drift over a vast snowy landscape.

"(It was) one of the best activities in my life!" said Ayoub Aziz, a tourist from Saudi Arabia drawn to the experience in the Dmitrov district 65km from the city centre, one of many such activity destinations dotted around the capital.

Four years into Russia's war in Ukraine, Moscow's pivot away from the West and its quest to draw nearer to other parts of the world has produced an Arabic-speaking tourism boom.

There are more direct flights between Moscow and key Gulf capitals, new visa-free regimes and closer diplomatic ties due to the roles of Gulf states in brokering prisoner exchanges or the

handover of children to Ukraine.

With more than 800,000 visits last year, tourists from China, long a close Russian partner, lead official figures by a long way. But Saudi Arabia secured the number two slot for the first time last year with nearly 75,000 tourists, a year-on-year increase of nearly 36%, while more than 59,000 tourists came from the UAE, putting it in sixth place. "Virtually all Arab countries have at least doubled their numbers," said Alexander Musikhin, general director of the Intourist tour operator.

"But there are also destinations like Saudi Arabia, which has increased its arrivals in Russia — and in Moscow in particular — by almost 15 times compared with the pre-pandemic period," he said. Visitors from the Gulf stay in



People sit in a cafe in the GUM department store, which is a popular destination for tourists from Arabic-speaking countries, in Moscow, Russia.

high-end hotels in the centre of the capital and are a common sight in upmarket Russia-themed restaurants and well-known shopping streets or malls.

They often spend at least 200,000-300,000 roubles (\$6,523) on extra services, tour operators say, and would spend more if the rules did not limit them to bringing in \$10,000 in cash without a declaration. Western sanctions mean Visa and Mastercard

do not work in Russia, "so it has to be in cash", UAE tourist Rashan Godani said.

Despite its war with Ukraine, Russia welcomed a total of 1.64 mn tourists in 2025 according to the country's association of tour operators, 4.5% up on 2024, but sharply down on 2018, the year Russia held the World Cup when 4.2mn foreign tourists visited.

By contrast, 2.45mn Russians visited the UAE alone last year, up

by nearly a quarter year-on-year, and some Russian businessmen have opened up offices in Dubai.

Musikhin, the Intourist head, said fallout from the conflict was limiting growth. He cited the periodic and temporary closure of Russian airports due to Ukrainian drone attacks and the longer time it takes tourists to cross the border due to heightened security checks.

"Tourists are generally understanding about this," he said.

Washington presses Syria to shift from Chinese telecom systems

Reuters
Damascus

The US has warned Syria against relying on Chinese technology in its telecommunications sector, arguing it conflicts with US interests and threatens US national security, according to three sources familiar with the matter.

The message was conveyed during an unreported meeting between a US State Department team and Syrian Communications Minister Abdulsalam Haykal in San Francisco on Tuesday. Washington has been co-ordinating closely with Damascus since 2024, when Syria's now President Ahmed al-Sharaa ousted long-time leader Bashar al-Assad, who had a strategic partnership with China.

Syria is exploring the possibility

of procuring Chinese technology to support its telecommunications towers and the infrastructure of local Internet service providers, according to a Syrian businessman involved in the procurement talks.

"The US side asked for clarity on the ministry's plans regarding Chinese telecom equipment," said another source briefed on the talks. Syria is open to partnering with US firms but the matter was urgent and export controls and "over-compliance" remained an issue, according to person familiar with the meeting in San Francisco.

A US diplomat familiar with the discussions told Reuters that the US State Department "clearly urged Syrians to use American technology or technology from allied countries in the telecoms sector".

It was unclear whether the United States pledged financial or logistical support to Syria to do so.

Bird-like dinosaur discovered in Niger desert by scientists

AFP
Abidjan

Deep in the desert of Niger, scientists have unearthed an unknown species of dinosaur, a giant fisher of its kind in more than a century.

Around 95mn years ago, the Spinosaurus — a massive beast with a blade-shaped head crest and interlocking teeth — roamed the African continent.

Scientists believe it rivalled the fearsome Tyrannosaurus rex in size, measuring around 40 feet long with a 20-inch sword-like crest on its head.

Researchers dug up fossils that belonged to the Spinosaurus mirabilis — or "hell heron", in the words of Paul Sereno, the University of Chicago palaeontologist and lead author of the research published in the journal Science. "Look at the length

of the skull, the length of the neck, and the length of the hind limb — you're in heron territory!" Spinosaurus mirabilis lived when forests and rivers covered the now-barren Sahara. Previously, most spinosaurid fossils had been found near coastlines in North Africa.

Some scientists thought these fish-eating creatures may have been fully aquatic, gliding through deep waters to snare prey. But this time, the fossils were discovered further inland, hundreds of miles from what would have been the nearest ocean.

"I think it was an animal that could have waded easily into the water," Sereno said. "But I do not think it was a diver, I do not think it was a good swimmer."

The search began in 2019 in the Sahara Desert, where French geologist Hugues Faure had said

he found a tooth belonging to the giant predator Carcharodontosaurus in the 1950s.

"We've got a couple of things that Faure could never dream of. We have GPS co-ordinates, we have drones and better vehicles," said Sereno.

The barren sands yielded nothing and the team, disheartened, headed back to their camp. But a Tuareg man in a black trench coat approached Sereno's team on a motorcycle, claiming to know where "big bones" lay.

After a long journey through the desert, Sereno worried they "had made a mistake".

"We jokingly said, are we still in Niger? I mean, we drove for a day and a half until we had no more gas to spare because we wouldn't get back."

But eventually they reached a remote site where the "biggest bones... I have ever seen in my

life" emerged from the ground. Far out in the desert, the researchers gaped at the six-foot-long femur, the jaw, teeth, and base of the crest.

In 2022, Sereno returned with a 100-person team and 64 Nigerian guards to excavate the "earth-shattering site".

They unearthed a skull, fragments of the hind legs and several crests. "The crest was like nothing we'd ever seen before," said Sereno.

Some were brought to tears, he said, by the "overwhelming" experience.

"It's actually like looking at a digital image of your new dinosaur and gawking over it in the tent in the middle of the Sahara." The team realised "it was a new species... and it was going to be a landmark discovery."

"That's your Jurassic Park moment... one to remember for a lifetime."

Mass graves found in eastern Congo after rebel withdrawal: governor



File photo shows Congolese civilians walk after returning to their homes following displacement during renewed clashes between Alliance Fleuve Congo AFC/M23 and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Uvira town, South Kivu province, in DR Congo.

Reuters
Uvira

Two mass graves containing a total of at least 172 bodies have been found in the Democratic Republic of Congo's eastern city of Uvira, following the withdrawal of the AFC/M23 rebel group, a senior government official said.

The rebels briefly captured Uvira, a transit hub on Lake Tanganyika near the Burundian border, in December. They began withdrawing a week later under US pressure and the Congolese army

re-entered the city last month. A spokesperson for AFC/M23 did not respond to requests for comment yesterday.

Local authorities did not say how the people died, and Reuters was not able to independently verify the circumstances of the deaths. Jean-Jacques Purusi, the Kinshasa-appointed governor of South Kivu province, where Uvira is located, told local reporters the graves had been found in the Kilomoni and Kavimvira neighbourhoods.

One contained 31 bodies, the other 141, he added in comments on Tuesday that were recorded

and broadcast in the country on Thursday.

A local human rights activist, Mashauri Mwindule, told Reuters more graves had been found in Kabimba, a village 8km from Uvira.

Campaign group Human Rights Watch reported in December that M23 fighters had carried out summary executions in Uvira, with bodies found in several neighbourhoods, including Kavimvira.

HRW cited residents and a United Nations source. AFC/M23 did not respond to those allegations at the time but had previously accused the organisation of running a "disinformation cam-

paign" against it. The Congolese army and allied militia groups also committed abuses before the rebels took the city and as they retreated, Human Rights Watch said. AFC/M23 controls swathes of North and South Kivu provinces after a rapid offensive last year in which it seized the strategic cities of Goma and Bukavu.

Rwanda rejects allegations from Congo, the United Nations and Western powers that it supports M23 with arms and troops.

Fighting has continued in recent weeks on several fronts in eastern Congo despite mediation efforts by several actors.



Deadly militant offensive sweeps northern and eastern Burkina Faso

AFP
Abidjan

Al-Qaeda-affiliated JNIM has in recent days claimed to have inflicted heavy losses in Burkina Faso as a surge in deadly militant attacks sweeps across the Sahelian state.

Burkina Faso, ruled by a military junta since September 2022, has faced more than 10 years of raids by groups linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, including the JNIM.

A February UN Security Council report noted that the “pace of JNIM attacks” had slowed in September as fighters were diverted to Mali to back an attempted fuel blockade.

“The group’s efforts in Mali have been the primary focus since early September last year,” said Heni Nsaibia, analyst at conflict monitor ACLED.

But attacks never fully stopped, and JNIM has launched a string of large-scale assaults in northern and eastern Burkina Faso since mid-February, killing dozens, including civilians.

“Since February 14, JNIM has claimed responsibility for 10 attacks across different regions of Burkina Faso,” said Hasret Kargin, an Africa studies researcher at intelligence firm Intel World.

The deadliest incidents targeted Titao’s military base on February 15 in the northwest, where the group says it killed dozens of soldiers.

A separate ambush on the same day left around 50 forestry officers dead in Tandjari in the east.

Around 10 civilians were also killed in Titao, including seven Ghanaian traders.

“This latest round demonstrated a high degree of coordination, given the number of large-scale attacks that occurred between February 12 and 22,” Nsaibia said.

“Over 130 people” – Burkinabe soldiers, civilian auxiliaries and JNIM fighters – “were killed in this series of battles”.

Kargin noted that JNIM has issued no formal statement explaining the recent uptick after several months of reduced activity.

But militant groups often strike “right before and during” the holy month of Ramadan, he said, adding current dry-season conditions had helped them on the ground.

Recent attacks have gripped the country’s north and east, areas seen as financial hubs for Al-Qaeda’s Sahel branch.

“These are zones with numerous gold sites and key routes that fuel the group’s smuggling

activities,” a Burkinabe security analyst said, requesting anonymity.

The north “acts as a bridge” to JNIM’s “main central command” in Mali, Kargin said, while the east – home to a vast nature reserve straddling Niger, Benin and Burkina Faso – allows the group to push into neighbouring countries.

The forests, he added, both shield fighters from airstrikes and generate income through illegal timber sales and control of artisanal gold mining.

The Tandjari attack near regional capital Fada N’Gourma highlights JNIM’s growing freedom of movement after having “gained a lot of ground in recent years,” Nsaibia said.

“The question is not the frequency of attacks – they never stopped – but how these groups are able to inflict such heavy losses” when the army claims to be better equipped and better organised, said a Burkinabe political scientist.

The army, which rarely comments on attacks, said in mid-February it now controls 74% of national territory, with some “600 villages retaken”.

According to the UN report, JNIM recently appointed a senior leader in eastern Burkina Faso tasked with expanding into Benin, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Niger and Togo.



Incumbent Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis waves at the end of a press conference where he announced that he will seek to be elected as federal leader of the South African Democratic Alliance, in Cape Town, yesterday.

Cape Town mayor to run for leadership of SA’s second party

AFP
Cape Town

The mayor of Cape Town yesterday announced he would be running for leadership of the Democratic Alliance (DA), the second-largest party in South Africa’s ruling coalition.

John Steenhuisen announced earlier this month that he would not run for a third term at party elections in April in a major shake-up ahead of local polls later this year. “I today announce that I am standing to be the next leader of the Democratic Alliance,” Geordin Hill-Lewis told a rally in

Cape Town to the cheers of hundreds of supporters. Hill-Lewis, 39, became mayor in 2021 of the touristy city seen as among the better-managed municipalities in the country.

“Under my leadership, we will show, as we have shown here in Cape Town, that the DA governs well and governs for everyone,” he said. The pro-business DA – credited with boosting confidence in South Africa when it joined the 10-party coalition following general elections in 2024 – was rocked by a series of internal controversies over Steenhuisen’s leadership.

Claiming to be polling at histor-

ically high levels, the DA is seeking to win over voters disillusioned with poor performance of the African National Congress (ANC).

The ANC was forced into an uneasy coalition with the former opposition party after losing its 30-year majority in the 2024 national elections, accused of incompetent and corrupt governance.

But the DA, which runs on a liberal, free-market agenda, has long struggled to shake off an image of representing the White minority.

“Too often, people see us as distant,” Hill-Lewis said. “They feel that we speak at them, not with them. If we are going to grow, we must change that.”

55 Ghanaians killed fighting in Ukraine, says minister

AFP
Accra

Ghana’s foreign minister said yesterday that 55 Ghanaians had been killed while fighting in Ukraine, among hundreds of Africans said to have been lured to fight there for Russia.

“We were informed that 272 Ghanaians are believed to have been lured into battle since 2022 for which an estimated 55 have been killed and 2 captured as prisoners of war,” minister Sam Okudzeto Ablakwa said on X.

He called the news “depressing and frightening”, speaking after meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart in Kyiv.

“We cannot turn a blind eye to these heartbreaking statistics.

These are not just numbers, they represent human lives, the hope of many Ghanaian families and our nation,” Ablakwa wrote.

“We cannot turn a blind eye to these heartbreaking statistics. These are not just numbers, they represent human lives, the hope of many Ghanaian families...”

Ukraine said on Wednesday that more than 1,780 citizens from 36 African countries had been identified among Russia’s ranks.

Ablakwa said the government was “committed to tracking and dismantling all dark web illegal recruitment schemes operating within our jurisdiction.”

AFP reporters in Ukraine in late 2025 met prisoners of war

from Kenya, Togo, Cameroon and Nigeria.

AFP recently spoke with four Kenyans – three wounded – who made it home. They had been promised lucrative civilian jobs in Russia but were forced to sign contracts with the army and sent to the frontlines in Ukraine with limited training.

A key figure in a network that sent more than 1,000 Kenyans to fight for the Russian army was charged on Thursday with human trafficking, the state prosecutor said.

In South Africa, 15 men who were reportedly tricked into joining mercenary forces were repatriated this week. Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola said several remain in Russia and at least two have died fighting in Ukraine.

Senegal ex-minister faces \$2.7mn embezzlement probe

AFP
Dakar

Senegal’s parliament yesterday referred a former minister to a special court for allegedly embezzling millions in taxpayers’ cash, in the latest case targeting a member of ex-president Macky Sall’s government.

Since unseating Sall in March 2024, President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko have repeatedly accused their predecessors of mismanaging the public purse, pledging to bring them to justice.

At least five of Sall’s ministers have since been referred to the west African country’s High Court of Justice, which is responsible for trying former members of government over crimes committed while in office.

The National Assembly, which is overwhelmingly dominated by Faye and Sonko’s ruling Pastef party, voted yesterday to refer former communications and digital affairs minister Moussa Bocar Thiam to the court over a contract for a digital technology park.

According to a parliamentary report, the contract’s execution showed “serious indications and

presumptions of a nature to justify criminal proceedings against Minister Moussa Bocar Thiam for criminal conspiracy, embezzlement of public funds to the tune of 1,476,482,766 CFA francs (\$2.7mn) and money laundering”.

The ex-minister replied on social media to denounce the process as “without legal basis”, adding that he would fight the matter in court.

After a hearing, the High Court of Justice’s investigating committee will decide whether to bring Thiam to trial. The tribunal’s rulings cannot be appealed or reviewed.

Mahama’s traditional tunic fuels heritage revival in Ghana

AFP
Accra

Ghanaians have rushed to defend their colourful handwoven “fugu” smocks after President John Mahama’s wearing of the loose-fitting traditional garment on a recent state visit to Zambia caused an online storm.

Traditionally produced in northern Ghana on narrow-strip looms, the fugu is widely treated as the west African country’s national costume, worn at festivals, political events and – increasingly – in offices and public life.

But Mahama’s choice to walk the red carpet and inspect a guard-of-honour parade in Lusaka while rocking a blue-white-grey striped version of the flare-armed tunic drew mockery from non-Ghanaians on social media, with some calling the garment inappropriate for a head of state.

Unfazed, Mahama’s government declared Wednesday “fugu” day on his return home, with traders and weavers reporting a spike in demand for the centuries-old attire since.

“People are coming specifically for it now,” textile trader William Nene said as he folded freshly woven smocks, which are also known as “batakari”, at his small stall in central Accra.

Customers have filtered in ask-



A street vendor arranges traditional garments, known as a ‘fugu’, as they are displayed for sale on a street in Accra. **Right:** Another photo of ‘fugu’ in Accra.



ing for the same style recently worn by the president.

“Since the discussion online, many want to wear something that shows they are Ghanaian,” said Nene. The furore has triggered a broader conversation about identity, heritage and support for local textiles.

Shadrack Yao Agboli, a fugu weaver who also works with the National Commission on Culture, has a home workshop where long bands of hand-loomed fabric hang

to dry in the afternoon sun.

“More young people are asking questions: how it’s made, where it comes from,” he said as he guided a thread through a wooden loom.

Weaving provides livelihoods for many families, he said, adding that each garment can take days to complete. “When leaders wear it, it reminds people this cloth is ours,” Agboli said.

Historian and cultural commentator Yaw Anokye Frimpong called the fugu “an unofficial na-

tional dress” with practical and historical roots.

“Unlike kente, which is largely ceremonial, the smock is everyday wear,” he said, referring to another form of traditional Ghanaian dress worn during major celebrations. “Our ancestors even wore it into battle. It represents Indigenous technology and self-reliance.”

Beyond patriotic symbolism, the renewed demand for fugus could provide a lift for local arti-

sans competing against cheaper imported clothing, mainly from China.

For Frederick Ohene Offei-Addo, who wears a locally woven fugu to his work as radio station head at the Asaase Broadcasting Company, choosing Ghana-made textiles is both a matter of cultural pride and economic strategy.

“If we keep talking about industrialisation and jobs, then we must also be intentional about what we buy and wear. Culture is not

just heritage – it’s livelihoods,” he said. The debate comes as the Ghanaian government has sought to promote local industries and cultural exports as part of efforts to create jobs and reduce reliance on imports.

But for traders like Nene, the politics matter less than the immediate effect. “When people see it on the president, they want one too,” he said, gesturing towards an almost empty rack. “Right now, we can’t weave them fast enough.”

US military mistakenly shoots government drone with laser: media

AFP
Washington

The US military mistakenly shot down a government drone with a laser near the Mexican border on Thursday, prompting the closure of nearby airspace, US media reported.

The incident followed a similar gaffe this month near the southern border in which border protection officials reportedly used

a laser to shoot down a party balloon it mistook for a drone.

Democratic lawmakers demanded an investigation into Thursday's strike, slamming the White House's "incompetence".

The drone, which belonged to Customs and Border Protection (CBP), was shot down over a small town near El Paso, Texas, the *New York Times* reported, quoting sources not authorised to speak publicly.

The CBP had not notified the Pentagon that it was launching a drone in the area,

and the laser was used without approval from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the *Times* added.

The FAA said in a notice on Thursday that it was temporarily closing airspace around Fort Hancock, about 80km from El Paso, citing "special security reasons".

The error prompted scrutiny from Democratic lawmakers, who accused President Donald Trump's administration of showing a "lack of co-ordination" between agencies. "Our heads are exploding over the news

that DoD reportedly shot down a Customs and Border Protection drone using a high-risk counter-unmanned aircraft system," Democratic Representatives Rick Larsen, Bennie Thompson and Andre Carson, who sit on committees related to aviation and security matters, said in a statement.

The Pentagon, CBP and FAA said agencies would boost co-operation to prevent similar mistakes from happening again.

"This reported engagement occurred when the Department of War employed

counter-unmanned aircraft system authorities to mitigate a seemingly threatening unmanned aerial system operating within military airspace," the agencies said in a joint statement quoted by the *Times*.

The Department of War is the Trump administration's rebrand of the Department of Defence (DoD).

The Pentagon, FAA and CBP "will continue to work on increased co-operation and communication to prevent such incidents in the future," the agencies said.

Mayor orders protection of protesters, ban on ICE from Denver city property

Denver Mayor Mike Johnston has signed an order authorising the Democratic-governed city's police to protect peaceful protesters against federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations and banning ICE from city property.

Republican President Donald Trump's administration has used the ICE in an immigration crackdown that has been condemned by human rights advocates, especially after the January fatal shootings of two US citizens by federal agents in Minnesota.

In the aftermath of those shootings, Democratic mayors and governors have sought ways to counter Trump's actions.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey signed an order prohibiting agencies from using any city-owned parking lots, ramps, garages, or vacant lots to stage immigration enforcement operations.

Johnston's order says that in the event of civil immigration enforcement operations, including a surge in ICE agents, the city's law enforcement agencies "shall use their established de-escalation protocols to try to protect peaceful protesters" and ensure public health, safety, and the preservation of free speech rights.

"If we see any ICE officer using excessive force against a Denver resident, we will step in to detain that officer and remove them from the situation," Johnston said in a news conference about the order.

"We hold our own officers to that standard, and we will hold any ICE agent to the same," he added.

The White House said local officials should work with the ICE and not against it.

"Anyone doing otherwise is simply doing the bidding of criminal illegal aliens," White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said in a statement cited by Politico.

Trump has cast his crackdown as aiming to curb illegal immigration and improve domestic security. - **Reuters**

Nasa shakes up moon programme

AFP
Cape Canaveral

The US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) said yesterday that it would revise its Artemis lunar programme that has suffered multiple delays in recent years, in a bid to ensure Americans can return to the Moon's surface by 2028.

The US space agency will add missions between this spring's Artemis 2 and the ultimate lunar landing, a strategic revision that Nasa Administrator Jared Isaacman told a briefing would allow for improved launch "muscle memory".

That means Artemis 3, which was meant to send astronauts to the Moon's surface, will now have the alternate goal of "rendezvous in low-Earth orbit" of at least one lunar lander.

The next phase, Artemis 4, will aim for a lunar landing in early 2028.

Isaacman said he hoped that mission could be followed relatively quickly by a second Moon landing within the year.

"We're not necessarily committing to launching two missions in 2028," he said, "but we want to have the opportunity to be able to do that."

The Nasa chief said speeding up the cadence of Artemis launches would allow for building more institutional knowledge in the model of the Apollo programme, which originally put Americans on the Moon.

"Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, through the shuttle programme - I don't think it would surprise many of the folks in the room that our average launch cadence was closer to three months throughout all those programmes, not three years," he said. "We need to start getting back to basics and moving in this direction."

"Launching every three years, your skills atrophy, you lose muscle memory," Isaacman added.



Nasa Administrator Jared Isaacman at the press conference at the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida. - **Reuters**

The revised architecture announcement comes in the wake of repeated delays to the Artemis 2 mission, which now will not launch before April.

It is meant to see the first flyby of the Moon in more than half a century.

Earlier this week, the US space agency rolled back its towering SLS rocket and

Orion spacecraft off the launchpad to investigate its problems and make necessary repairs.

President Donald Trump announced he wanted Americans to once again set foot on the lunar surface in his first term.

The US space agency now hopes to put humans back on the Moon as China forges ahead with its own effort, which is targeting 2030 at the latest for a first crewed mission.

China's uncrewed Chang'e 7 mission is expected to be launched in 2026 for an exploration of the Moon's south pole, and testing of its crewed spacecraft Mengzhou is also set to go ahead this year.

Queried on the so-called "space race", Isaacman said yesterday that "I think competition is good".

"We're here talking to you about what is a common-sense approach to achieve the objective, whether we had a great rival in the running or not."

Clinton says he had no idea of Epstein's crimes

Reuters/AFP
Washington

Bill Clinton told lawmakers yesterday that he "saw nothing that gave me pause" when he spent time with Jeffrey Epstein, as the former president gave closed-door testimony about his relationship with the late convict.

In a prepared statement, Clinton told the House of Representatives Oversight Committee that he would not have flown on the late financier's plane if he had known about his alleged trafficking of minors, and would have reported him if he did.

"We are only here because he hid it from everyone so well for so long," Clinton said.

Clinton flew on Epstein's plane several times in the early 2000s after he left office and before Epstein's 2008 conviction.

A tranche of millions of documents released by the Justice Department includes photos of Clinton with women whose faces are redacted.

"I saw nothing, and I did nothing wrong," Clinton said.



Members of the media gather outside the Chappaqua Performing Arts Centre as the House Oversight Committee conducts a deposition with former US president Bill Clinton as part of the committee's investigation into Jeffrey Epstein, in Chappaqua, New York. - **AFP**

His testimony follows that of his wife, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, who told the panel on Thursday that she did not remember ever meeting Epstein and had nothing to share about his crimes.

The panel's Republican chairman, Representative James Comer of Kentucky, said he

would ask the former president about the photos released by the Justice Department.

The committee is also expected to quiz Clinton about Epstein's involvement with the couple's charitable foundation.

Comer said video of Hillary Clinton's testimony could be released soon.

Comer has repeatedly said the Clintons are not accused of wrongdoing.

They agreed to testify near their main residence of Chappaqua, New York, after the House threatened to hold them in contempt of Congress for refusing to co-operate. Some Democrats supported the move.

Democrats say the panel should also subpoena President Donald Trump, whose name appears frequently in the Epstein-related files as well as Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, who has admitted to visiting Epstein's private island.

"Let's be real, we are talking to the wrong president," said Democrat committee member Suhas Subramanyam.

Clinton did not name Trump directly but said "no person is above the law, even presidents - especially presidents".

Trump socialised extensively with Epstein in the 1990s and 2000s and says he broke off ties before Epstein's 2008 conviction.

Epstein died in jail in 2019 while facing federal crimes. His death was ruled a suicide.

TSA officers get fractional pay as government shutdown drags

Reuters
New York

Airport security screeners across the US received a fraction of their usual pay yesterday as the partial government shutdown drags on, increasing the risk that more officers will call in sick to take second jobs, or even quit.

Funding for the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) lapsed on February 13 after Congress failed to reach a deal on immigration enforcement reforms demanded by Democrats.

That halted funding for the operation of several government agencies, including the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

This shutdown is more limited than the record 43-day October-November event that closed numerous departments of government.



A TSA gate at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Arlington, Virginia, US. - **Reuters**

However, with TSA agents facing the possibility of losing even more pay if this one drags on further, the ripple effects could emerge again: absences, departures, and bottlenecked security lines at the nation's airports.

"People are going to get discouraged a lot quicker this time," said Philip Glover, national vice-president of District 3 of the American Federation of Government Em-

ployees (AFGE), who represents TSA workers at 19 airports in Delaware and Pennsylvania.

Local AFGE officials said they are expecting TSA resignations to rise, while other TSA workers, some of whom are still repaying debts from the last shutdown, again tighten their finances.

Ha Nguyen McNeill, the top official at the TSA, told Congress this month that around 1,110 transpor-

tation security officers (TSOs) left the TSA in October and November 2025, a more than 25% increase from the same time period in 2024.

"We heard reports of officers sleeping in their cars at airports to save money on gas, selling their blood and plasma and taking on second jobs to make ends meet," McNeill said of last year's shutdown, adding that the TSA is working to surge staffing in March, April, and May to be prepared for spring break, summer, and World Cup travel.

A TSA officer at Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas who asked to remain anonymous told Reuters that the back-to-back shutdowns are making her reconsider the future of her nine-year career at the agency.

"I want to keep this job at least for the medical benefits, but sometimes I think I would be better off to abandon ship to reinvest myself elsewhere," the 34-year-old said.

Workers for a second time in four months have to find a way to make ends meet without pay as the agency's management is pressing workers more on absences, as some call in sick to take on odd jobs to pay bills and fill their gas tanks, local AFGE officials said.

"Officers are looking at other alternatives just to maintain some kind of stability," said Darrell English, president of AFGE Local 777, which represents TSA workers in Illinois and Wisconsin. "That's the backlash that's coming down the line from these continuous shutdowns."

Neal Gosman, treasurer of the AFGE Local 899 in Minnesota, said that several of his colleagues with high seniority decided to retire shortly after this shutdown started.

"Maybe it's just coincidence and these are older people who've been there a while, but somehow they decided to pull the trigger this week," he said.

OpenAI outlines steps to boost safety in response to Canada school shooting

Reuters/AFP
Toronto

OpenAI said on Thursday that it will set up a direct point of contact with Canadian law enforcement and improve detection of repeat violators of its "violent activities" policy to boost safety protocols in the wake of a recent school shooting.

The ChatGPT maker detailed the steps in a letter to Canada's minister in charge of artificial intelligence (AI), Evan Solomon.

Ann O'Leary, OpenAI's vice-president of global policy, wrote the letter after

Canadian ministers this week urged the ChatGPT maker to boost its safety protocols quickly and warned that Ottawa would effect change through legislation if the company did not.

"We remain committed to co-operating with law enforcement authorities on the investigation into the Tumbler Ridge tragedy, and we are committed to an ongoing partnership with federal and provincial governments," O'Leary said, referring to the town in British Columbia where the shooting occurred.

Ottawa summoned OpenAI's safety team for talks this week after the company said it had not contacted police about an

account belonging to the alleged shooter, Jesse Van Rootselaar, that it had banned.

Van Rootselaar, 18, is suspected of killing eight people on February 10 before taking her own life in Tumbler Ridge.

She killed her mother and brother at the family home before heading to the local secondary school, where she shot dead five children and a teacher.

OpenAI said it banned her ChatGPT account last year for policy violations.

The company said the account was flagged by systems that identify "misuses of our models in furtherance of violent activities" but did not provide further details.

OpenAI said the issues did not meet its

internal criteria for reporting to law enforcement.

O'Leary said on Thursday that under the company's "enhanced law enforcement referral protocol", it would have referred the initial account ban in June to police if it were discovered now.

She also said the company had discovered that Van Rootselaar had used a second account, which it shared with law enforcement.

"We commit to strengthening our detection systems to better prevent attempts to evade our safeguards and prioritize identifying the highest-risk offenders," O'Leary said.

The company also committed to periodically assessing the thresholds used by its automated systems for identifying potential violent activities by users.

Crime experts have noted that while greater scrutiny of AI platforms and social media is necessary, police or other authorities may have missed additional chances to avert one of Canada's worst mass killings.

Police said Van Rootselaar had a history of mental health problems and that they had removed and later returned guns from her home.

Minister Solomon's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ecuador approves mining law in area of Galapagos

AFP
Quito

Ecuador's parliament has approved a mining law criticised by environmentalists for allowing extraction in an area of the Galapagos Islands, a famed archipelago with unique flora and fauna.

With 77 votes in favor and 70 against, the National Assembly gave the green light to the law promoted by the right-wing government of President Daniel Noboa, which seeks to encourage investment in the mining sector.

The text allows the extraction of rock materials in an area of the Galapagos Islands, a tourist gem about 1,000km (620 miles) off the coast of Ecuador, albeit outside the boundaries of its national park.

The archipelago is a Unesco World Heritage Site famous for its unique flora and fauna, and is where British scientist Charles Darwin developed his theory of evolution.

The law "strengthens controls and regulations on extractive activity, with the aim of combating illegal mining", the parliament, in which the government holds a majority, said in a statement.

Opposition lawmaker Veronica Iniguez criticised the passing of the law.

"We're going to see how the Galapagos Islands become a quarry," she said, also raising concerns about Amazonian territories and the paramos, high-altitude Andean ecosystems.

Some 300 people marched against the law around the Constitutional Court in capital Quito, wearing masks of the faces of assembly members who voted in favour.

The protesters held signs with slogans including "Noboa, miner, life comes first" and "The land is not for sale".

CONAIE, the country's largest Indigenous organisation, warned in a statement that the law would harm environmental protection and increase the risk of river pollution.



China for Afghanistan-Pakistan ceasefire

AFP
Beijing

China called yesterday for a ceasefire between Afghanistan and Pakistan, adding it was talking to both sides to try to end violent clashes that had left Beijing “deeply concerned”.

Pakistan is one of China’s closest partners in the region, but Beijing also calls itself a “friendly neighbour” of Afghanistan.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said China was “deeply concerned about the escalation of the conflict”, after Pakistan bombed major cities in Afghanistan including the capital Kabul yesterday.

China “calls on both sides to remain calm and exercise restraint... achieve a ceasefire as soon as possible, and avoid further bloodshed”, she told a regular press briefing. “China has consistently mediated the conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan through its own channels and is willing to continue playing a constructive role in easing tensions.”

The ministry and China’s embassies in Pakistan and Afghanistan were “working with relevant parties in both countries on this matter”, she said.

Pakistan’s latest operation came after Afghan forces attacked Pakistani border troops on Thursday night over earlier air

strikes by Islamabad. Islamabad’s defence minister has declared the neighbours at “open war”.

Islamabad used Chinese-made military hardware, including jets, against India during a short conflict last May.

But analysts say Beijing has also become a crucial partner of the Taliban authorities since they swept back to power in 2021 after ousting the foreign-backed government.

China has requested both countries ensure the safety of Chinese citizens, projects and institutions, Mao yesterday. She said Beijing was closely monitoring the situation and would provide assistance to any of its citizens in need.

Japan PM opposes changing male-only imperial succession

AFP
Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi told parliament yesterday that she opposes changing the imperial family’s male succession rules.

The comments are her clearest on the issue – the subject of increasing debate as a succession crisis looms – since her party’s landslide election victory this month.

Takaichi said she respected the conclusion of a panel of experts who had discussed the matter and found in 2021 that it was “appropriate to limit eligibility to those who are male-line male descendants belonging to the imperial lineage”.

“The government, and I, myself as well, respect this report.”

The premier previously warned that revising the imperial family’s succession rules is “an urgent matter”, although this would likely involve “adopting” new members.

During a policy speech last, she said that she hoped “discussions

will deepen on how to ensure stable imperial succession... leading toward the revision of the Imperial House Law”.

Even though tradition dictates only a man can carry on the imperial line – which goes back 2,600 years according to legend – opinion polls have shown high public support for a woman taking the throne.

Emperor Naruhito has a daughter, Princess Aiko, but she has been sidelined by the royal family’s male-only succession rules.

Japan has debated the royal succession for decades, with a key government panel in 2005 recommending that it pass to the oldest child regardless of their sex.

That appeared to pave the way for the emperor’s daughter to rise to the Chrysanthemum Throne, but the birth of Prince Hisahito, the emperor’s nephew, the following year silenced the debate.

In 2021, a government-appointed expert panel advised the government to consider allowing the imperial family to “adopt” new male members – distant relatives that could be

brought back into the fold.

But it is unclear if those men would be willing to give up their careers and freedom to continue the lineage.

The panel also said royal daughters – currently forced to leave the family after marriage – could potentially continue their public duties after their nuptials.

Traditionalists have asserted that the “unbroken imperial line” of male succession is the foundation of Japan, and major changes would divide the nation.

Under the post-war constitution, the royal family holds no political power.

Historically, women who wed royals have faced intense pressure to produce sons and some family members are regular subjects of online and media gossip.

Empress Masako, a former high-flying diplomat, struggled for years with a stress-related illness after joining the household, which some have put down to the pressure to have a boy.

Emperess Emerita Michiko, Naruhito’s mother, also suffered stress-induced illnesses.

Japan ruling party approves plans to beef up intelligence

AFP
Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s ruling party has approved plans to beef up the country’s intelligence capability, a party official said yesterday, as the premier pushes ahead with a defence overhaul.

Newly empowered after a landslide victory in snap elections this month, Takaichi has vowed to make Japan “strong and prosperous” through key policy changes including in defence and intelligence.

The plans come as a months-long diplomatic row between Japan and China over comments Takaichi made on Taiwan rumbles on.

The proposal, agreed by the intelligence strategy headquarters of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), includes establishing an upgraded intelligence bureau and strengthening “foreign intelligence collection capabilities”, an LDP official told AFP.

It calls for a mandatory registration system for foreign agents – such as individuals and corporations lobbying within Japan on behalf of other governments – as

part of counterintelligence measures.

The plan, which also includes a ban on the use of mobile phones in key government buildings, is expected to be submitted to Takaichi next week, the Asahi Shimbun and other local media reported.

“One of the central pillars of the major policy shift (under Takaichi) is a fundamental strengthening of intelligence,” the LDP’s policy chief Takayuki Kobayashi said at the meeting Thursday where plans were approved.

“Simply creating an organisation on paper is utterly meaningless; the question is how we can turn it into a truly living, functioning body,” he said.

Separately, the LDP on Wednesday proposed changes to Japan’s stringent rules on exporting military equipment so as to enable exports of lethal weapons, local reports said.

The LDP official could not immediately confirm the proposal.

Takaichi has also said that she plans to revise three key national security policy documents this year to reflect the changing security environment.

The premier, seen as a China

hawk before becoming premier in October, suggested in November that Japan could intervene militarily if Beijing sought to take Taiwan by force.

China, which regards the democratic island as part of its territory and has not ruled out force to annex it, was furious.

It summoned Tokyo’s ambassador, warned Chinese citizens against visiting Japan and in December J-15 jets from China’s Liaoning aircraft carrier twice locked radar on Japanese aircraft in international waters near Okinawa, according to Japan.

Takaichi has vowed that Japan will steadfastly protect its territory, territorial waters and airspace.

Beijing’s top diplomat Wang Yi told the Munich Security Conference earlier this month that forces in Japan were seeking to “revive militarism”.

While she has said in parliament she will not change the rules, local media have reported that Takaichi is considering allowing US nuclear weapons into Japanese territory, a revision to the country’s non-nuclear principles of not producing, possessing or permitting the introduction of the weapons into the country.

China urges citizens to evacuate from Iran

China told its citizens yesterday to evacuate from Iran “as soon as possible”, and those in Israel to strengthen preparedness, citing a significant rise in security risks in the Middle East.

“Chinese nationals currently in Iran are advised to strengthen safety precautions and evacuate as soon as possible,” the foreign ministry said in a social media statement.

The US on the same day authorised the departure of non-emergency embassy staff from Israel, as it threatened strikes on Iran and pressed its biggest military build-up in the Middle East in decades.

The US military is building up its forces in the region, with the world’s largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, due to arrive off the coast of key US ally Israel.

This came a day after Oman-mediated talks between Iran and the US – which have been seen as a last-

ditch bid to avert war – though initial optimism was tempered by Tehran warning Washington must drop “excessive demands” to reach a deal.

Beijing’s foreign ministry told its citizens yesterday to avoid travelling to Iran for the time being “in light of the current security situation”.

The foreign ministry added that its Chinese embassies and consulates in Iran and neighbouring countries will provide “necessary assistance” to Chinese citizens seeking to relocate via commercial flights or overland routes.

China’s embassy in Israel, meanwhile, warned its citizens to remain highly vigilant, strengthen emergency preparedness, and avoid going out unless necessary, state broadcaster CCTV said.

They should “familiarise themselves in advance with nearby bomb shelters and evacuation routes to ensure personal and property safety”, CCTV added. (AFP)

S Korea set to get a fully functioning Google Maps

Reuters
Seoul

South Korea will soon no longer be one of the few countries where Google Maps doesn’t work properly, after its security-conscious government reversed a two-decade stance to approve the export of high-precision map data to overseas servers.

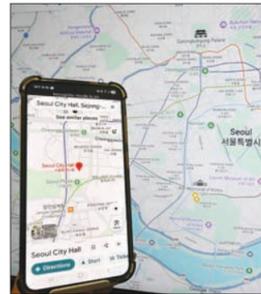
The approval was made “on the condition that strict security requirements are met,” the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport said in a statement.

Those conditions include blurring military and other sensitive security-related facilities, as well as restricting longitude and latitude coordinates for South Korean territory on products such as Google Maps and Google Earth, it said.

The decision is expected to hurt Naver and Kakao – local internet giants which currently dominate the country’s market for digital map services. But it will appease Washington, which has urged Seoul to tackle what it says is discrimination against U.S. tech companies.

“We welcome today’s decision and look forward to our ongoing collaboration with local officials to bring a fully functioning Google Maps to Korea,” Google Vice President Cris Turnersaid in a statement.

South Korea, still technically at



This photo illustration taken in Seoul yesterday shows a Google Maps screen with a search for Seoul City Hall on a smartphone and a Google Maps webpage showing a map of Seoul. (AFP)

war with North Korea, had shot down Google’s previous bids in 2007 and 2016 to be allowed to export the data, citing the risks that information about sensitive military and security facilities could be exposed.

Google Maps was not banned here in South Korea and other countries have gone further. It is prohibited in mainland China, North Korea, Syria and Vietnam for example.

The data in question is 1:5000 scale data, where 1cm on a map represents 50m in actual distance. Google has argued it needs to export the data to provide real-time navigation information worldwide. This includes people researching South Korean desti-

nations from overseas.

The conditions stipulate that Google must process map data on locally based servers and is only allowed to export data related to navigation and direction services that have been pre-approved by the government.

The South Korean government also reserves the right to request revisions to maps, and Google must set up a security incident prevention framework to respond to emergency issues.

Choi Jin-mu, a geography professor at Kyung Hee University, said the decision raised serious questions about market control and national security.

“Google can now come in, slash usage fees, and take the market. If Naver and Kakao are weakened or pushed out and Google later raises prices, that becomes a monopoly. Then, even companies that rely on map services – logistics firms, for example – become dependent, and in the long run, even government GIS (geographic information) systems could end up dependent on Google or Apple. That’s the biggest concern.”

Naver’s stock ended 2.3% down after the decision yesterday, though Kakao gained 1.5%.

AMCHAM Chairman James Kim welcomed the decision, saying it “sends a positive signal about Korea’s commitment to innovation, open markets, and ensuring a level playing field for global companies operating in Korea.”

Braille helps blind students recite Qur’an



Visually impaired students read the Holy Qur’an in Braille during the holy fasting month of Ramadan at a school in Surabaya, Indonesia’s East Java province, yesterday. (AFP)

Philippines, US, Japanese planes drill over Bashi Channel

AFP
Manila

The Philippine, US and Japanese militaries conducted joint exercises this week over the Bashi Channel that separates the Philippines from Taiwan, officials said yesterday.

Aircraft from the three nations patrolled over the Philippines’ northernmost Batanes islands in drills aimed at showcasing their “ability to operate seamlessly together in complex maritime environments”, the Philippine military said in a statement.

It marks the first time that so-called Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activities (MMCA) involving the countries have expanded beyond the South China Sea, where the Philippines and China have engaged in repeated clashes over disputed territory.

Little more than 100km (60 miles) separates the Philippines and self-ruled Taiwan, which China views as its territory and has not ruled out taking by force.

“Air operations were conducted



A Philippine air force FA-50 fighter jet (left) flying alongside a Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force’s P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft during a joint military exercise in the disputed South China Sea. (AFP)

within airspace over Philippine territory and its territorial sea, north of Luzon,” the Philippine military said in a statement, adding naval vessels had stayed west of the Batanes island chain.

Armed forces public affairs chief Colonel Xerxes Trinidad told AFP it was the “first time” MMCA operations had been conducted in

the “said operational box”.

The military’s statement said that box extended “up to the northern tip of Luzon, particularly Mavulis Island”, which hosts small Philippine navy and marine detachments.

China’s military reacted angrily to the drills yesterday.

“The Philippines co-opted

countries outside the region to organise the so-called joint patrols, disrupting peace and stability in the region,” said Zhai Shichen, spokesperson for the PLA’s Southern Theatre Command.

He added that China had conducted a “routine patrol” of the South China Sea from February 23-26. In November, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi sent relations with Beijing into a tailspin by suggesting that Tokyo could intervene militarily in any attack on Taiwan.

Beijing imposed export restrictions and warned its citizens against visiting Japan, while accusing Tokyo of attempting to “revive militarism”.

Japan’s defence minister upped the ante by saying on Tuesday that Tokyo planned to deploy surface-to-air missiles on one of its remote western islands located near Taiwan by early 2031.

The Philippine-US-Japanese exercise took place over six days and concluded on Thursday. It included a live-fire gunnery exercise conducted by the guided missile frigate BRP Antonio Luna.

Oil spill washes up on Thai tourist islands

An oil spill from a capsized cargo ship in the Indian Ocean is washing ashore on the pristine beaches of Thailand’s most famous resort island, a lawmaker told AFP yesterday.

The Panama-flagged Sealloyd Arc sank off Phuket on February 7 while sailing for Chattogram in Bangladesh, Thai authorities said, spilling around 1,700 litres of oil.

The coagulated residue has begun washing up on the island’s Ya Nui Beach, as well as a smattering of smaller islands in Phuket province, local lawmaker Chalermpong Saengdee told AFP.

The oil has tainted Koh Hey’s Banana Beach – a popular destination for island-hopping tourists seeking turquoise clear waters – and is expected to keep spreading, he said.

“It’s very worrying because the incident happened two weeks

ago, but the situation is not improving and it poses a threat to marine life and coastal reefs,” he said.

“We are also concerned it could affect Thailand’s tourism and economy.”

The ship lies at a depth of about 60m (197 feet), making it difficult for divers to contain the leak, Chalermpong said.

Footage on public broadcaster Thai PBS showed locals combing beaches with rakes and buckets to collect globs of the oil.

While the Thai Navy has been using dispersants to treat the spillage, Chalermpong has called for government funding to salvage the wreck.

Environmental organisations warn oil spills cause severe and long-lasting damage to ecosystems – coating wildlife, contaminating food sources and releasing toxic chemicals. (AFP)

Starmer suffers humiliating defeat as Greens seize Labour stronghold

Reuters
Manchester

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer pledged to fight political “extremes” on the right and left yesterday after his Labour Party suffered a humiliating election defeat to the left-wing Green Party in an area it had dominated for almost a century.

In a result that underscored the breakdown of Britain’s two-party politics, the loss of a safe Labour seat in England’s northwestern region of Greater Manchester piles pressure on Starmer after weeks of turmoil and calls for him to resign.

The Green Party’s Hannah Spencer won the contest for the seat of Gorton and Denton, with Nigel Farage’s populist Reform UK party coming second, and Labour in third.

Starmer described the result as “very disappointing”, arguing that while governing parties were often punished at such elections, he understood voter anger.

“I will ... fight against the extremes in politics on the right and the left,” he told reporters, promising to work “as long as I’ve got breath in my body” to deliver the change he promised when he won a landslide national election in 2024.

But his words will do little to calm some in his party, who criticised an election strategy that focused on the threat from Reform, rather than targeting the Greens.

Spencer told a news conference the party would go from strength to strength before the next national election, which must take place by mid-August 2029, and Green leader Zack Polanski said he wanted to secure at least 30 seats,

possibly up to 50, in Britain’s 650-seat parliament.

John Curtice, Britain’s most respected pollster, called the result a “seismic moment”, which means the “future of British politics looks more uncertain than at any stage” since the end of World War Two, uncertainty reflected across much of the West.

Starmer had staked his personal authority on Labour winning the seat by blocking one of his rivals, the popular Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, from standing, and by visiting the constituency earlier this week.

The defeat comes after Starmer faced the most dangerous moment of his premiership this month when some lawmakers said he should resign over his decision to appoint Peter Mandelson as ambassador to Washington, despite his links to the Jeffrey Epstein.

In 2024, Labour won just over half the vote in the area. Yesterday, the Green Party won 40.7% of the vote. Reform won 28.7% and Labour received 25.4%.

Labour lawmakers say Starmer is unlikely to face an immediate threat to his position, but some questioned his strategy. “In an election we tried to make into one of unity versus division, the electorate chose division – just not the division we were campaigning most against,” said one Labour lawmaker.

Starmer could be challenged after May elections when Labour is expected to fare badly in local and regional polls.

Gorton and Denton was once part of Labour’s coalition of industrial areas in England considered to be so impregnable it was called the Red Wall, but the contest was an example of how the electorate



Manchester City Council’s Chief Executive Tom Stannard congratulates Green Party’s candidate Hannah Spencer following her victory in the Gorton and Denton by-election, at the Manchester Central Convention Complex in Manchester, Britain, yesterday.

has become more volatile.

It was the first time the Green Party, which supports leaving Nato and legalising recreational drugs, had won such an election or one in northern England. That takes the party’s number of seats in parliament to five out of 650.

Life-time Labour supporter Gerald Gudgion, 73, said he had voted for the Greens because Britain needed “a change of direction and I think the Greens are offering that?”

Yesterday’s result shows how Reform, seen as the main challenger to Labour at the next election, could struggle to win in some places, particularly ethnically diverse urban areas.

Reform’s candidate Matt Goodwin alienated some voters in Gorton and Denton, which has a large number of Muslim residents, with his past comments that British Muslims “are fundamentally opposed to British values and ways of life?”

UK police arrest man after Churchill statue sprayed with graffiti

AFP
London

A 38-year-old man has been arrested on suspicion of racially aggravated criminal damage, UK police said yesterday, after he allegedly sprayed pro-Palestinian graffiti on the Winston Churchill statue in central London.

The iconic monument to the wartime British prime minister in Parliament Square “was graffitied with red paint” overnight, the Metropolitan Police said on X.

“Officers were on scene within two minutes of being alerted shortly after 4am (0400 GMT),” the force added.

The graffiti, which workers set about cleaning off early yesterday, included calling the former leader a “zionist war criminal”.

The words “free Palestine” and “stop the genocide” were also sprayed on it.

The Greater London Authority condemned the “vandalism” of the statue, adding that work was underway to remove the graffiti “as quickly as possible”.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s Downing Street office called the damage “completely abhorrent” and said it was “glad” police had made an arrest.

“Churchill was a great Briton,” a Downing Street spokesman said.

“This government will always stand up for our values and the perpetrator must be held to account.”

A Dutch activist called Olax Outis claimed responsibility for the stunt in a message shared yesterday on social media by campaign group Prisoners for Palestine.

“If you see this message that peaceful protest has begun and it’s a reasonable assumption that I’m currently in a jail, somewhere in London,” the pre-

recorded message said.

Other phrases painted onto the statue included “globalise the intifada”.

In December police said people chanting this phrase would be arrested as part of efforts to counter alleged antisemitism and incitement to violence through slogans.

The police stance followed a deadly October attack on a synagogue the English city of Manchester, and a December shooting attack at a Jewish festival at Australia’s Bondi Beach in Sydney in which 15 people were killed.

The intifada refers to Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation. The first raged from 1987 to 1993, while the second flared between 2000 and 2005.

The 3.6 metre (12-foot) Churchill statue has been vandalised a number of times in recent years, including during Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion climate demonstrations in 2020.

UK set to approve Leonardo military contract

Britain’s finance minister Rachel Reeves is set to award a contract to Italian defence company Leonardo to build a new fleet of military helicopters, a Treasury source said yesterday.

Without a new contract, Leonardo had said it could shut Britain’s last military helicopter manufacturing site, in Yeovil, southwest England, threatening the jobs of the 3,000 people who work there.

The deal, worth as much as 1bn pounds (\$1.35bn), had appeared to be up in the air with just days to go until a March 1 deadline. The source from Reeves’ office said the finance minister had felt compelled to intervene to ensure that UK defence spending protects and drives British business and jobs, and that “she wasn’t going to let this deal

collapse under her watch,” the source said.

Reeves is set to approve a deal to buy 23 medium-lift support helicopters, which would be fewer than the requirement for up to 44 helicopters originally stated in a 2022 government notice.

A spokesperson for Leonardo declined to comment. A separate source told Reuters Leonardo’s tender offer expires on March 1, adding that further talks between the government and Leonardo were likely in the coming days.

Sky News had reported earlier that defence minister John Healey had been due to visit the factory in Yeovil on Thursday to announce the deal but pulled out because the finance ministry had yet to sign it off.

The government has previously said it needed to finalise its defence investment plan before it could award the helicopter contract.

That plan has been delayed from the autumn amid media speculation about a 28bn pound (\$38bn) hole in the military budget, despite Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s pledges to boost defence spending.

The Yeovil facility dates back to 1915, when it was known as Westland and made planes used in World War One. It pivoted to helicopters in the 1950s and has recently produced the Merlin and Apache helicopters.

As well as the 3,000 jobs on site, a further 9,000 jobs in the supply chain are supported by the factory. (Reuters)

Indian court throws out alleged corruption case against AAP leader

Reuters
New Delhi

An Indian court yesterday declined to proceed with a trial against opposition leader and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in an alleged corruption case that his party has labelled as politically motivated.

The anti-corruption activist-turned-politician was arrested in March 2024 and faced accusations by the Central Bureau of Investigation over irregularities in awarding liquor licences under a 2022 policy enacted by his government. He was released on bail six months later, after which he resigned as chief minister.

Kejriwal’s Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had dismissed the allegations as “a desperate attempt to malign his image” ahead of national and Delhi elections. The AAP lost the Delhi election in February 2025, handing Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s party controls of the national capital territory for the first time in 27 years. Kejriwal, 58, had earlier won three straight elections in Delhi.



Former Delhi chief minister and leader of the opposition Aam Aadmi Party Arvind Kejriwal holds a portrait of B.R. Ambedkar as he arrives at the party office upon his acquittal in the liquor scam case in New Delhi yesterday.

“We have always said the truth prevails,” Kejriwal told reporters outside the Rouse Avenue district court, with tears in his eyes. “They slapped a false case on us but the court said that we are fiercely honest.”

The CBI said it planned to appeal the ruling, stating that “several aspects of investigation have either been ignored or not considered adequately.” The Enforcement Directorate, which is separately examining the case, had also been

pursuing charges against Kejriwal.

The CBI alleges that the liquor policy implemented by Kejriwal’s government gave unfair advantages to private retailers. Kejriwal and his colleagues have denied the charges.

The court order also exonerated 22 other individuals, including Kejriwal’s former deputy Manish Sisodia, said lawyer Sumer Singh Boparai, who represented one of the accused. The trial court’s full order is yet to be published.

Reuters
New Delhi

India’s economic growth slowed in the October-December quarter as government spending and private investment eased, but the South Asian nation remained the world’s fastest growing major economy, helped by strong consumption.

The economy grew 7.8% in October-December from a year earlier under a new data series, slowing from 8.4% expansion in the previous quarter.

The Indian government’s projections under the new data series marginally boosted growth for financial year ending March 31. The economy is estimated to grow by 7.6% in 2025/26, the National Statistics Office said yesterday. It had been forecast to grow by 7.4% under the old data series.

For financial year 2026/27, the country’s projected economic growth has been revised to 7%-7.4% under the new series, said Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran after the data was released. In his annual report released last month, the economy was projected to grow at 6.8%-7.2% for 2026/27.

The South Asian nation will comfortably cross the \$4tn mark in the next financial year, Nageswaran said.



Construction workers build a section of the high-speed Ahmedabad-Mumbai rail project over the Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad yesterday.

For much of the current financial year, India’s economy has contended with uncertainty from tariffs, which have weighed on exports.

In response, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s administration accelerated domestic reforms, including cutting consumer taxes on hundreds of items and pushing ahead with long-delayed labour reforms.

Earlier this month, New Delhi reached an interim agreement with Washington that reduces effective tariffs to 18%, easing trade tensions, although the deal has yet to be formally signed.

The US Supreme Court’s order striking down President Donald Trump’s global tariffs may improve India’s trade position in its upcoming interim negotiations. Meanwhile, Trump has announced a temporary 10% duty on all nations, including India, and promised to raise it to 15%.

Despite those pressures, private consumption remained strong, expanding by 8.7% year-on-year in the October-December period compared with an 8% expansion in the previous quarter.

Government spending rose 4.7% year-on-year in October-December, down from a 6.6% increase the previous quarter while private investment grew 7.8%, lower than the 8.4% growth a quarter ago.

Manufacturing grew by 13.3% in the third quarter, compared with 13.2% a quarter ago. Financial services and hospitality sectors held strong.

Growth in farm output, a sector which employs more than 40% of the workforce, slowed to 1.4% in the current fiscal year from 2.3% a quarter ago.

“Service sector performance signals a strong lift, besides double-digit growth in manufacturing,” said Radhika Rao, economist at Singapore-headquartered DBS Bank.

“The October-December quarter also benefited from indirect tax rationalisation and festive demand, in addition to a better faring rural farm sector,” Rao said.

As India’s growth has remained strong, rating agency ICRA expects the central bank to keep rates on hold, with inflation likely to rise temporarily, its chief economist Aditi Nayar said.

Canada PM begins key India visit, seeking to boost trade

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney arrived in India yesterday for a visit he hopes will reset ties and double trade, offsetting the damage from his country’s fracturing relations with the United States.

Carney’s visit is a key step forward in ties that effectively collapsed in 2023 after Ottawa accused New Delhi of orchestrating a deadly campaign against Sikh activists in Canada.

He arrived in the financial hub of Mumbai, where he is expected to address business leaders before travelling to the capital and meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, the final day of his visit.

India’s foreign ministry said Carney’s visit marked a “significant step in further strengthening India-Canada ties”. “The India-Canada partnership is anchored in shared democratic

values, strong people-to-people ties, and expanding co-operation across diverse sectors,” ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

Carney’s office said discussions would focus on “ambitious new partnerships in trade, energy, technology and artificial intelligence (AI), talent and culture, and defence”.

Last year, the two countries agreed to resume negotiations on a proposed free-trade agreement.

Carney has said he wanted to more than double two-way trade with India by 2030, eyeing an annual target of \$51 billion. Ties improved after Carney took office in March 2025, and envoys have since been restored.

Anita Anand told reporters: “That is always at the forefront of our minds.”

India, the world’s fastest-growing major economy, is seeking to attract more overseas investments, and says Canadian pension and wealth funds have already invested \$73 billion.

Energy-hungry India – the world’s most populous country with 1.4 billion people – hopes Canada can support its ambitious plan to expand nuclear power capacity.

After India, Carney will travel on to Australia and Japan, part of a broad effort to pivot the Canadian economy away from excessive reliance on its southern neighbour, the United States. So far Trump broadly adhered to the North American free trade agreement he signed during his first term, and about 85 percent of US-Canada trade remains tariff-free. (AFP)

Friday prayers in Srinagar



Kashmiri men offer prayers on the second Friday of the holy month of Ramadan along a street in Srinagar, yesterday.



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Rebalancing act: Key outcomes of German leader's China sojourn

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz urged Beijing to press Russia for an end to the Ukraine war and raised the issue of Europe's yawning trade gap with China as he followed a string of Western leaders to court President Xi Jinping. Here are key outcomes of the German leader's inaugural trip to China earlier this week: Travelling with dozens of business leaders, Merz told reporters that economic competition "played an important role" in conversations during his visit. European businesses complain that China, with its low domestic demand, is flooding Europe with cheap goods. Germany's trade deficit with China hit a record €89bn (\$105bn) last year.

"This dynamic is not healthy," Merz admitted after talks on Wednesday. "We want to reduce these imbalances, which have arisen primarily from overcapacity in China," he said, vowing that more German officials would visit the country this year.

While Merz stressed the need to reduce dependence and trade imbalances, China raised concerns about what it calls Berlin's "over-securities" of trade and high-tech exports. Merz's visit was a "success for both sides," said Wang Dong, a professor at Peking University's School of International Studies. "Germany secured strong economic and business deals, while China deepened strategic communication with Europe's key power."

Companies from both sides reached more than 10 agreements this week across industries including autos, energy and finance, according to the Chinese commerce ministry.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz urges Beijing to press Russia for an end to Ukraine war

But the visit "did not exceed expectations," said Philippe Le Corre, a China-Europe relations expert at the Asia Society Policy Institute's Center for China Analysis. "Bilateral trade is unbalanced and increasingly so," he said. "I don't expect Chinese investments to come soon and help rebalance that deficit."

Merz said China had agreed to purchase up to 120 additional Airbus aircraft, adding that it "demonstrates how worthwhile such trips can be." He did not specify when those purchases would take place. Airbus is Europe's largest aerospace company, and China is a key export market.

The new Airbus deal would follow a raft of orders announced by Chinese firms at the end of last year.

Air China, Shanghai-based Juneyao Airlines and Spring Airlines, as well as Hong Kong-listed China Aircraft Leasing Group Holdings (CALC) announced purchases totalling around 150 jets. Airbus has yet to publicly comment on the deal announced by Merz. It did not respond to an AFP request.

Merz told reporters following talks with Chinese leaders on Wednesday that he urged Beijing to exert influence on its ally Russia to end the war in Ukraine. "Signals from China are taken very seriously in Moscow," Merz said. "China's voice is heard in the world." Xi said that diplomacy was "key to the issue" and that it was necessary to address the "legitimate concerns" of all sides, according to Chinese state news agency Xinhua.

Merz added that Germany wanted China to avoid supplying Russia with dual-use goods its military could use against Ukraine. "I hope that in my talks I was able to foster a little understanding for the fact that the leadership of this country should also contribute to ending the war in Ukraine," Merz told reporters before he left China on Thursday.

Merz said he had also touched on the sensitive topic of Taiwan, the self-ruled island China claims as its territory and which it has not ruled out using force to annex. Any "reunification" must be done peacefully, the German leader said. Merz is the latest in a string of Western leaders to visit China since December.

"China has risen to the ranks of the great powers," Merz said. "That is also changing our relationship with China."

Britain's Keir Starmer, France's Emmanuel Macron and Canada's Mark Carney also visited Beijing, as they recoil from a mercurial United States. "European countries now see China as a stable, indispensable partner – not just an economic player, but a critical factor in their foreign policy calculus," said Peking University's Wang.

Merz said Germany's trade policy was "not in isolation" from Europe. But visits by individual European leaders are not as strong as a coordinated push, Asia Society's Le Corre warned. "Beijing has been trying to ignore EU institutions for the past few years," he said. "Beijing is always keen to 'divide and rule.'" – AFP

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War-weary Kyiv



A pedestrian walks near a street art mural depicting a Ukrainian soldier in the Podil district of Kyiv amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. (AFP)

Balancing spiritual values, economic responsibility, environmental awareness

QNA
Doha

The holy month of Ramadan represents an opportunity to promote values of moderation, balance, solidarity, and self-discipline. However, the month also witnesses a noticeable rise in consumption levels across several sectors, particularly food, energy, and water. Instead of being a month of moderation and restraint, Ramadan has become for some families a season of excessive spending. Excessive consumption during Ramadan contradicts the essence of fasting, which is intended to refine self-discipline and strengthen social solidarity. From an environmental perspective, over-consumption aggravates waste management challenges, increases pressure on natural resources, and contributes to a higher carbon footprint, negatively affecting both the environment and society.

In this context, experts have warned of the adverse consequences of rising non-essential spending on household budgets during Ramadan, stressing the importance of adopting behaviours that reflect the true objectives of fasting. Experts interviewed by Qatar News Agency (QNA) stated that high consumption during Ramadan is no longer limited to food, but has become a comprehensive phenomenon affecting various aspects of daily life, from energy and water consumption to increased purchasing and unplanned spending, creating a striking contrast with the spiritual values that the holy month is meant to reinforce.

In this regard, Chairman of Friends of Environment Center (FEC), Dr Saif bin Ali al-Hajari, said Ramadan has become for some segments of society a season of intensive consumption rather than a period of reflection and rational use of resources. He stressed that focusing solely on food waste, despite its importance, does not reflect the full scope of the problem.

He noted that consumption in Ramadan doubles in several aspects, with food representing the most visible component of a broader pattern that also includes energy, water, goods and even time. Food waste remains the clearest indicator of escalating consumption during the holy month, with estimates suggesting that food waste ranges between 30 and 50 percent of total food prepared in homes, hotels and restaurants.

Food waste

Dr al-Hajari pointed out that the average per capita food waste in Qatar during Ramadan exceeds global averages, stressing that these figures reflect imbalances in consumption culture and food planning, particularly amid the expansion of Ramadan banquets, social gatherings and rising demand for takeaway meals.

The chairman of FEC also highlighted that energy and water consumption during Ramadan are no less significant than food waste. Homes typically experience higher electricity usage due to increased cooking activities and prolonged operation of household appliances, in addition to rising water consumption associated with food preparation and cleaning.

He explained that this increase often occurs without real awareness of its environmental impact, despite its direct pressure on natural resources and contribution to a higher ecological footprint, stressing that rationalizing energy and water use is as important ethically and religiously as reducing food waste.

Dr al-Hajari added that consumption during Ramadan also extends to non-food goods, as shopping malls and markets witness growing consumer demand driven by promotional campaigns and seasonal purchasing associated with the holy month. This spending pattern reflects a seasonal consumer culture based not on actual need but on social and psychological motivations, warning of its economic impact on families, especially amid rising financial obligations during and after Ramadan.

In a less discussed dimension, Dr al-Hajari pointed out that wasting time is another form of

30% - 50%
Food Waste in Homes, Hotels & Restaurants

1.3
Billion Tons Food Wasted Annually According to FAO

50% - 100%
Demand Increase of Food Sources in Some Markets

Statements to Qatar News Agency



Dr. Saif bin Ali Al Hajari
Chairman of Friends of Environment Center

Goes Beyond Food Waste & Includes Energy, Water, Prices & Time

Awareness, Environmental & Community Programs Initiated by Qatar to Enhance Consuming Responsibility



Dr. Omar Khalif Gharaibeh
Professor of Finance at School of Business at al-Bayt University in Jordan

Waste Affects Economy & Reflects Gap between Moral Values & Desires

Environmental Challenges Such as Water & Energy Over Usage, Increase of Garbage & Rise in Carbon Emissions

irrational consumption during Ramadan, where excessive focus on preparation and consumption activities may overshadow the spiritual essence of the month, which is based on worship, reflection and social solidarity.

Regarding the root causes of rising consumption patterns, he attributed them to the persistence of social customs linking abundance with social status, weak planning at the household level, commercial advertising influences during Ramadan, and limited awareness of long-term environmental and economic impacts.

Dr Saif bin Ali al-Hajari affirmed that Qatar is making continuous efforts to promote responsible consumption through the National Food Security Strategy, waste reduction programs, and environmental and community initiatives aimed at strengthening sustainability concepts. He noted that charitable initiatives, smart applications and partnerships with the private sector provide practical models for managing consumption surplus, though their success ultimately depends on changing individual behaviour.

He called for redefining the relationship with consumption during Ramadan, stressing that moderation does not mean limiting generosity but directing it in the right way. He emphasized that Ramadan is an opportunity to practice awareness rather than multiply consumption, and every resource we preserve today is a right for future generations.

He also stated that building a sustainable society begins with simple daily decisions related to what we buy, consume and waste, stressing that the true spirit of Ramadan lies in balance rather than excess. For his part, Professor of Finance at the School of Business at Al al-Bayt University in Jordan, Omar Khalif Gharaibeh, pointed out in remarks to QNA that Ramadan has become a unique seasonal consumption phenomenon in Muslim societies, with effects extending to essential resources such as water and energy, as well as consumer behaviour regarding goods and services.

Field estimates indicate that demand for food products may increase by 50 to 100 percent in some markets during Ramadan, accompanied by a noticeable rise in food waste. He also cited estimates by the Food and Agriculture Organization

stating that about 1.3bn tonnes of food are wasted annually, adding that Ramadan represents a seasonal example of the global challenge of food loss. He noted the transformation of the holy month in some cases into a consumption-driven season influenced by social customs, advertising, and marketing campaigns.

Excessive consumption

Shopping has become an end, with spending increasing before iftar due to hunger and psychological stimulation. This psychological and social shift reflects a fundamental paradox: fasting is meant to regulate desires, yet in practice it is often accompanied by excessive consumption and waste, placing pressure on household and economic resources.

Excessive consumption is not only linked to economic aspects but also to environmental challenges, including water and energy depletion, increased organic waste, and higher carbon emissions. Health experts also warn that overindulgence in sweets and fatty foods and poor sleep regulation can harm individual health, reflecting how resource mismanagement extends from society to the human body itself.

Gharaibeh highlighted that Ramadan should be a comprehensive test of self-management and resource governance at both individual and societal levels, linking spiritual values with practical responsibility. He stressed that Ramadan should not become a season of luxury food or social competition but rather an opportunity to promote moderation and discipline in personal and public resources.

He called for community-wide engagement in sustainable behaviour to reduce waste and support food security, noting that solutions should not be limited to individuals but should also involve public policies that encourage rational consumption, reuse practices and food donation. Addressing excessive consumption during Ramadan requires dual awareness, religious awareness that restores the true meaning of fasting based on moderation, and economic and environmental awareness that recognizes the impact of individual behavior on resource sustainability. Balancing the spiritual dimension with environmental responsibility is the pathway to making Ramadan a month of true worship and sustainable development at the same time.

Two killed, dozens injured as tram derails in Milan

AFP/Reuters
Milan

A tram derailed and smashed into a building in Milan yesterday, killing two people and injuring 38 others, police told AFP.

One of the dead was hit by the tram as it derailed and the second victim was a passenger, the city's mayor Giuseppe Sala told reporters at the scene.

Milan has just hosted the 2026 Winter Olympics and is preparing to host the Paralympics. It is currently staging Milan Fashion Week.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni expressed "deepest condolences" over the deaths.

Local emergency services said 13 ambulances were on the scene.

Civil protection teams set up a tent to assist the injured, according to a Reuters eyewitness.

Firemen wrapped shocked passengers in emergency blankets while ambulances took the more seriously injured to hospital.

The Milan transport company, ATM, said in a statement it was "deeply shocked", expressed its sympathy to those affected and said it was working with authorities to try to understand the cause.

An initial investigation suggested the driver had not activated a track switch, according to media reports.

The driver had also run through the last stop on the line before the accident, the reports said.

"There was a man who was trapped under the tram, his arm was trapped," witness Valerio Gaglione told AFP. "There were lots of people injured inside the tram, I saw an old man



Emergency services work at the scene following the deadly tram derailment in Milan. - Reuters

completely covered in blood."

Prosecutor Marcello Viola, the lead investigator, said the impact between the tram and the building it hit was "devastating".

One victim was an Italian in his 60s, while the other was an immigrant who lived in the city, Sala said.

"It doesn't look like it was a technical issue, but was connected to the driver," Sala added.

Witnesses told the media that the tram had been travelling fast.

However, it was not immediately clear if it was breaking the 50kph (31mph) speed limit for trams.

"I just heard an enormous bang," a 27-year-old called Anna, who was in her office nearby when the crash happened, told AFP.

"I saw a bit of the tram had gone into a shop," said Anna, who did not want to give her last name.

The yellow and white tram could be seen slung across the road just outside the historic centre in Milan.

One passenger told the Ansa news agency that "I thought it was an earthquake".

"I was sitting and ended up on the floor, along with the other passengers. It was terrible," the passenger said.

Afghan Taliban 'open' to talks after Pakistan military strikes on cities

Reuters/AFP
Kabul/Islamabad

Afghanistan's Taliban rulers said yesterday that they were willing to negotiate after Pakistan bombed its forces in major cities and dozens of troops were killed in the most serious clashes between the allies-turned-foes.

The strikes by Pakistan were the first time that it had directly targeted its former allies over allegations they are harbouring militants; it described the situation as "open war".

Targets in the capital Kabul and the city of Kandahar, where Taliban leaders are based, were hit, signalling a stark rupture in ties between the Islamic neighbours.

AFP reporters in Kabul and Kandahar heard blasts and jets overhead until dawn, and the Taliban government said Pakistani surveillance aircraft were flying over Afghanistan yesterday afternoon.

The overnight operation was Pakistan's most widespread bombardment of the Afghan capital and its first air strikes on the southern power base of the Taliban authorities since they re-

turned to power in 2021.

Near the key Torkham border crossing, an AFP journalist heard shelling yesterday morning, and a camp accommodating Afghans who had returned from Pakistan was hit by the fighting overnight.

"Children, women, and old people were running," Gander Khan, a 65-year-old returnee, told AFP in front of rows of tents at the Omari camp.

Thick plumes of black smoke rose from two sites in Kabul and a huge blaze was visible in video verified by Reuters.

"The plane came and dropped two bombs, then flew away again. After that, we heard explosions," said Kabul taxi driver Tamim, who was asleep when the strikes hit. "Everyone, in panic, ran down from the second floor of the house. The ammunition inside the depot kept exploding on its own."

Security sources in Pakistan said the strikes involved air-to-ground missile attacks on Taliban military offices and posts in response to Afghan attacks on Thursday.

The Taliban said Afghan forces had used drones to hit Pakistani military targets.

Pakistan said all the drones had



The deserted Friendship Gate, following the exchanges of fire between Pakistan and Afghanistan forces, at the border crossing between the two countries, in Chaman, Pakistan. - Reuters

been brought down and there was no damage.

Multiple ground clashes were reported along the border.

Pakistan said it killed 274 Taliban officials and militants while Afghanistan said it killed 55 Pakistani soldiers - figures which Reuters was unable to verify.

Pakistan confirmed that 12 of its own soldiers were killed and Afghanistan said it lost 13 Taliban fighters.

The Taliban denies sponsoring militant attacks on Pakistan and makes similar accusations against its neighbour.

"Afghanistan has never been a supporter of violence and has always preferred to resolve issues based on mutual understanding and respect," the Afghan foreign ministry quoted Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi as saying. "However, this approach will be effective only if the other party dem-

onstrates a practical and sincere willingness to find solutions."

The latest strikes threaten to unleash a protracted conflict along the 2,600km (1,615-mile) frontier.

"Our cup of patience has overflowed. Now it is open war between us and you (Afghanistan)," Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif said yesterday.

Pakistan's foreign ministry warned that any new provocations by the Taliban, or attempts by any "terrorist group" to target Pakistanis, will be met with a "measured, decisive and befitting response".

Pakistan is nuclear-armed and its military capabilities are vastly superior to Afghanistan.

However, the Taliban are adept at guerrilla warfare, hardened by decades of fighting with US-led forces, before returning to power in 2021.

German chemical workers protest looming job cuts

AFP
Berlin

Waving placards reading "Broken Agreements, Sacrificed Futures", hundreds of workers from chemical titan BASF protested in Berlin yesterday over plans to axe jobs in Germany and shift them to Asia.

The looming cuts at a major office employing some 3,000 administrative staff in the capital are the latest sign of the huge pressures facing Germany's traditional industries.

They are part of a cost-cutting drive by the world's biggest chemical company, which has been battered by high energy costs in Germany, weak demand and massive overcapacity on global markets.

"What BASF is doing is not right," Jesus Pinate, who works in BASF's human resources division, told AFP at the protest.

"They are taking away important jobs, a bunch of people are going to be unemployed," added the 33-year-old, as some 300 protesters waved the red and white flags of the IG BCE chemical workers union.

They also brandished placards emblazoned with various messages playing on the company's name, such as "Berliners Axed, Shareholders Flourishing?" and "Budget Above Staff Futures?"

Berlin Mayor Kai Wegner addressed the protesters outside the BASF offices in Berlin, telling them that we "are fighting together for this site"

"We are fighting together for your jobs with the works council, with the union, and with the Berlin legislature - I am sure that we will achieve something here."

Outlining the plans yesterday as it unveiled downbeat financial results, BASF said that back-office jobs would be reduced including at the Berlin office - the European hub of the global business services division - although it did not give a figure.

A whole range of administrative tasks will in future be carried out at a new site to be established in India, as well as at an existing centre in Malaysia, the group said.

"We will adapt our existing location structures and achieve significant cost savings as a result," BASF chief financial officer Dirk Elvermann told reporters.

He offered assurances that the Berlin hub would not be closed completely but conceded that it "will be smaller in terms of staffing than it is today".

Union representatives however slammed the plans to "relocate large parts" of the Berlin operation to India, and accused management of breaching existing agreements.

Europe's biggest economy has faced a storm of problems in recent years, from a manufacturing slump and fierce competition from China to weak demand in key export markets and high energy prices.

Firms large and small are shedding jobs, and there is a steady drumbeat of redundancy announcements in sectors ranging from automotive to factory equipment makers.

BASF's latest results highlighted their prob-



BASF employees display placards during a protest in front of German chemical giant BASF's European administrative headquarters (BASF Services Europe GmbH) in Berlin. - AFP

lems - adjusted operating profit, a key metric for investors and analysts, slipped to €6.6bn (\$7.8bn) in 2025 from €7.2bn the year before.

Sales meanwhile fell to €59.7bn, from €61.4bn in 2024. The company's shares fell by 2% after the results were announced.

The group, with around 110,000 staff worldwide, is hoping for a turnaround through its cost savings, targeting in particular its historic site in Ludwigshafen, the largest chemical complex in the world.

BASF chief executive Markus Kamieth said yesterday that his message was that "cost pressure will naturally remain".

"We will continue to seek constant productivity improvements and cost reductions in the coming years, especially in Europe, but also worldwide."

German rail operator, labour union reach wage agreement

Germany's Deutsche Bahn and the GDL train drivers' union reached a wage agreement yesterday, averting strikes that had threatened to hit passenger and freight transport at

a sensitive moment for the state-owned rail operator.

A GDL spokesperson confirmed the deal, saying that details would be presented later in the day.

Deutsche Bahn also confirmed

the breakthrough, which follows months of tense talks over pay and working conditions for around 10,000 staff covered by the union's contracts.

The GDL had pushed a

40-point catalogue of demands, including an overall wage increase of up to 8%, improved allowances, better terms for trainers and enhanced company pension bonuses. - Reuters

UN says use of force in global disputes being 'normalised'

AFP
Geneva

The UN rights chief warned yesterday that leaders were increasingly wielding power for power's sake and normalising the use of force to solve disputes, spurring surging numbers of global conflicts.

"The world is upside down," Volker Turk told the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Presenting an update on rights situations around the world, he voiced alarm at a number of raging conflicts, including in Sudan, Ukraine and the occupied Palestinian territories.

"The threat and use of force to solve disputes is becoming more frequent and normalised," he said.

"The number of armed conflicts has almost doubled since 2010, to around 60," he pointed out. "The world really is becoming a more dangerous place."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights cautioned that the growing number of conflicts came at a devastating cost, causing "a human rights wasteland".

"We must not revert to violence as an organising principle," he insisted.

Turk said an increasingly relentless competition for power for power's sake was on display in the world, to the detriment of rights everywhere.

"Players compete for control over land, energy, attention. But to what end?" he asked. "Dominating the global economy? Accumulating more power? Putting AI into space? Surely power must serve other purposes?"

Without naming names, Turk slammed leaders who "use power for their own ends, (who) exploit and subjugate".

Instead of trying to reverse the current dangerous trends, he lamented that some were actually "attacking the institutions designed to keep us safe", including the UN and international courts.

"The world cannot stand by as the edifice of international humanitarian and human rights law is dismantled before our eyes," he warned.

The UN rights chief listed a range of concern trends, including

how a number of countries were "militarising their law enforcement operations".

He pointed to how immigration officers and other agents in the United States had "used excessive force during large-scale operations against migrants and peaceful protesters, and have shot and killed several people during these operations".

Rising hate speech targeting migrants and refugees in places including the United States, Europe and Libya was "a deeply worrying trend", he said, also noting "a sharp increase in antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of religious hate across several regions".

Turk voiced particular concern over rising threats to the rights of women and girls.

"Violence against women, including femicide, is a global emergency," he said, pointing out that in 2024 alone, "around 50,000 women and girls worldwide were killed... most by family members".

He also pointed to two cases that have recently caused shockwaves around the world: those of Jeffrey Epstein and of Gisele Pelicot.

Both cases "show the extent of the exploitation and abuse of women and girls", Turk said, asking: "does anyone think there are not many more men like Pelicot or Jeffrey Epstein?"

"Such horrific abuse is enabled by social systems that silence women and girls, and insulate powerful men from accountability."

Turk also said he was deeply concerned by swelling attacks against women in the public eye.

"Every woman politician I meet tells me they face constant misogyny and online hate," he said.

More broadly, Turk highlighted the challenges posed by digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI), warning that without adequate oversight and accountability, they "invade privacy, undermine democratic processes and pose serious risks to the safety of our children and ourselves".

"They also turbocharge inequality and reproduce existing biases," he said, voicing particular concern about "the use of AI systems in armed conflict, to shape battlefield decisions with deadly impact".

French infant tests positive for toxin linked to formula recalls

A French infant has tested positive for the toxin cereulide after consuming baby formula, the health ministry said yesterday, following a contamination scare that sparked recalls in more than 60 countries.

This is the first case of a French infant testing positive for cereulide - a toxin known to cause nausea and diarrhoea - following its initial detection in December in formula containing arachidonic acid oil.

The deaths of three infants are suspected to be linked to the consumption of recalled infant formula in France where authorities have launched a probe.

While an initial stool test for the infant returned positive for the toxin cereulide, the health ministry warned that a direct causal link has yet to be established.

"This result confirms that the child in question was exposed to this toxin," the ministry said, adding it "may explain the symptoms".

The ministry stated that the child's medical team and toxicology experts are working to determine the source of the contamination.

While officials have not released details about the patient, Radio France reported the infant spent one night in the hospital in February after consuming formula produced by the French dairy giant Danone.

Eight infants in Belgium tested positive for the toxin this month, all of whom showed mild symptoms.

Manufacturers including European giants like Nestle, Danone and Lactalis, have recalled formula in more than 60 countries including several EU states since December. - AFP

Norway arrests teen suspected of plotting IS-inspired attack

Norway has arrested a 17-year-old Islamic State (IS) group sympathiser suspected of a plot to bomb a Nato site in the Scandinavian country, the NRK broadcaster reported yesterday.

According to the public broadcaster, the suspect, who was born and grew up in Norway, had been seen in school with an IS flag.

He was arrested on Thursday by officers from Norway's PST inter-

nal security service, which is responsible for counter-terrorism, before being taken into provisional custody for two weeks yesterday.

His lawyer, Knut Lerum, told AFP that he denies the accusations.

According to the NRK, citing PST documents, the teenager was planning to detonate explosives at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato)'s Joint Warfare Centre in Jatta, Stavanger, in southwestern Norway. - AFP

Fire, blast at Kazakhstan cafe kill at least seven, injure 19

A blast and fire in a cafe killed at least seven people and injured 19 in Kazakhstan's northern town of Shchuchinsk, local authorities said yesterday.

A 16-year-old girl was among the casualties, with as many as 13 still in hospital, they added in a post on Instagram, but gave no further details. - Reuters

Daily habits, actions play critical role in shaping environment

Dr Sa'ed Abdel-Halim Shannak, Scientist at Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (QEERI), part of Qatar Foundation's (QF) Hamad Bin Khalifa University, explains that the cumulative impact of individual actions plays a critical role in shaping the environment. "Our collective choices shape the world we live in," he says. "Each small decision - how we commute, what we buy, or how much waste we produce - adds up. Reducing our footprint helps slow global warming, conserve natural resources, and could play a part in improving air quality right where we live." Everyday consumption habits leave a measurable climate impact. For example, producing a single polyester shirt can generate around 5.5 kilograms of carbon dioxide - more than double the emissions of a cotton equivalent. Red meat is among the most carbon-intensive foods,



while fruits and vegetables typically carry a much lighter environmental footprint. Dr Shannak emphasises that simple, practical actions can collectively make a meaningful difference. Choosing public transport or carpooling, keeping air conditioners at moderate temperatures, reducing single-use plastic, supporting local products, and minimising food waste are all ways to lower emissions. Workplaces can also contribute

by adopting green procurement practices (purchasing goods and services that are environmentally friendly, energy-efficient, low-waste, and sustainably produced) and encouraging low-carbon commuting. Moderation in daily habits can make a measurable impact, he explains. "Climate change doesn't recognise borders," Dr Shannak explains. "Whether it's an individual household or an entire nation, cutting emissions means building



a more resilient and sustainable future." QF's Education City serves as a living laboratory and national testbed for sustainability in action. It is home to the world's largest concentration of LEED-certified student housing, and its community-led initiatives help ensure the campus operates as a thriving green space guided by sustainable practices. Within this environment, researchers collaborate across academia and

industry to develop solutions that address Qatar's priorities while contributing to global sustainability efforts. These initiatives are further strengthened through international partnerships that advance existing projects and create opportunities for new ones. "Projects like Green Island - a recycling hub and edutainment platform in Education City - remind us that environmental change starts locally," says Dr Shannak. "By integrating art, education,

and sustainability, such spaces make environmental awareness tangible and inspiring, especially for younger generations. "And high-impact research initiatives that address national priorities, like those led by QEERI, complement these community efforts by developing tools, technologies and influencing policies that make sustainable choices easier and more effective. Together, community engagement and research-driven solutions are accelerating Qatar's progress toward a greener, low-carbon future." So, what does the future look like if we succeed in lowering our carbon footprint? According to Dr Shannak: "It's a more sustainable, resilient, and environmentally responsible Qatar. Reducing our footprint means better air quality, healthier communities, and a future where economic prosperity and environmental protection go hand in hand."

The holy month of Ramadan enjoys a unique spiritual and humanitarian atmosphere

The atmosphere of the holy month of Ramadan is unique in its spiritual depth and humanitarian values, stressed ambassador of Turkmenistan Myratgeldi Seyitmammedov, who reflected on the profound meanings of the holy month and its significance within Turkmen society. The envoy described Ramadan as a time of spiritual and physical purification, deeply rooted in centuries of ethical traditions and cultural practices among Muslim communities, including the Turkmen people. In addition to its religious importance, he emphasised the month's role in strengthening family ties and social cohesion. Ramadan is often a month of generosity, patience, and compassion, as families gather in unity and devote themselves to charity and good deeds. He pointed out that in Turkmenistan, the observance of Ramadan is also accompanied by national initiatives that reinforce humanitarian values. Each year, on the occasion of Laylat al-Qadr, the President of Turkmenistan issues a special decree granting pardons to certain citizens, reflecting the country's commitment to mercy, social solidarity, and national unity. Further, the envoy highlighted the importance of maintaining Turkmen traditions while respecting the cultural and religious identity of his host country, describing Qatar as one of Turkmenistan's closest partners. He also noted the health benefits of fasting, explaining that it allows the body to rest and recover while strengthening resilience and endurance, reinforcing the idea that Ramadan represents both spiritual renewal and physical well-being. Accordingly, the ambassador lauded the distinctive Ramadan atmosphere in Qatar, where acts of charity and social engagement flourish, bringing people closer together. In particular, he expressed his admiration for the firing of the Iftar cannon and the widespread custom of inviting guests to share in Iftar meals, both of which reflect a spirit of hospitality and mutual harmony.



Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Qatar Myratgeldi Seyitmammedov

Meet the friend behind 'Feed a Friend'

By Amjad Vanimal
Staff Reporter

When the Covid-19 pandemic brought daily life to a halt, many found themselves facing unexpected challenges. While Qatar responded swiftly to the crisis, some residents, especially those who had always been self-reliant, suddenly struggled with job losses and reduced incomes.

Amid this difficult period, Aliyah Choudhury chose to act. What began as a simple gesture of kindness during those uncertain months has since grown into one of Qatar's most heartfelt grassroots initiatives. As the founder of Feed a Friend, she turned compassion into action, creating a community-led effort to support families experiencing hardship.

"That Ramadan during the Covid pandemic felt different," she recalls. "The usual spirit of generosity and togetherness was missing."

Determined to revive that spirit, Choudhury and a small group of volunteers began distributing hot meals, safely and responsibly, to frontline workers still labouring in the heat, including petrol station attendants and car washers. These hot meal distributions soon evolved into sustainable monthly food boxes containing essential staples for families in need.

Guided by the teaching of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that "the best of people are those who feed others," Feed a Friend grew into a community-led initiative rooted in dignity, compassion, and care.

In its early days, one of the biggest challenges was reaching those who needed help the most. Many families were hesitant to seek support.

"We had to build trust slowly and operate sensitively," Choudhury explains.

Through collaboration with embassies, community leaders, and like-minded organisations, the initiative gradually expanded its reach, ensuring assistance was delivered discreetly and respectfully.



Aliyah Choudhury, founder of Feed a Friend.

This Ramadan, the initiative expects to reach over 15,000 "Friends" across Qatar through food box distributions, supported by more than 2,000 volunteers. Each year, the team refines logistics, strengthens volunteer co-ordination, and enhances accountability measures to improve efficiency and reach. Ramadan food boxes are distributed a few days before the holy month begins to ensure families have food security from day one.

Choudhury describes Ramadan as a "spiritual insulin" that reawakens compassion and collective responsibility within the wider community.

While Ramadan remains a peak period for giving, Feed a Friend operates year-round. "Hunger and hardship do not end when Ramadan does," says Choudhury.

Among the many stories that have shaped Feed a Friend's journey, one stands out.

A newborn baby, Munisa, lost her mother just days after birth. Hospital social workers reached out to Feed a Friend and gently encouraged the grieving father, a taxi driver far from his extended family, to seek support.

Suddenly navigating grief while caring for a newborn alone, he was unable to work. Feed a Friend's



Feed a Friend's community fridges provide free food to anyone in need.

Welcome Baby Team stepped in with a comprehensive care box that included baby clothes, toiletries, diapers, a stroller, and a cot.

With support from the wider community, Munisa eventually returned home to be cared for by her grandmother, allowing her father to regain stability and return to work.

"It was a powerful reminder that when compassion is shared, it can restore dignity, stability, and hope at the darkest times," Choudhury reflects.

To date, Feed a Friend has supported over 45,000 people across Qatar. Beyond monthly food boxes and Ramadan hot meals, the initiative provides Welcome Baby care packages, community fridge refills, and educational support through its Little Learners programme for children awaiting school placements.

The organisation has delivered more than 40 Welcome Baby care boxes, completed over 2,000 fridge refills, redistributed more than 5,000 essential items through its Pay It Forward programme, processed over 12,000 applications, and mobilised more than 2,500 volunteers.

"For us, impact is not just scale. It's stability, dignity, and continuity for families and com-

munities," Choudhury says. Entirely volunteer-led, Feed a Friend relies on the dedication of individuals balancing work, family, and other commitments. While this presents challenges in capacity and scalability, strong systems, clear processes, and shared responsibility help ensure consistency and reliability.

Volunteers, Choudhury notes, are motivated by the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful, hands-on way. During Ramadan, community members can meet the team at Torba Market on Friday and Saturday evenings to learn more and get involved.

Looking ahead, Choudhury's long-term vision is simple yet ambitious: food security for all. Beyond immediate relief, she hopes Feed a Friend can contribute to long-term resilience through education, skills development, and community empowerment.

"We are always thinking of new programmes," she says, "but I would like to spend time refining and strengthening what we already have."

Her message to the wider community is clear: "This is not charity. It is social responsibility. When we look out for one another, even in small ways, we strengthen and develop the entire community."

Humanitarian work and giving have always been at core of Qatar's ethos

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar has always been an active donor to humanitarian and charitable work, as giving and helping others are considered integral parts of Qatari ethics and traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation, especially when it comes to aiding others in their difficult times and improving their lives.

Last year, more than 21mn people in 70 countries benefited from Qatar Charity's development projects valued at QR925mn, including initiatives that went beyond temporary aid to sustainable development, helping people alleviate their difficult situations and generate income.

Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) provided over \$667mn in international aid to support humanitarian causes in 2025, benefiting more than 45 countries worldwide. This aids various areas, including healthcare (\$62.1mn), education (\$74.1mn), economic



development (\$314.9mn), and humanitarian aid (more than \$141.1mn), in addition to various sectors that enhance local development in the targeted areas. QFFD also signed agreements worth over \$525mn in 2025 to benefit 17mn people globally.

Over the past decade, QFFD has pledged around \$110mn to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and malaria in the affected areas across the world. Further, it has provided considerable aid in various forms to conflict-stricken countries to help alleviate the hardship of their people and

achieve greater stability, including Afghanistan, Sudan, Palestine, and Gaza in particular, as well as Syria, Somalia, Niger, and Lebanon.

Qatar has always been quick to respond to international disasters and has adopted the good of humanity above all other considerations. In 2025, QFFD launched emergency aid for flood-affected families in Vietnam and Sri Lanka, and donated around \$11mn for flood victim housing in Pakistan. In 2023, it provided massive aid to those affected by the 2023 Turkey-Syria earthquake, donating 10,000 mo-



bile homes for affected families.

Millions of dollars' worth of supplies, including medical equipment, food and emergency supplies, were flown to countries such as Somalia, Lebanon and Nigeria to deliver quick relief to the trouble-stricken people there.

As the country is keen to maintain long-term, sustainable development for people across the world, education has been a major area of Qatari international contributions and donations.

For instance, the Education Above All (EAA) Foundation has



impacted millions of out-of-school children and young people from 78 countries worldwide and helped get them back to school through aid, grants, and loans for educational infrastructure and skill-building. Gaza, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia are among the focus areas of such projects, in addition to the considerable contributions and effective projects for the refugee children.

Educational projects included a \$2.5mn integrated educational complex in Sri Lanka, and partnerships for thousands of out-of-school children in Djibouti and Kenya. Further, the Educate A Child (EAC) initiative has helped over 14.7 million out-of-school children enrol in primary education classes around the world, giving them hope for a better life and the opportunity to realise their full potential. The initiative has outreach in around 77 countries worldwide, targeting less-privi-

leged and vulnerable children to equip them with equal education and empower them.

Locally, the country has several government and non-government organisations and entities that support needy persons and their families, regardless of their nationalities or backgrounds, through various means such as food donations, education aid and debt relief.

On the popular levels, it has been customary during the holy month of Ramadan, religious occasions and other major festivals to see many Qatari households distributing free meals on the expatriate workers, give them packages of food, and some families and persons even distribute food supplies and clothes on the houses of the targeted needy persons, all done without announcement or brag or causing any embarrassment for the needy, as they see giving as an integral to continue the blessing from heaven.