

**QIC** Qatar Insurance Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)	Net Profit Before the Impact of P11r Two Taxes	Net Profit Profit attributable to QIC shareholders	Earnings Per Share
9%  QAR 9.9B	19%  QAR 874M	9%  QAR 791M	10%  QAR 0.188

qic-group.com

**GULF TIMES**

SUNDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13666

March 1, 2026  
Ramadan 12, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

Published in QATAR since 1978

Roam across the GCC this Ramadan with your local plan. Use your local data minutes and SMS while roaming.

**ORIX POLYDEX**

دوربکس بولیدکس

Durable waterproofing-performance for roof protection

44601602/3

**Running Hotel Business For Sale**

Furnished Hotel With License & Prime Location.

Serious Party Call Us: 33598672 / 30200166 / 52038746

**HABARI REAL ESTATE**

EVERY PIECE OF THE PUZZLE, IN ONE PLACE

+974 3030 0880  
+974 3341 9475

Apartment & Villa's • Commercial & Office Spaces  
Warehouses & Stores • Worker Accomodations

**RAMADAN WITH FAMILY**

1500+ Products On Offer

Ready to GUAC AND ROLL?

Only on talabat

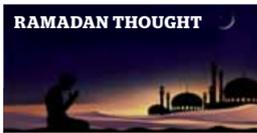
**Starting today, distance learning for all schools and universities**

By A Staff Reporter  
Doah

All educational institutions in Qatar – from kindergartens through to universities, both public and private – will move to remote learning starting today, March 1, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education announced yesterday, describing the measure as precautionary and open-ended. The ministry said the decision reflects its commitment to ensuring a safe environment for students, teachers and administrative staff, and comes against the backdrop of its ongoing monitoring of regional developments. It stressed that the shift to distance learning would not disrupt academic schedules, with institutions expected to continue operating through their official digital platforms. Schools have been directed to notify parents and students of the relevant communication channels and to ensure that all students can access their learning platforms without difficulty.

**Remote work for all ministries, govt entities from today**

In light of current regional developments, the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers announced that it has been decided to adopt remote work starting today for all employees in all ministries, government agencies, public bodies and institutions. This decision excludes employees in the military, security, and health sectors, as well as employees whose work requires their presence at the workplace. The General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers urges all citizens and residents to obtain information from reliable sources and to follow the security and safety guidelines issued by official state authorities. (QNA)



And eat up not one another's property unjustly (in an illegal way e.g. stealing, robbing, deceiving, etc.), nor give bribery to the rulers (judges before presenting your cases) that you may knowingly eat up a part of the property of others sinfully (Qur'an 2:188)

**Prayer times**

Fajr...4:40; Zuhr...11:46; Asr...3:07; Maghrib...5:39; Isha...7:09

**Fasting times**

Iftar today ..... 5.39pm  
Imsak tomorrow..... 4.29am

**Khamenei is dead: Trump**

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is dead, US President Donald Trump said yesterday. Trump announced this on his Truth Social platform, without elaborating on the source of the information. Trump also said that US bombing of Iran will continue as long as needed and that the killing of the country's supreme leader gives Iranians their "greatest chance" for taking power. "The country has been, in only one day, very much destroyed and, even, obliterated. The heavy and pinpoint bombing, however, will continue, uninterrupted throughout the week or, as long as necessary to achieve our objective," Trump said.

The death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – which Iran has not yet confirmed – "is the single greatest chance for the Iranian people to take back their country," Trump said in the statement. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi had earlier told NBC News that Khamenei was alive



"as far as I know", adding that "all high-ranking officials are alive". Also asked about Khamenei's health, foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told the BBC he was "not in a situation to confirm anything", but "the whole system, the whole nation is focused on defending (our) national integrity". Ali Larjani, head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said: "The brave soldiers and the great nation of Iran will teach an unforgettable lesson to the international oppressors." In an earlier video address, Trump told Iranians the "hour of your freedom is at hand", urging them to rise up and "take over your government". (Reuters/AFP)

**Qatar repels Iranian missile, drone attack**

**65 missiles and 12 drones launched; 8 hurt, one critical**

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Qatar repelled an Iranian aerial assault yesterday morning, intercepting dozens of ballistic missiles and drones. The authorities however assured the citizens that the country remained stable and safe. Iran launched a co-ordinated barrage of 65 ballistic missiles and 12 drones at targets across the country. The strike began at 11:39am, when the Ministry of Defence detected the first incoming wave of threats. Military forces moved swiftly to intercept repeated volleys of missiles alongside multiple drone incursions, with Staff Lieutenant Colonel Nasser Mohamed al-Kubaisi confirming that a large

number of the threats were successfully neutralised. Despite the scale of the assault, authorities moved quickly to reassure the public. Major General Abdullah Khalifa al-Muftah, Director of Public Relations at the Ministry of Interior, said the country's response activated a comprehensive national system from the very first moments of the attack, with full co-ordination across all relevant authorities. He confirmed that the overall situation across Qatar remains stable and safe.

However, the attacks were not without consequence. Across the south, west, north, and central regions of the country, authorities received 114 reports of shrapnel falling in residential and open areas. Eight people were injured; four have since been treated and discharged from hospital, while four others remain under medical care – one of them in a critical condition. Material damage to both public and private property was also recorded. To Page 2

**Qatar condemns strike, reserves right to respond**

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

Qatar has issued a forceful condemnation of Iran after ballistic missiles struck Qatari territory, calling the attack a flagrant violation of its national sovereignty and warning that Doha reserves its full right to respond in accordance with international law. In a statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Qatar described the Iranian strikes as "a direct infringement on its security and territorial integrity" and "an unacceptable escalation that threatens the security and stability of the region." To Page 2

**World leaders back Qatar, condemn Iranian attack**

**Amir receives calls of solidarity from Saudi, Kuwait, Oman, UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan, France, Germany, Britain, Greece**



World leaders have rallied in solidarity with Qatar following Iranian ballistic missile strikes on its territory, with heads of state and government from across the Arab world and Europe making calls to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to condemn the attacks and pledge their full support.

In a series of calls, leaders uniformly stressed the need for an immediate halt to escalation and a return to dialogue, while affirming their countries' readiness to stand with Qatar in any measures it takes to protect its sovereignty, security, and stability.

In a call made to His Highness the Amir by Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, they exchanged viewpoints on developments in the region amid the rapidly evolving security situation, along with the consequences of the ongoing escalation and its impact on regional and international security. They further underscored the importance of the immediate cessation of any escalatory acts and a return to the dialogue table to safeguard the security of the region and to prevent sliding into wider confrontations.

In this context, the Saudi crown prince stressed Saudi Arabia's full solidarity with Qatar, along with his vehement condemnation of the targeting of Qatari territories with Iranian ballistic missiles. He also affirmed the provision of all possible support for Qatar in any measures it takes to safeguard its sovereignty, security, and stability. The Amir expressed his utmost thanks and profound gratitude for Saudi Arabia's enduring positions and fraternal sentiments of solidarity. To Page 4

**Trump call with Amir expresses solidarity**

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call yesterday from US President Donald Trump. At the outset of the call, the US president expressed his solidarity with Qatar following Iranian aggression on the state and several countries in the region. The Amir expressed his appreciation to the US president for the solidarity with Qatar. The call also dealt with security developments in the region and their repercussions on regional and international peace and security. In this regard, the Amir stressed the importance of containing the dangerous escalation through diplomatic channels and peaceful means to protect the region's security and stability. (QNA)

**Qatar summons Iran ambassador**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned yesterday Iranian ambassador to Qatar Ali Salehabadi and registered its strong protest, deep dissatisfaction, and categorical rejection of the targeting of Qatari territory, describing it as a blatant violation of Qatar's sovereignty, a threat to its security, and a flagrant breach of international law and the United Nations Charter. To Page 2

**Attacks lead to airspace closures, flight disruption**

GT Report  
Doha

A sweeping military escalation across the Middle East has brought global aviation to a near standstill, with US and Israeli strikes on Iran earlier yesterday triggering retaliatory missile and drone attacks on Israel and multiple Gulf states – and setting off a chain reaction of airspace closures. By last evening, at least 10 countries had fully or partially shut their skies. Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Bahrain, and Kuwait all closed their airspace entirely. Qatar's Civil

Aviation Authority announced a temporary closure of Doha's airspace. The UAE suspended operations at both Dubai International and Al Maktoum International. Oman shut down Muscat International Airport, while Syria imposed partial restrictions over its southern border regions. The impact has been immediate. Emirates, the Dubai-based carrier that connects much of the world through its Gulf hub, suspended all operations. Qatar Airways grounded its entire schedule out of Doha. Flydubai, Gulf Air, Kuwait Airways, and Etihad reported heavy disruptions. To Page 4

Today's **GULF TIMES** includes a 48-page supplement on **Education**

Scan here To Read ONLINE



# PM discusses developments with leaders

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received telephone calls yesterday from Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Co-operation and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs Dr Badr Abdel-Aty; Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan; Jordan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Dr Ayman Safadi; Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah al-Saud; Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah; UAE's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan; Bahrain's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Abdul Latif bin Rashid al-Zayani; Oman's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood al-Busaidi;

and Lebanon's Prime Minister Dr Nawaf Salam.

HE Sheikh Mohammed also received phone calls Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs Jose Manuel Alvarez, French Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Noel Barrot, German Minister of Foreign Affairs Johann Wadepuhl and Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov.

HE the Prime Minister also received phone calls from European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas and Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Abbas Araghchi.

The calls dealt with the military escalation in the region and its repercussions on security and stability, both in the region and internationally.

They also dealt with discussing ways to resolve all differences peacefully.

HE Sheikh Mohammed stressed that Iran's targeting of Qatari territory with ballistic missiles was a blatant violation of its national sovereignty, inconsistent with the principles of good neighbourliness, and could not be accepted under any justification or pretext.

He pointed out that Qatar has always been keen to distance itself from regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue between the Iranian side and the international community.

However, HE Sheikh Mohammed added, the renewed targeting of its territory does not show good faith and threatens the understanding on which bilateral relations between the two countries were built.

He expressed Qatar's strong condemnation of the Iranian attacks that targeted Jordan, Saudi

## Qatar strongly condemns attacks on Saudi Arabia

Qatar has expressed its strong condemnation of the Iranian attacks that targeted the Riyadh region and the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, considering them a breach of the kingdom's sovereignty, and a rejected escalation that imperils the region's security and stability.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs underscored Qatar's full solidarity with Saudi Arabia in all measures it takes to protect its sovereignty, security, and stability. - QNA



Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE and Bahrain, and Qatar's full solidarity with them in all the measures they take to preserve their sovereignty, security and stability.

The ministers expressed their countries' condemnation of the Iranian missile attack on Qatari territory, considering it a flagrant

violation of Qatar's sovereignty, its airspace, international law, and the Charter of the United Nations.

During their phone conversation, HE Sheikh Mohammed and Iran's Dr Araghchi discussed the outcomes of the third round of negotiations between the US and

Iran, which took place in Geneva, Switzerland.

They emphasised the importance of continuing US-Iranian negotiations and supporting diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions and promote security, stability, and peace in the region. - QNA

## Qatar Philatelic and Numismatic Centre holds annual auction

THE Qatar Philatelic and Numismatic Centre, affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, held its 27th annual stamp and coin auction on Friday at its new headquarters in the ministry building.

The auction featured 262 diverse items, including stamps, coins, covers, albums, and first editions.

Centre director Hussein Rajab al-Ismail said that this year's auction is distinguished by the

significant participation of collectors and enthusiasts of stamps and coins from the Gulf countries and the Arab world, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Jordan, Yemen, and Lebanon.

He noted the Centre's commitment to offering comprehensive and rare examples that cater to the interests of stamp and coin collectors from across the Gulf and the Arab world.

Al-Ismail highlighted the di-



verse range of exhibited items, including stamps, covers, and gold and silver banknotes and coins.

He noted that the Qatar Philatelic and Numismatic Centre's programme for this year features local and international participation and exhibitions, such as

a major international stamp and coin exhibition in Doha, organised by the ministry with the participation of 16 countries from the Gulf, the Arab world, and beyond.

The Centre will also participate in the Doha International Book



Fair in May, the Macau International Stamp Exhibition 2026, the Asian International Stamp Exhibition in Bandung, Indonesia, the Sharjah Stamp Exhibition, and the Taipei International Philatelic Exhibition.

The Qatar Philatelic and Nu-

matic Centre aims to promote the hobby of stamp and coin collecting, working to elevate its standards and create opportunities for its development through national, regional, and international exhibitions and participation. - QNA

## Uganda president receives credentials of Qatar's envoy



Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has received the credentials of Qatar's ambassador to Uganda Ahmed bin Mohammed Abdulrahman al-Zwaidi. - QNA

## Strong turnout for 'Al Razji 2026' at Darb Al Saai

THE "Al Razji 2026" heritage event organised by the Ministry of Culture at its permanent Darb Al Saai venue in the Umm Salal area continues until March 3, with the aim of reviving cultural heritage, celebrating traditional Qatari customs, and offering a Ramadan experience that embodies the authenticity of the past.

The activities have witnessed a large turnout of citizens, residents, and visitors.

Families were particularly prominent, bringing their children to enjoy the activities amidst a distinctive heritage atmosphere.

Abdulaziz al-Buhaisim, a researcher in Qatari history and heritage, praised the events that celebrate authentic Qatari heritage, the di-

versity of participating exhibitions, shops, and organisations, and the enthusiastic public response.

At the heart of this heritage scene, the interactive "Al Razji competition", presented by media personality Iman al-Kaabi, emerged amidst a vibrant Ramadan atmosphere.

The competition attracted significant engagement from audiences of all ages.

Al-Kaabi said that Al Razji competition transcends mere entertainment, serving as a bridge of knowledge connecting contemporary generations to their authentic roots.

She said that it witnessed a great passion among the audience to learn about the details of the folk

heritage in an interactive and enjoyable way.

As part of Al Razji activities, artist Mohammed Hassan al-Mohammadi presented a daily heritage segment for children.

Various activities continue daily from 8pm to 1am.

The workshops are witnessing a remarkable turnout for learning and acquiring of traditional craft skills.

Visitors also explore art exhibitions, including a photography exhibition and the rare collections exhibition from the Khaled Al Ajmi museum, in addition to specialised workshops on "Grandparents' Skills in the Hands of Grandchildren". - QNA

## NHRC castigates Iranian attacks, says it's documenting violations

The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) condemned the Iranian military attacks that targeted the State of Qatar, stressing that these attacks constitute a clear violation of the United Nations Charter, a blatant challenge to the rules of public international law, and a breach of the principles of respect for state sovereignty.

In a press statement, the Committee expressed its condemnation of Iranian aggression targeting the country's territory and the resulting repercussions affecting civilians, causing fear and threatening their safety as well as the safety of civilian facilities and infrastructure, due to the fall of

missiles or shrapnel in residential areas.

It pointed out that these attacks represent a clear violation of international human rights law, foremost among them the right to life, the right to psychological and physical integrity, the right to freedom of movement, personal security, and other rights that were endangered as a result of the Iranian military attacks. The National Human Rights Committee commended the swift response and immediate measures taken by the Ministry of Interior and other competent authorities, which contributed to safeguarding the lives of citizens, residents, and visitors and ensuring their safety. It called on citizens, residents, and visitors

to adhere to the instructions issued by the relevant authorities in order to strengthen measures protecting the right to life and the right to health.

The Committee said that it will keep this matter under review, and will continue to monitor and document the effects and violations resulting from these attacks, in preparation for issuing a detailed and comprehensive report. It reaffirmed its firm commitment to continuing its work to promote and protect human rights and to safeguard the dignity of citizens, residents, and visitors in the State of Qatar, stressing the need to activate international accountability mechanisms to ensure justice and end impunity. (QNA)

## Recall of Toyota, Lexus vehicles

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in co-operation with Al Abdulghani Motors, Qatar's Toyota dealership, has announced the recall of Toyota LC300/VJA300 (gasoline, twin turbo) 2025-2026 models and the LC300/FJA300 (diesel, twin turbo) 2025-2026 models. The recall is due to a possible defect in 10-speed automatic transmission that contains linear solenoids to control the shifting of gears which leads transmission fluid to leak from the housing. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in co-operation with Al Abdulghani Motors, Qatar's Lexus dealership, has also announced the recall of Lexus LX600 (Gasoline, twin turbo) 2025-models. The recall is due to a possible defect in 10-speed automatic transmission that contains linear solenoids to control the shifting of gears which leads transmission fluid to leak from the housing. The ministry said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs. The ministry said it will coordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works and will communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out.

## Qatar repels Iranian missile, drone attack

From Page 1

Authorities are urging the public to avoid spreading rumours or sharing videos of the attacks online, to report any foreign objects or unidentified debris, and to stay away from suspicious remains.

Earlier, QNA reported the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as announcing that, thanks to high readiness, constant vigilance, and coordinated efforts between the relevant authorities, it successfully intercepted the third wave of attacks targeting several areas in the country.

The MOD confirmed in a press statement that the threat was addressed immediately upon detec-

tion according to the pre-approved operational plan, with all missiles being intercepted before reaching the country's territory.

The ministry emphasised that the Qatari Armed Forces possess full capabilities and resources to protect the nation's security and to respond decisively to any external threat, reiterating that the security situation is stable and fully under control.

It also called upon citizens, residents, and visitors to remain assured, follow instructions issued by the security authorities, avoid being swayed by rumours, and rely on data and information issued by official sources.

## QYH establishes a Toastmasters club

Qatar Youth Hostels (QYH) has announced the establishment of a Toastmasters Club, a specialised development platform focused on honing public speaking, communication, and leadership skills among young people within an internationally accredited interactive educational framework.

The initiative stems from the Ministry of Sports and Youth's belief in the role of youth in driving change. The ministry invited young people who are passionate about leadership, public speaking, and effective communication to apply for the club's youth leadership team. The deadline for registration is March 21, 2026, with interviews taking place on March 25 and 26.

The programme aims to develop professional public speaking and communication skills, cultivate leadership and management abilities, represent QYH at youth and international events, and contribute to estab-



lishing a unique youth experience within QYH.

It is worth noting that Toastmasters is a global, non-profit educational organisation founded in 1924 and is considered one of the world's leading organisations specialising in developing communication, public speaking, and leadership skills.

The organisation adopts a practical educational methodology based on application and practice, where members gain their experience through periodic meetings that include prepared and impromptu speeches, constructive assessments, and progressive learning paths that contribute to enhancing self-confidence, refining personal skills, and building influential leadership competencies.

## Qatar summons Iran's envoy

From Page 1

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi affirmed to the Iranian ambassador that the repetition of such targeting constitutes a reckless and irresponsible act that is completely inconsistent with the principles of good neighbourliness and the relations between the two countries. He stressed that the continuation of such irresponsible actions would inevitably lead to serious repercussions for bilateral relations, particularly as Qatar has worked diligently to support diplomatic solutions aimed at de-escalation. He also emphasised that targeting Qatari territory caused fear among civilians and damage to residential areas, stressing the urgent need to return immediately to dialogue and diplomatic channels to resolve differences and halt military operations that pose a direct threat to security and stability in the region. (QNA)

## Qatar condemns strike, reserves right to respond

From Page 1

The ministry affirmed that Qatar would reserve the right to respond "in a manner proportionate to the nature of the aggression, in defense of its sovereignty and in protection of its security and national interests." The ministry pointedly noted that Qatar has long been "among the foremost advocates of dialogue with the Islamic Republic of Iran," consistently calling for negotiation as "the optimal foundation for addressing differences and resolving disputes through peaceful means." The strikes, Qatar said, "do not reflect good faith

and threaten the foundations of understandings upon which bilateral relations between the two countries were based."

Qatar also noted its consistent efforts to distance itself from regional conflicts and its role in facilitating dialogue between Iran and the international community - making the targeting of its territory, the Ministry stressed, all the more indefensible. "The targeting of Qatari territory is inconsistent with the principles of good neighbourliness and cannot be accepted under any pretext or justification," the statement read. Qatar further extended its condemna-

tion to cover Iranian strikes against Kuwait, the UAE, Jordan, and Bahrain, expressing "full solidarity" with those countries and affirming its support for "all measures they take to safeguard their sovereignty, security, and stability." The ministry closed its statement with a renewed call for de-escalation, urging all parties to pursue an "immediate cessation of any escalatory actions" and a return to negotiations. Qatar called for "the prioritisation of reason and wisdom" and efforts to contain the crisis "in a manner that preserves the security of the region, safeguards the interests of its peoples, and prevents a



## Qatar Charity extends Ramadan aid to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Georgia, Cote d'Ivoire



As part of its Ramadan campaign "Good Starts With You", and with support from donors in Qatar, Qatar Charity (QC) continues to implement its "Feed the Fasting" project by distributing Ramadan food baskets in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Georgia, and Cote d'Ivoire.

The distributions are carried out in co-operation with Qatari embassies to support underprivileged families and ease their hardships during the holy month of Ramadan.

The project supports families most in need during Ramadan by providing food baskets with essential items, ensuring enough food for the entire month.

In Pakistan, Qatar Charity distributed food baskets to more than 6,888 vulnerable people in Rawalpindi, Punjab, including women-headed families, persons with disabilities, orphans, and the elderly.

In Bangladesh, the "Feed the Fasting" project benefited 12,470 people from orphan families and underprivileged households by providing food baskets for the entire month of Ramadan.

Some 580 Ramadan food baskets were distributed to needy



families in co-operation with the Qatar embassy in Dhaka, as part of Qatar's ongoing humanitarian efforts.

Similarly, Qatar Charity, in co-operation with the Qatar embassy in Tbilisi, distributed Ramadan food baskets in several areas of Georgia to support needy families during the holy month.

In Cote d'Ivoire, Qatar Charity, in co-operation with Qatar

embassy in Abidjan, distributed Ramadan food baskets to underprivileged families.

Rashid bin Humaidi al-Muqarrar, acting charge d'affaires of Qatar embassy in Abidjan, took part in the distribution of food to 520 families, benefitting about 3,200 people, as well as in the provision of hot Iftar meals to the most vulnerable in West Africa.

## Traditional catering kitchens enjoy brisk business during Ramadan

Throughout Ramadan, traditional catering kitchens across various parts of the country are witnessing brisk business, operating at full capacity to meet the growing demand for meals during the holy month.

These include daily Iftar meals, meals for social gatherings, Suhoor, and collective Iftar events, as key meals of Ramadan traditions.

Several kitchen managers confirmed that preparations for this season began early, with sufficient stockpiles of essential food items, spices, equipment, and cooking tools.

Some kitchens have also introduced special Ramadan offers, such as discounts on lamb prices set at QR350 instead of QR400. Syrian lamb options are available for large gatherings, cooked and served with rice, broth, and sauces, priced between QR1,750 and QR1,900, depending on the type of lamb and desired addi-

tions. These meals are mainly reserved for evening gatherings and family feasts, with flexibility in presentation based on customer preferences, along with delivery services across the country.

Awab Mohamed, supervisor of a traditional kitchen, said the facility is now capable of serving up to 6,000 Iftar meals daily during Ramadan.

He stressed that preparations are running at full speed to meet the increasing demand. The kitchen has ensured adequate supplies, including cookware, stoves, and spices, in addition to a team of five traditional chefs and assistants to ensure high-quality dishes and fast preparation. Another kitchen manager, Hafeez Mashhour, confirmed that daily Iftar meals are offered, including various meat and chicken

dishes, available from 3.30pm until Iftar time, providing flexibility for customers to pick up their orders. The kitchen also offers other services, including Arab lamb dishes priced at QR500 with additional sides of rice, boiled eggs, nuts,

broth, and sauces. Syrian lamb is available for QR1,900, roasted goats for QR1,650, Arabic goats for QR1,500, and Hoor lamb for QR3,500. There is also an option to serve the Hoor lamb on a large platter for QR750.

Mashhour noted that traditional kitchens are open to large meal orders throughout the day during Ramadan, with deliveries starting at Maghreb and continuing until lam, ensuring customers receive their meals on time.

## How to improve your relationship with the Qur'an

It is recommended for every believing man and woman to recite the Book of Allah, the Noble Qur'an, often, with due contemplation and understanding. This may be done by using a copy of the Qur'an or from one's memory. Allah - the Most High - Says (what means): "[This is] a blessed Book (the Qur'an) which We have revealed to you, (O Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam), that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded." [Qur'an 38:29] Are you one of those people who rarely touch the Qur'an? Or do you read it daily, but don't find it is having the impact on you that it should? Whatever the case may be, these are some simple tips that can help you connect with the Qur'an.

### 1. Before you touch it, check your heart

The key to really benefiting from the Qur'an is to check your heart first, before you even touch Allah's book. Ask yourself, honestly, why you are reading it. Is it to just get some information and to let it drift away from you later? Remember that the Prophet Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, was described by his noble wife, 'Aa'ishah, as a "walking Qur'an": in other words, he didn't just read and recite the Qur'an, he lived it.

### 2. Before you touch it, do your Wudhoo' (ablution)

Doing your Wudhoo' is good physical and mental preparation to remind you that you are not reading just another book. You are about to interact with Allah, the Most Exalted, so being clean should be a priority when communicating with Him.

### 3. Start with reading only five minutes everyday

Too often, we think that we should read the Noble Qur'an for at least one whole hour. If you are not in the habit of reading regularly, this is too much. Start off with just five minutes daily. If you took care of step one, Insha Allah (Allah willing), you will notice that those five minutes will become 10, then half an hour, then an hour, and maybe even more!

### 4. Make sure that you understand what you have read

Five minutes of reading the Qur'an in Arabic is good,

but you need to understand what you are reading. If you are not Arabic, or you don't understand the Arabic language, then make sure you have a good translation of the Qur'an in the language you understand best. Always try to read the translation of what you have read that day.

Regarding those who neglect the Glorious Qur'an by not reading or not understanding it, Allah Almighty Says (what means): "And the Messenger has said, 'O my Lord, indeed my people have taken this Qur'an as [a thing] abandoned.'" [Qur'an: 25:30]

Allah Almighty informs us about His Prophet and Messenger, Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, that he said: "My Lord my people have abandoned -- acting or listening -- to the Qur'an" and that is because the idol-worshippers did not pay attention nor listen to the Qur'an, as Allah Says (what means): "And those who disbelieve say, [Do not listen to this Qur'an and speak noisily during [the recitation of] it that perhaps you will overcome." [Qur'an 41:26]

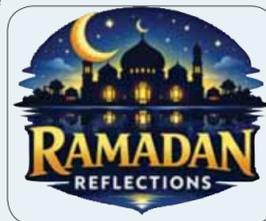
### 5. Remember that the Noble Qur'an is far more interactive than a CD

In an age of "interactive" computer programs, a number of people think books are passive and boring. But the Qur'an is not like that. Remember that when you read the Glorious Qur'an, you are interacting with Almighty Allah. He Almighty is talking to you, so pay attention.

### 6. Make Du'aa' (supplication)

Ask Allah, the Most Exalted, to guide you when you read the Qur'an. Your aim is to sincerely, for the love of Allah, interact with Him by reading, understanding and applying His blessed words. Making Du'aa' to Allah for help and guidance will be your best tool for doing this. When you are making Du'aa', you have a direct connection with Allah Almighty. So when you are saying your Du'aa', you shouldn't be distracted, but instead you should be fully concentrated. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Make Du'aa' and be assured of it being answered, and know that Allah, the Exalted, does not answer a Du'aa' from a careless heart which is not concentrating." [At-Tirmithi]

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



## Qatar Charity organises Iftar for sponsored students in Somalia

With generous support from Qatari donors and as part of its Ramadan campaign 'Good Starts with You', Qatar Charity has organised a group Iftar in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, for 250 male and female university students under its sponsorship.

The initiative aimed to strengthen engagement with the students, especially during the holy month, and to support their academic journey.

The event was attended by several governmental and academic figures, including Abdullahi Adam Musa, director general of Social Affairs in the Benadir Region; Ismail Omar Mohamed, acting president of Mogadishu University; Sheikh Abdulhay Sheikh Adam, president of the Somali Scholars Forum; and Abdul Fattah Adam Moalim, director of Qatar Charity's office in Somalia.

During the event, Moalim emphasised that the gathering reflects Qatar Charity's commitment to following up on the well-being of its sponsored students and supporting them. He highlighted that investing in education is a fundamental pillar in developing a generation capable of contributing to their country's progress.

Musa praised the initiative, describing it as a reflection of the strong humanitarian partnership with Qatar. He noted that it contributes to social development by



providing free university education to students in need.

Mohamed also expressed his appreciation for Qatar Charity's continued support, affirming that such initiatives demonstrate the organisation's dedication to its sponsored students, open doors of hope, and help strengthen their academic stability.

For his part, Sheikh Abdulhay Sheikh Adam stated that this initiative embodies the values of unity and solidarity. He explained that the concept of sponsorship extends beyond material support to include moral and human care, particularly during Ramadan.

Student Shukri Abdulhakim Mahmoud Yusuf expressed her gratitude for the Ramadan gathering and the ongoing support of-

ferred to sponsored students: "We extend our heartfelt thanks to the generous donors in Qatar and to Qatar Charity for their noble humanitarian support. Thank you for being the backbone that enables us to continue our educational journey. We pledge to become active contributors in serving our community."

The Iftar comes as part of Qatar Charity's ongoing efforts to support the education sector in Somalia. Currently, more than 700 university students benefit from its Student Sponsorship Programme. Since the programme's inception and until the end of 2025, a total of 3,684 university students have benefited reflecting the lasting impact of the initiative and its expanding reach.



broth, and sauces. Syrian lamb is available for QR1,900, roasted goats for QR1,650, Arabic goats for QR1,500, and Hoor lamb for QR3,500. There is also an option to serve the Hoor lamb on a large platter for QR750.

Mashhour noted that traditional kitchens are open to large meal orders throughout the day during Ramadan, with deliveries starting at Maghreb and continuing until lam, ensuring customers receive their meals on time.

# Attacks lead to airspace closures, flight disruption

From Page 1

According to aviation analytics firm Cirium, at least 868 flights operated by Middle Eastern carriers were cancelled yesterday alone, with the broader knock-on effect – including international routes forced to re-route or cancel – pushing the figure above 3,500 flights affected, with disruptions already spilling into today.

The Iranian attacks were reported to have targeted not only Israel but also US military installations in four GCC countries, and areas near Jordan – a dramatic widening of what had been a volatile but contained regional standoff.

International carriers moved swiftly to protect passengers and crews. Germany's Lufthansa Group suspended all services to Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Tehran until at least March 7. Turkish Airlines cancelled Saturday flights to Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, and Oman, and suspended routes to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Jordan until at least March 2. Air India halted all Middle East services for the day and reported cancellations on some Europe and US routes. British Airways, Air France, Iberia, Wizz Air, and Virgin Atlantic all issued cancellations or announced reroutes avoiding closed zones. Some carriers began

carrying additional fuel to allow diversions on longer southern paths around the stricken corridors.

The ripple effects extend far beyond the region. Europe-to-Asia routes, many of which cross Iran or Iraq, have been forced onto longer diversions via Türkiye, Egypt, or around the Arabian Peninsula. Tens of thousands of passengers are reported stranded at airports across the region, with aircraft and crew out of position creating further cascading delays. Diverted flights have been landing at Jeddah, Cairo, Larnaca, and Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia – which condemned the Iranian strikes – notably kept its airspace open. Some carriers have rerouted traffic over Saudi territory, though India's aviation authority flagged the kingdom's airspace, along with much of the wider region, as a high-risk zone. Flightradar24 screenshots circulating yesterday afternoon showed vast empty swathes of sky over Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Jordan.

The situation remains highly fluid. No timetable for reopening the closed corridors has been announced. Airlines have issued rebooking waivers for affected passengers, and travellers in or transiting through the region are urged to monitor airline apps, civil aviation authority announcements, and government travel advisories.

# World leaders back Qatar, condemn Iranian attack

From Page 1

HH the Amir held a phone call with Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, reassuring Kuwait as well as its leadership and people – a sentiment returned by the Kuwaiti Amir with equal warmth. Both sides expressed their vehement condemnation of the brazen assault, considering it a flagrant violation of the two nations' sovereignty, the provisions of international law, and the UN Charter.

They asserted that this attack on the two nations, alongside several sisterly nations, represents a dangerous escalation that imperils the region's security and stability. In addition, the two sides reviewed the security developments in the region, along with the consequences of these developments on both regional and global peace and stability. Their Highnesses underscored the criticality of an immediate cessation of escalatory acts and a return to diplomatic and dialogue channels, noting their readiness to harness all potential to support the region's security and safeguard its stability.

HH the Amir received a phone call from Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of the sisterly Sultanate of Oman. At the outset of the call, the Omani leader inquired after Qatar's leadership and people following the Iranian aggression that targeted its land.

HH the Amir expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Sultan of Oman for the sincere feelings and the interest shown towards Qatar and its people.

The call also dealt with discussing security developments in the region and their implication for regional and international peace and stability, with both sides emphasising the importance of exercising restraint and the return to diplomatic means and dialogue achieve the region's security and stability.

Earlier in the day, HH the Amir also received a phone call from UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. They discussed the latest security developments in the region and their repercussions on regional and international peace and stability. Both sides stressed the need to halt the escalation and open avenues for dialogue in order to preserve the region's security and spare it from further tensions and confrontations. Both sides also condemned the targeting of Qatar, the UAE and other sisterly Arab states with Iranian ballistic missiles, affirming the continued coordination between the two countries at the highest levels to take all necessary measures to safeguard sovereignty and enhance security and stability. Their Highnesses emphasised the solidarity of their countries with all Arab states subjected to aggression and the continuation of joint coordination to preserve the security of the region and the dignity of its peoples.

During a call from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, they discussed the security developments in the region along with the repercussions on regional and global peace and stability, with both sides underscoring the criticality of an immediate halt to escalation and of giving precedence to dialogue to protect the security of the region and prevent it from plunging into further tensions. In this context, the Egyptian president emphasised Egypt's solidarity with Qatar, alongside the sisterly Arab nations that came under the wanton attack, along with its absolute condemnation of the targeting of Qatari territories with Iranian ballistic missiles. He stressed Egypt's readiness to stand side by side with Qatar and the affected nations in all measures they take to protect their sovereignty and reinforce their security and stability. HH the Amir expressed his utmost thanks and profound gratitude for Egypt's stance and enduring support.

In a call from King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein of Jordan, the two leaders addressed the security developments in the region and their implications for peace and stability, with both sides stressing the importance of an immediate halt to the escalation and of giving dialogue a chance to ensure regional security and prevent further deterioration of the situation. The Iraqi prime minister underscored his country's solidarity with Qatar and its condemnation of attacks targeting Qatari territories with Iranian ballistic missiles. He emphasised that Iraq is ready to provide support to Qatar in all measures it takes to protect its sovereignty, security, and stability. HH the Amir expressed his thanks and appreciation for Iraq's support.

Lebanese President General Joseph Aoun expressed his country's solidarity with Qatar in a call to HH the Amir, who expressed his thanks and appreciation to president for the sincere feelings expressed towards Qatar.

## Arab League slams attacks

The Arab League condemned in the strongest terms the Iranian attacks on Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. In a statement issued yesterday, the Arab League General Secretariat considered the missile attacks a blatant violation of the sovereignty of peace-loving nations that have worked to achieve stability and have not participated in war. The statement expressed full solidarity with the Arab states in confronting these attacks and support for any measures they take to defend themselves and protect their people. The statement emphasised that Arab states have taken clear positions on the Iranian crisis by rejecting military action against Tehran, and Arab states have exerted tremendous efforts to mediate and avert the escalation being witnessed today. It also warned of the immense danger inherent in the current situation in the region, urging all active parties in the international community to work towards de-escalation as quickly as possible, to spare the region the devastating consequences of widening instability and violence, and to return to dialogue. (QNA)

King Mohammed VI of Morocco also had a phone call with HH the Amir.

The king assured Morocco's full solidarity with Qatar, saying his country was ready to offer the support needed to enhance the security and stability, and protect the sovereignty of Qatar. HH the Amir expressed his thanks and appreciation to the king.

HH the Amir also received a phone call from Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The call addressed the security developments in the region and their implications for regional and international peace and stability, with both sides stressing the importance of an immediate halt to the escalation and of giving priority to dialogue and diplomatic solutions to prevent sliding towards further tensions.

In a call Syrian President Ahmed Al Sharaa made to HH the Amir yesterday, he expressed solidarity with Qatar in the face of Iranian aggression, and his country's support for everything that would enhance the security and stability of the State of Qatar. HH the Amir expressed his appreciation and thanks to the Syrian president.

The Pakistani premier expressed his country's strong condemnation of the attacks targeting the territories of Qatar and brotherly Gulf Arab states, underscoring Pakistan's full solidarity with Qatar and its readiness to support the country in all measures it takes to protect its sovereignty, security, and stability. HH the Amir expressed his thanks and appreciation for Pakistan's stance and its support for Qatar.

Similarly, HH the Amir received a phone call from French President Emmanuel Macron, in which they discussed the security developments in the region and their implications for regional and global peace and stability. The French president expressed France's solidarity with Qatar and its condemnation of the targeting of its territories, confirming his country's readiness to provide various kinds of support to Qatar in any measures it takes to protect its sovereignty, security, and stability. HH the Amir expressed his thanks and appreciation to the French president for his stance and supportive positions towards Qatar and its people.

HH the Amir also received a phone call from German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. At the outset of the call, the chancellor expressed his country's solidarity with Qatar and other countries in the region.

HH the Amir expressed his thanks to the chancellor for Germany's solidarity with Qatar.

In his call with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, the two leaders exchanged views on the latest security developments in the region and their repercussions on regional and international peace and stability. Both sides stressed the need to halt the escalation and prioritise diplomatic means and dialogue to avoid further tensions in the region and establish the foundations of stability. Starmer affirmed his country's support for Qatar, stressing it was ready to support Qatar in all matters that would preserve its sovereignty and enhance its stability. HH the Amir expressed his thanks to the British prime minister for his support.

In a call with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the two leaders discussed the security developments in the region, stressing the criticality of de-escalation and opening prospects for dialogue to protect the security of the region and spare it from further tensions. The Greek prime minister expressed his country's solidarity with Qatar, underscoring Greece's readiness to provide support in all measures Qatar takes to protect its sovereignty and security. HH the Amir expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Greek premier for his support. (QNA)



**TENDER ADVERTISEMENT**

ORYX GTL Limited is pleased to announce the following tender(s):

S. No.	Tender Ref.	Tender Title:	Tender Bond QAR	Bid Closing Date & Tender Bond Validity Period
1	STC-CN-003-26-LA	<b>Call-off Contract for Lab Testing Services</b>	45,500/-	<b>25 Mar 2026 at 12.00 noon &amp; 180 days</b>

Companies wishing to register their interest and obtain Tender Document(s) for the above Tender(s) must pay a non-refundable registration fee and register with ORYX GTL as detailed below:

Tender Registration Fee	QAR 500/- (Non-refundable) per Tender
Payable to	ORYX GTL Limited
IBAN (29 Digits)	QA23QNBA00000000013010705001
Bank	Qatar National Bank – HQ or any branch (cash only)
Registration Dates	From 01 Mar 2026 to 05 Mar 2026
Registration Process and Requirements:	Write an e-mail to <a href="mailto:oryxgtltenders@oryxgtl.qa">oryxgtltenders@oryxgtl.qa</a> with the following attachments: 1. Copy of Commercial Registration (CR) 2. Copy of bank deposit slip of the Tender Registration Fee. 3. Copy of ICV Certificate

COMPANIES WHO HAVE PAID THE NON-REFUNDABLE REGISTRATION FEE BUT FAILED TO FORMALLY REGISTER AT THE DATE AND TIME STATED ABOVE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED AS ACCEPTABLE TENDERER.

TENDER BOND SHALL BE ISSUED BY A BANK REGISTERED IN THE STATE OF QATAR.

Effective from 1st July 2023, bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Tender Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that has been established for less than 2 years are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV Digital Portal:- <https://icv.qa>

For more information about ORYX GTL and its tenders, please visit our website: <http://www.oryxgtl.com.qa>



## QatarEnergy LNG

### Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/MNT/7595/26 FIRE & GAS SYSTEMS MAINTENANCE SERVICES ON CALL-OFF BASIS	25/02/2026 to 11/03/2026	0	300,000	17/03/2026

**Scope of Work:**  
Company's Onshore facility requires Fire and Gas Systems Maintenance Services on Call Off basis. Contractor shall perform the work by providing qualified resources with all tools and tackles; The duration of Contract shall be for five (05) years with a sole option for Company to extend it for further up to two (02) years.

**Bid Validity:** Bid Offer should be valid for 180 calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

**Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:**  
ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

**Note:** Local Companies (established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) are advised to refer to the tender documentation and In-Country Value (ICV) Digital Portal:- <https://icv.qa/en-US/> for details of ICV compliance that may be applicable.

## GCC condemns blatant targeting

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) expressed its condemnation in the strongest terms of the nefarious and blatant Iranian missile attacks on the territories of Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan in a flagrant violation of their sovereignty.

In a statement yesterday, Secretary-General of the GCC, Jassem Mohamed Albudaiwi, affirmed the full solidarity of all GCC states, standing as one and placing all their capabilities at the disposal of these nations to support whatever measures they take to defend their sovereignty, security, and national interests, while maintaining their right to respond and defend themselves in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter.

Moreover, Albudaiwi warned of the dire consequences of this unjustified escalation, which threatens the security and stability of the region. He explained that the Council states have always been strong advocates for maintaining regional peace, security, and stability for the benefit of all peoples in the region. Albudaiwi further stressed that targeting the territories of GCC states contradicts the provisions of international law, the UN Charter, and the principles of good neighborliness, and cannot be accepted under any justification or pretext, and that Iran must immediately cease any escalatory actions that would undermine regional security and stability. (QNA)



**QATAR FUEL ADDITIVES COMPANY LIMITED**

**QAFAC**

**TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Tender Committee of QAFAC invites qualified local suppliers to participate in the following Tenders in accordance with QAFAC tendering procedures:

No.	Tender No.	Description	Collection Fees	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
1	QTC/016/26	Five (5) Year Call off Contract for the Maintenance Services for PSV Valves at QAFAC Plant, Mesaieed.	Qrs. 300/-	Qrs. 50,000/-	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2026
2	QTC/017/26	Three (3) Year Contract for the Provision of Catering Services at QAFAC Plant, Mesaieed.	Qrs. 300/-	Qrs. 300,000/-	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2026

Interested companies are invited to collect the above tender documents as follows:

- **Collection Date** : From **Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2026** (QAFAC working days from Sunday to Thursday only)
- **Collection Time** : 08:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. during regular days  
09:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. during holy month of ramadan
- **Location** : The Gate, Bay Tower 2, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor, West Bay, QAFAC
- **Tender Fees** : As shown above, (**non-refundable**) can be paid at QAFAC Doha Office
- **Validity** : Offers must be valid for 120 days from closing date.
- **Bid Bond** : Offers must include a Bid bond issued from a local bank and valid for 120 Days from closing date.
- **Authorization** : Tenders will be issued to authorized company personnel with the following:
  1. Official authorization on Company Letter Head.
  2. Proper Identification.
  3. Copy of valid Company's Commercial Registration.
  4. Focal Point of Contact (Name, Telephone, Mobile & Email)
  5. Valid In Country Value (ICV) Certificate (Mandatory for No.2)

Note: "Effective from 1st July 2023, bids received from Local Companies (established under the Laws of state of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Bid Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that have been established for less than 2 years and insurance companies are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV digital Portal:- <https://icv.qa/US>

## DR Congo, US reach agreement on \$1.2bn health partnership

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) and the United States have agreed a \$1.2bn strategic health partnership, the two governments said in a joint statement on Thursday.

The partnership covers the period of 2026-31, the statement said.

It includes \$900mn in targeted US government assistance and \$300mn in "progressively increased domestic health expenditure" by the DR Congo government, they said.

It will focus on HIV/Aids, tuberculosis, malaria, maternal and child health, polio eradication, epidemiological surveillance, health workforce development, and emergency preparedness and response, the statement said.

"This structural investment aims to strengthen the resilience of the healthcare system, improve care for the population, and consolidate the country's healthcare sovereignty," the ministry said on X.

The DR Congo deal's structure, with a domestic funding requirement, matches the template the US has used in other African health partnerships, some of which have come unstuck recently.

On Wednesday, Zimbabwe pulled out of talks on a \$367mn bilateral health agreement with the US due to concerns over the sharing of sensitive health data in return for US financial support, with a government spokesman suggesting the offer represented an "unequal exchange".

Late last year, a Kenyan court suspended a health funding agreement worth more than \$1.6bn that the government signed with the US, pending the hearing of a case filed by a consumer protection group citing concerns over the safety of citizens' health data. - Reuters

## Africa CDC concerned over data, pathogen sharing in US deals

Reuters  
London

There are big issues in the deals the United States is pursuing with African countries that govern how US global health funding will work from now on, the head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Thursday.

"There are huge concerns regarding data, regarding pathogen sharing," director-general Jean Kaseya told a virtual press conference.

On Wednesday, Zimbabwe pulled out of talks with the US for its agreement, worth \$367mn over the next five years, raising concerns over sensitive data and saying that it was unequal.

Zambia's government also said it had pushed back on a section of its deal.

Other global health advocates have criticised the pathogen-sharing element of the deals, which ask countries to promptly share data with Washington about pathogens that could spark epidemics in their countries, as a condition of getting the funding.

The deals do not guarantee that any drugs

or vaccines developed as a result of that exchange would go to the countries affected.

The deals are the latest in a series of bilateral agreements reshaping how US President Donald Trump's administration delivers billions of dollars in global health funding, after dismantling its aid agency last year, cutting funding and contracts worldwide, and pledging to put "America First" in its global health strategy.

Kaseya said he had initially greeted that strategy with enthusiasm, because it would see African countries get money more directly, while simultaneously requiring them to co-invest.

However, he said he had rejected an opportunity for Africa CDC to be an observer to the deals, as he respected the sovereignty of individual nations.

However, Kaseya he said the agency had been supporting countries where requested, and would continue to advise if they wanted to renegotiate with the US, as well as supporting them to implement any agreement they do sign.

"I said to all of my countries, you have full support from Africa CDC. Even if you want to re-negotiate... if you want Africa CDC to be there, we'll be there," he said.

## Kenya administers the first HIV prevention shots

Kenya began administering the first dose of a groundbreaking HIV prevention drug in a Nairobi slum on Thursday.

Lenacapavir, taken twice a year, has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV transmission by more than 99.9%, though it is technically a chemical drug rather than a vaccine because it does not train the immune system.

"Today is a moment of hope for thousands of Kenyan families," Health Minister Aden Duale said during the rollout.

Kenya was among nine African countries selected last year to introduce lenacapavir, which has already been introduced in South Africa, Eswatini and Zambia since December.

There are roughly 1.3mn people living with HIV in Kenya, with the highest burden among those aged 15-24.

"Many of our young people still face the risk of infection... this innovation gives us renewed strength in our national fight against HIV," Duale, said adding that the drug will be free to those receiving it.

Last week, Kenya received its first batch of 21,000 doses through a deal with lenacapavir's manufacturer, Gilead Sciences, and the Global Fund to Fight Aids.

Lenacapavir offers greater privacy compared to regularly visits to health clinics for treatment, said Carol Njomo, a community health worker in Nairobi's Kawangware area, where the first doses were administered.

"This is an added protection," said Samson Mutua, 27, the first person to receive the injection.

The rollout comes as African countries grapple with United States aid reductions that have affected HIV/Aids programmes across the continent. - AFP

## Congo-Brazzaville leader vows to retain power

AFP  
Pointe-Noire, Congo Republic

Congo-Brazzaville's 82-year-old President Denis Sassou Nguesso promised to extend his decades-long time in power yesterday as campaigning kicked off for next month's presidential election in the oil-rich central African nation.

Thousands of supporters turned out to watch Sassou Nguesso parade in an open-topped convertible at a rally held by the president's Congolese Labour Party (PCT) in the country's economic and oil capital Pointe-Noire, on the Atlantic coast.

Campaigning will end on March 13, with the first round of voting on March 15.

Six opposition candidates have formally confirmed that they will be standing, including first-time 34-year-old candidate Destin Gavin, from the Republican Movement (MR).

However, the fragmented and muzzled opposition stands little chance of winning, with the ruling party promising a "wave" in favour of its "patriarch", according to roadside campaign posters.

"Have no fear, on March 15, we will win!" Sassou Nguesso told the rally, dressed in a white shirt adorned with an elephant.

The career military officer first led the Congo Republic under the one-party system from 1979 to 1992 before losing the country's first multi-party elections to former prime minister Pascal Lissouba.

He overthrew Lissouba in a civil war to return to power in 1997.

Earlier this month, he announced he



Denis Sassou Nguesso is surrounded by supporters as he arrives for the rally launching his election campaign in Pointe-Noire yesterday. - AFP

would be seeking a new five-year term, which, according to the constitution, would be his last.

Sassou Nguesso is one of Africa's longest-ruling leaders after Paul Biya of Cameroon, who has been in office since 1982, and Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who took power in a 1979 coup.

He was the victor in 2002 and 2009 and was able to stand again - and win - in 2016 and 2021 after a constitutional change that removed the upper age limit of 70 and extended the maximum number of terms of office.

## US targets allowing '4,500 white South Africans per month as refugees'

By Ted Hesson and Nellie Peyton  
Reuters

The US aims to process 4,500 refugee applications from white South Africans per month, far above President Donald Trump's stated refugee programme cap, and is installing trailers on embassy property in Pretoria to support the effort, a US contracting document said.

The new target, contained in a previously unreported document from the US State Department dated January 27, signals a push to ramp up admissions from South Africa, while refugee applications from other areas have been severely curtailed.

Trump has said that the US would only admit 7,500 total refugees from around the world in fiscal year 2026, while a much higher cap of 40,000 to 60,000 was discussed internally last year.

Only 2,000 white South Africans had entered the US as refugees as of January 31 under a programme launched in May last year, although the pace has picked up in recent months.

The ambitious target could also face

administrative delays in Washington, which in recent weeks have halted all refugee travel to the US, including from South Africa, according to a US official familiar with the matter.

A US State Department spokesperson declined to comment on the contracting document but said Trump had publicly explained the reason for the program for white South Africans.

"The US position on this humanitarian initiative is unchanged," the spokesperson said.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) did not respond to requests for comment.

The White House referred questions to the State Department.

The South African Chamber of Commerce in the US said last year that more than 67,000 people had expressed interest in relocating.

Trump ordered a halt to refugee admissions into the US after taking office in 2025 as part of his crackdown on legal and illegal immigration.

However, weeks later, he launched an effort to bring in white South Africans of Afrikaner ethnicity as refugees, saying

that they had been violently persecuted in the majority-black country.

South Africa's government has rejected that claim, while some refugee advocates have criticised the Trump policy.

The contracting document, posted to a US government database on Wednesday, explains the rationale for awarding the contract for the trailers without a competitive bidding process, stressing an urgent need for a secure site.

An immigration raid by South African authorities on a previous US refugee processing site on a commercial property in Johannesburg had forced the government to consider a more secure location, it said, after "operations were compromised".

"The inability to safely process about 4,500 applicants per month, an objective communicated to (the US State Department's refugee division) from the White House, would result in failure to meet a Presidential priority," the document said.

South African foreign ministry spokesperson Chrispin Phiri said his government would not interfere with the US programme if it remained within legal boundaries, while reiterating Pretoria's

rejection of Trump's claims about white South Africans.

"The assertion that Afrikaners face systematic persecution is fundamentally unsubstantiated," he said.

Whether the US could reach the ambitious 4,500 per month target remains unclear.

The State Department last week canceled all refugee travel - including for South Africans - from February 23 to March 9 due to operational factors, an email sent to applicants said.

Because of Trump's sweeping refugee ban issued in January 2025, South Africans must be admitted as exceptions on a case-by-case basis by Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem.

The US official, who requested anonymity to discuss internal operations, said that the DHS had delayed the approvals, creating an administrative backlog.

Prior to the pause on admissions, South African entries had been ramping up, with about 1,500 admitted in December and January, compared with about 500 in the previous six-and-a-half months, according to US State Department figures.

Tensions between the US and South Africa over the refugee effort boiled over in mid-December when South African authorities raided the commercial building in Johannesburg where US staff and contractors were working on refugee cases.

Seven Kenyans working as contractors for a US-based refugee group were arrested for alleged violations of their visa terms, while two US refugee officers were briefly detained.

US and South African officials reached an agreement during a closed-door meeting in late December to allow processing to continue, Reuters reported last month.

The contracting document said a South African company had received a no-bid \$772,000 contract to supply and install 14 prefabricated modular buildings as part of a "temporary modular village" on an embassy property in Pretoria.

In a WhatsApp group for South Africans to share information about the programme, one applicant said they had an interview this week in a trailer-like structure at an embassy property and that more trailers were being prepared, suggesting the site was now operational.



### GULF HELICOPTERS COMPANY (GHC) Q.P.S.C.

Invites prospective suppliers to participate in the following tender

Tender Reference and Description	Submission of information & willingness for bidding	Tender fee (non-refundable)	Tender Package Issuance	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
RFQ-GHC/SCO/002/2026 Call off Agreement for Supply of Office Stationery Items for Three (3) Years	Until 5 March 2026	QAR 500/- Until 9 March 2026 10:00 am	11 March 2026	QAR 20,000/-	2 April 2026 12:00 noon

**Brief Scope:** GHC invites reputable and qualified suppliers to submit their bids for the supply and delivery of stationery office supplies for a period of three (3) years. The scope of work requires the regular supply and delivery of a variety of office supplies covering daily-use consumables, paper products, writing instruments, filing and organizational materials, desk accessories, and printer-related consumables. Suppliers are expected to maintain consistent quality, ensure timely delivery, and comply with all applicable health and safety regulations in the State of Qatar.

- i. Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and send contact details to GHC email ([procurement@qulhelicopters.com](mailto:procurement@qulhelicopters.com)) indicating company name, address, telephone, official email, authorized company representative, etc. latest by 5 March 2026.
- GHC tender reference numbers and description must be mentioned in the email.
- ii. Non-refundable tender fee of QAR 500/- is payable to GHC, only through QNB account # 0013-036531-001 at any QNB branch. Interested bidders shall attach the evidence of the tender fee payment and send to GHC email: [procurement@qulhelicopters.com](mailto:procurement@qulhelicopters.com), latest by 9 March 2026, 10:00 am for GHC approval.
- iii. Tender package will be sent via email to the confirmed participants by 11 March 2026. GHC shall provide the necessary instructions and guidelines for the bid submission.
- iv. Original of the Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee) must be submitted by hand to the following address:  
Gulf Helicopters Company,  
P O Box: 811, Al Areesh Street,  
Ras Abu Abboud, Doha, Qatar  
Tel: +974 44 333 888  
Attention: Supply Chain Manager

Attach a copy of tender bond to the technical offer. Offer without Tender Bond will not be considered.

V. For any clarifications on the above, please send your queries with tender reference and description addressed to Supply Chain Mail to email [procurement@qulhelicopters.com](mailto:procurement@qulhelicopters.com).

**Note:** Bidders who are not registered in GHC will be requested to complete the supplier registration process during the tendering period.



### GULF HELICOPTERS COMPANY (GHC) Q.P.S.C.

## BIDS INVITED FOR VEHICLE SALE

Gulf Helicopters invites sealed bids from interested buyers for the following vehicles:

Make	Model	Year of Manufacturing	Colour	Mileage (KM)	Minimum Bid (QAR)
Lexus	LX570	2018	Grey	64,000	225,000
Isuzu	KB	1996	White	260,000	2,000

**Vehicle Inspection:**  
Available from **1st March to 4th March 2026**, between **09:00 AM and 12:00 PM**.

**Bid Submission:**  
Interested buyers may submit their bids on or before **4th March 2026 at 12:00 PM** to: [adcsec@gulhelicopters.com](mailto:adcsec@gulhelicopters.com) or submitting the sealed bids addressed to secretary of Assets Disposal Committee of Gulf Helicopters Company. (Attention: Secretary of Asset Disposal Committee, Gulf Helicopters Company Head Office, P O Box: 811, Al Areesh Street, Ras Abu Abboud, Doha, Qatar Tel: 44333856)

The management of Gulf Helicopters Company reserved the right to decide about bids and potential buyers. It is the discretion of the management of Gulf Helicopters Company to accept or not accept any bids for any reason whatsoever.



This picture obtained from Iran's ISNA news agency shows the site of a strike on a girls' school in Minab, in Iran's southern Hormozgan province, yesterday. (AFP)

# Iran retaliates after US, Israel launch attacks

Reuters  
Washington/Jerusalem/Dubai/Doha

The United States and Israel attacked Iran yesterday, targeting its top leaders and calling for the overthrow of its government, while Iran responded with missiles fired at Israel and neighbouring Gulf countries.

President Donald Trump, who in the biggest foreign-policy gamble of his presidency launched the war against a foe Washington has jostled with for generations, said the strikes were aimed at ending a security threat and ensuring Iran could not develop a nuclear weapon.

He called on Iranian security forces to lay down their weapons.

Tehran called the strikes, which began in the morning hours and hit targets in different areas of the country, unprovoked and illegal. Iran's Al-Alam television said Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei - yet to be heard from by yesterday evening - was due to give a speech soon.

Iran responded to the strikes by launching missiles at Israel and at several Gulf state allies of the United States that host American bases and global airlines cancelled flights across the Middle East.

Iran also issued a warning to shipping that the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow passage through which around a fifth of global oil consumption passes, had been closed. Traders expected a sharp jump in oil prices.

Tehran promised a stronger response to come, with a senior Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander, Ebrahim Jabbari, saying it had so far used only "scrap missiles" and would soon unveil unforeseen weapons, state television reported.

The United Nations Security Council was due to meet in New York later. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an immediate cessation of hostilities.

Israel's military said its pilots hit hundreds of targets throughout Iran including strategic defence systems already damaged in strikes last year. It said three sites where leaders had been meeting were struck simultaneously, and several senior figures were killed.



Smoke rises after the state news agency reported missile attack on the service centre of the US Fifth Fleet, following strikes by the United States and Israel against Iran, in Manama, Bahrain, yesterday in this still image obtained from a video. (Reuters)

Iran's Defence Minister Amir Nasirzadeh and Revolutionary Guards commander Mohammed Pakpour were killed in the Israeli attacks, three sources familiar with the matter said.

Explosions rang out in nearby oil-producing Gulf countries, which said they had intercepted missiles after Tehran warned it would strike the region if it was attacked.

The first wave of strikes in what the Pentagon named "Operation Epic Fury" mainly targeted Iranian officials, a source familiar with the matter said.

An Israeli official said Khamenei and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian were both targeted but the result of the strikes was not clear. A source with knowledge of the matter had earlier told Reuters that Khamenei was not in Tehran and had been transferred to a secure location.

An Iranian source close to the establishment said several senior commanders in Iran's Revolutionary Guards and political officials had been killed.

In addition, a girls' primary school in the southern Iranian town of Minab was also hit, killing 85 people, according to the local prosecutor cited by state media. Reuters could not independently confirm the reports. Israel's military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In a video message published on social media, Trump cited Washington's dispute with Iran and Iranian attacks, dating to the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran during the 1979 revolution that brought the current rulers to power.

Trump, who had deployed vast US military firepower in the region saying he hoped to force Iranian concessions in nuclear talks, said the aim was "eliminating imminent threats from the Iranian regime".

He urged Iranians to stay sheltered because "bombs will be dropping everywhere". But he added: "When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the joint US-Israeli attack "will create the conditions for the brave Iranian people to take their destiny into their own hands" and "remove the yoke of tyranny".

Iran's leaders were already in a difficult position after mass anti-government demonstrations in January, which led to a crackdown in which thousands of people were killed in the worst domestic unrest since the era of the 1979 revolution.

Protesters had again taken to the streets in recent days in remembrance of those killed the

previous month. Eyal Zamir, the Israeli armed forces chief of staff, said that over the past months, he had been involved in preparing joint battle plans against Iran in co-ordination with senior leaders in the US military. An Israeli defence official said the launch date had been decided weeks ago.

Oil markets have been closely watching the standoff between Washington and Tehran to try and determine if supplies will be impacted.

"If we don't see signs of de-escalation over the weekend, risk premiums could still drive Brent up" by \$10-\$20 per barrel when markets reopen tomorrow, said Jorge Leon, head of geopolitical analysis at Rystad Energy.

Iran, the third largest producer in the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, pumps about 4% of global oil supplies, and a far larger share is shipped past its coast through the strait leading out of the Gulf.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said all US bases and interests in the region were within Iran's reach and that Iran's retaliation would continue until "the enemy is decisively defeated".

In Israel, sirens and mobile phone warnings sent Israelis rushing to air raid shelters as Iran launched a series of missile barrages. There were no immediate reports of serious damage or casualties.

Loud booms sounded in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates, an oil producer and close US ally, and several blasts were heard in the business capital Dubai, where one of the city's plush hotel districts was also hit.

Nada AlGarhy, 30, said she and her husband had been at the Waldorf Astoria hotel on Dubai's luxury Palm development for Iftar, the evening meal during the fasting month of Ramadan, when they heard a loud explosion.

Bahrain said the service centre of the US Fifth Fleet - base for American naval forces in the region - had been subjected to a missile attack. Video footage showed a thick grey plume of smoke rising from near the island state's coastline.

Kuwait confirmed a missile attack on a US military base there.

## QUOTES: Global reaction to strikes on Iran

Israel and the US launched strikes on Iran yesterday, plunging the Middle East into a renewed military confrontation. Tehran responded by launching missiles against it unprovoked and illegal.

Below is international reaction to the attacks:

### UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTONIO GUTERRES

"I condemn today's military escalation in the Middle East. The use of force by the US and Israel against Iran, and the subsequent retaliation by Iran across the region, undermine international peace and security."

"I call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and de-escalation. Failing to do so risks a wider regional conflict with grave consequences for civilians and regional stability. I strongly encourage all parties to return immediately to the negotiating table," he said.

"I reiterate that there is no viable alternative to the peaceful settlement of international disputes, in full accordance with international law, including the UN Charter."

### GERMANY, FRANCE AND BRITAIN

In a joint statement, the three countries condemned Iranian attacks, saying Iran must refrain from indiscriminate military strikes.

"We reiterate our commitment to regional stability and to the protection of civilian life," French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said in a joint statement, adding that they wanted a resumption of negotiations.

### FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON

Macron called for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council, saying the outbreak of a war between the US, Israel and Iran has "serious consequences" for international peace and security.

"The current escalation is dangerous for everyone. It must stop. The Iranian regime must understand that it now has no other option but to engage in good-faith negotiations to end its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, as well as its actions to destabilise the region," Macron said on X.

### UN HUMAN RIGHTS CHIEF VOLKER TURK

"I deplore the military strikes across Iran this morning by Israel and the US of America, and the subsequent retaliatory strikes by Iran. As always, in any armed conflict, it is civilians who end up paying the ultimate price. Bombs and missiles are not the way to resolve differences but only result in death, destruction and human misery."

"To avert these terrible consequences for civilians, I call for restraint and implore all parties to see reason, to de-escalate, and for a return to the 'negotiating table' where they had been actively seeking a solution only hours

earlier. "I have already warned that failing to do so risks an even wider conflict, that will inevitably lead to further senseless civilian deaths and destruction on a potentially unimaginable scale, not just in Iran but across the Middle East region."

### CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER MARK CARNEY

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said that Canada supports the US "acting to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and to prevent its regime from further threatening international peace and security".

### SPANISH PRIME MINISTER PEDRO SANCHEZ

"We demand immediate de-escalation and full respect for international law," Sanchez said in a statement posted on social media platform X.

Spanish Foreign Minister Albares later said on X that Madrid demanded respect for international law, de-escalation and dialogue, showing support and solidarity with those who are receiving the strikes.

"The attacks must stop," he added.

### OMAN

Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi said that active and serious negotiations mediated by his country between Iran and the US were "yet again undermined". "Neither the interests of the US nor the cause of global peace are well served by this...I urge the US not to get sucked in further. This is not your war," he said on X.

### LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER NAWAF SALAM

"I reiterate that we will not accept anyone dragging the country into adventures that threaten its security and unity."

### NORWEGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ESPEN BARTH EIDE

"The attack is described by Israel as a preventive strike, but it is not in line with international law. Preventive attacks require an immediately imminent threat."

### UKRAINE'S FOREIGN MINISTRY

"The cause of the current events is precisely the violence and impunity of the Iranian regime, in particular the killings and repression of peaceful protesters, which have become particularly widespread in recent months," the foreign ministry said.

### DMITRY MEDVEDEV, DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF RUSSIA'S SECURITY COUNCIL

"The peacemaker once again showed his face," Medvedev, a former Russian president, said. "All negotiations with Iran are a cover operation. No one doubted it. No one really wanted to negotiate anything." "The question is who has more patience to wait for the inglorious end of their enemy. The USA is only 249 years old. The Persian Empire was founded more than 2,500 years ago. Let's see in 100 years..." (Reuters)



Smoke from a reported rocket interception is seen in the sky over Abu Dhabi, UAE, yesterday. (AFP)

## ANNOUNCEMENT

I, JENAN ABDJALEEL ALWAN AL ZUBAIDI

holder of

Iraq Passport No. A15695815  
QID No. 2913680064

hereby change my name

from

JENAN ABDJALEEL ALWAN AL ZUBAIDI

to

JENAN ABD JALEEL AL ZUBAIDI

Any objection, please contact  
**THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS**  
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

## US strikes confirm fears of Iranians

AFP  
Tehran

For weeks, Iranians had been nervously anticipating another attack by the US and Israel, despite Tehran and Washington holding negotiations aimed at averting a violent showdown.

Nevertheless, yesterday morning just before the strikes, life in Tehran was moving at its usual pace, taxis and buses were inching through mid-morning traffic and people were running errands.

Then the routine was shattered by a series of detonations. Security forces flooded the streets and dark columns of smoke rose near the home of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"I am hearing explosions and fighter jets overhead," one resident of central



People shop for groceries in a store in Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)

Tehran said at around 9:45 am local time, before communications and Internet access were cut.

Within minutes of the attack, traffic-choked streets slowed and long queues formed outside bakeries and gas stations. Police and security forces were out in numbers.

Saturday is usually the start of Iran's

working week, but many shops pulled down their shutters and few pedestrians risked going out, an AFP journalist saw.

From outside the capital, reports came in that targets had been hit in almost two thirds of Iran's provinces.

Loud screams could be heard in the background of media footage of the

soot-covered debris from a school building hit in the southern province of Hormozgan.

As distraught people gathered at the site, the reported death toll rose to reach at least 51 students.

With US President Donald Trump urging Iranians to rise up against their leaders, rumours swirled over the status of Iran's senior military and political figures. But state media was quick to insist that President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and "all the commanders" of Iran's army were in good health.

One small demonstration took to the streets, covered by state media, with around 300 pro-government marchers convening on Tehran's Palestine square.

Beyond Tehran, explosions were reported in Kermanshah in the west, Isfahan in the centre and as far as Zahedan in the southeast.

# Travel in chaos as airlines cancel flights after US, Israel strikes

Reuters Dubai/London

Airlines suspended flights across the Middle East yesterday, including to and from the world's busiest travel hub Dubai, after the US and Israel launched strikes on Iran, plunging the region into a renewed military confrontation.

Flight maps showed airspace over Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Israel and Bahrain virtually empty as Israel said it struck Iran and the US military initiated a series of strikes against targets in the country. Iran retaliated with a salvo of missiles. Witnesses told Reuters about explosions across the Gulf, including in Qatar, as well as Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates — key global transport hubs.

The closure of Gulf megahubs chokes the busiest east-west transit point, leaving few parts of the planet untouched by disruption.

"You have crews, planes and passengers stranded all over the world. It's a massive logistical nightmare," a Gulf airline source said. Dubai Airports said all flights at Dubai International, which handled nearly 100mn passengers last year, as well as the smaller Al Maktoum International Airport, were suspended until further notice, urging passengers not to travel. "Due to multiple regional airspace closures, Emirates has temporarily suspended operations to and from Dubai," the Dubai-based carrier said, while its sister airline flydubai, said it had temporarily suspended operations.

Ethihad Airways said all flights scheduled to depart Abu Dhabi were suspended until 1000 GMT today, and flights expected to arrive at the Gulf hub before that time would be cancelled.

The escalation dimmed hopes for a diplomatic solution to Tehran's nuclear dispute with the West and



Stranded passengers wait at Tribhuvan International Airport after all evening flights to Sharjah, Doha, Dubai, Kuwait City, Abu Dhabi, and Dammam were cancelled, following strikes on Iran launched by the United States and Israel, in Kathmandu, Nepal, yesterday.

reignited conflict after weeks of US military buildup in the region. It marks the latest upheaval for air travel in the usually busy region amid escalating tensions. Airports in the Middle East are some of the busiest in the world, covering an area stretching from Iran and Iraq to the Mediterranean and serving as a connecting hub for flights between Europe and Asia.

"Passengers and airlines can expect airspace to be shut for quite some time in the region," said Eric Schouten, head of aviation security advisory Dyami. "The impact on regional aviation is immediate and highly fluid."

## FLIGHTS REROUTED, PASSENGERS STRANDED

Airlines cancelled yesterday about half of their flights to different Gulf states and Israel and about 28% of their flights to Kuwait, after the US and Israel launched strikes on Iran, according to preliminary Cirium data.

In total, about 24% of flights to the Middle East were cancelled, the data showed.

The region has taken on a more

important role since the start of the war between Russia and Ukraine, which has forced airlines to avoid airspace over both countries. Conflict zones are an increasing operational burden on airlines as aerial attacks raise worries about accidental or deliberate shoot-downs of commercial air traffic. Longer flight times also require more fuel, adding to their costs.

Israel, Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Jordan closed their airspace following the attacks and a map of the region on Flightradar24 showed planes avoiding these areas. Traffic instead appeared to be collecting around Larnaca, Cyprus, Jeddah, Cairo and Riyadh airports, according to the flight-tracking service, which earlier yesterday experienced an outage due to a spike in the number of visitors to its website.

## BA, LUFTHANSA SUSPEND FLIGHTS

The European Union's aviation regulator EASA yesterday recommended its airlines stay out of the airspace affected by the ongoing



Passengers wait inside the north terminal at London Gatwick airport in Crawley, yesterday, following the US and Israel's strikes on Iran.



A check-in desk shows information on a cancelled flight in the north terminal at London Gatwick airport in Crawley, yesterday, following the US and Israel's strikes on Iran.

military intervention. British Airways (BA), owned by IAG, said it had cancelled flights to Tel Aviv and Bahrain until March 3, as well as yesterday's flights to Amman. The Russian Ministry of Transport said yesterday that Russian air carriers had suspended flights to Iran and Israel.

Germany's Lufthansa said it was suspending flights to and from Dubai yesterday and today and halting temporarily the Tel Aviv, Beirut and Oman routes until March 7. Air France cancelled flights to and from Tel Aviv and Beirut.

Iberia also cancelled flights to Tel Aviv, while Wizz Air suspended flights to and from Israel, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Amman with immediate effect until the same

date, it said. India's civil aviation authority was on alert to manage potential flight diversions due to tensions in the Middle East, as carriers like Air India and Indigo suspended flights. Hong Kong's Cathay Group, and parent of Cathay Pacific Airways, suspended operations in the region, affecting passenger flights to and from Dubai and Riyadh, as well as freighter services operating through Al Maktoum airport in Dubai.

## REGIONAL CARRIERS AFFECTED

Qatar Airways and Kuwait Airways temporarily suspended flights, while Turkish Airlines also cancelled flights to several Middle Eastern destinations.

Kuwait's aviation authority said

it was halting all flights to Iran until further notice, according to the state news agency, while Oman Air said it had suspended all flights to Baghdad due to the regional developments. KLM, the Dutch arm of Air France-KLM, has brought forward the suspension of its Amsterdam-Tel Aviv service, cancelling the flight scheduled for yesterday after strikes in Iran, a spokesperson said.

The airline had announced on Wednesday that flights would be halted from today, March 1. Only one flight to Tel Aviv had been scheduled for yesterday. Virgin Atlantic said it had decided to temporarily avoid Iraqi airspace, resulting in some re-routing of its flights.

## Residents flee as Iranian missiles stun peaceful cities

A barrage of Iranian strikes caused havoc across the Gulf yesterday, AFP reported from Dubai. Missiles streaked across clear desert skies as smoke plumed from US bases in Manama and Abu Dhabi and loud thuds shook high-rise windows in Dubai. Flames and smoke erupted from a luxury hotel on Dubai's Palm, the landmark, palm tree-shaped development of land reclaimed from the sea, after a loud bang sent passers-by scurrying for cover. And in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates' capital, golfers enjoying a quiet round were stunned to see dozens of projectiles flying overhead. The Gulf states have worked hard to stay on the periphery of Middle East conflict, relying on their stability to attract business, trade and tourism. Given their reputation for calm, yesterday's sudden attacks on US military bases caused widespread shock among the Gulf's diverse, expat-heavy populations.

In Bahrain's capital Manama, residents were hurriedly evacuated from the Juffair district housing the US navy's Fifth Fleet, whose base was hit in the attack. "When we heard the sounds, we cried out of fear," said Jana Hassan, a 15-year-old school student, who

was visiting a friend in the area. "We didn't know what to do... I will never forget the sound of those loud blasts." In Dubai, the Middle East's commercial hub with the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, residents looked up to see missiles surge through the sky. "It was a rumble and then a bang," one resident told AFP, asking not to be named. The UAE had not been troubled since a deadly assault by Yemen's Houthi fighters in 2022, whose attacks on Saudi Arabia have also stopped in recent years. "As a Lebanese, I am traumatised," said a 31-year-old expat and mother of two living in Riyadh, the Saudi capital. "We came to the Gulf because it's known to be safer than Lebanon. Now I don't know what to do or how to think really," added the woman, who did not want to be named. Another Riyadh resident, from Jordan, said: "It was honestly very scary and very loud. "I was just walking out with my little boy when we suddenly heard the blast. People around us were looking up at the sky, trying to understand what was happening. "It's not something you expect in Riyadh."

## Turkiye 'deeply disturbed' over strikes and Iran's retaliatory attacks

AFP Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday he was "deeply disturbed" by the Israeli-US attacks on Iran, but also condemned Tehran's retaliatory strikes on the Gulf, demanding action to end the conflict.

The confrontation began earlier yesterday with the Israeli and US strikes and quickly broadened regionally as Tehran retaliated against Gulf states and Israel.

"We are deeply disturbed over the US-Israeli attacks on our neighbour Iran," Erdogan said in a televised address, in which he also denounced Iran's drone and missile attacks against the Gulf as "unacceptable, regardless of the reason".

"In order to prevent our region from experiencing greater suffering, all actors, especially the Islamic world, must take action," he added. Turkiye had "worked hard for a long time to resolve the conflicts at the negotiating table... but the trust deficit between the



Members of left-wing parties hold a protest against US military involvement in Iran, following strikes by the US and Israel against Iran, outside the US consulate in Adana, Turkiye, yesterday.

parties could not be overcome," he said, vowing to "accelerate Turkiye's diplomatic efforts" to bring the parties back to the table.

Earlier yesterday, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan spoke by phone with his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi and six other top diplomats about ways to "end the attacks", a foreign ministry source said.

Erdogan also said Turkiye had not seen any problem "in terms of border security" along the 500-kilometre frontier it shares with Iran.

"The police, gendarmerie and

intelligence services are taking all necessary measures," he said.

Earlier, Turkiye's Interior Minister Mustafa Ciftci also held calls with his Azerbaijani counterpart Vilayet Eyvazov and Iraq's Interior Minister Abdul Amir al-Shammari on "strengthening areas of co-operation", the ministry wrote on X.

All three countries share a border with Iran. Iran's neighbours have long feared that a new round of strikes on the country could destabilise the entire region, with concerns focused on a possible influx of refugees.

## FREE VEHICLE RECALL

وزارة التجارة والصناعة  
Ministry of Commerce and Industry  
مجلس التعاون الخليجي  
State of Qatar



## LEXUS LX600 (Gasoline, twin turbo)

Manufacturing Year	2025 - 2026
DEFECT	Possible defect in 10-speed automatic transmission that contains linear solenoids to control the shifting of gears which leads transmission fluid to leak from the housing.
PROCESS	Reprogramming of Automatic Transmission ECU.
CONTACT	Al Abdulghani Motors 8002929 crm@aamotors.com

14001 | +974 44111400 | www.moci.gov.qa

وزارة التجارة والصناعة  
Ministry of Commerce and Industry  
مجلس التعاون الخليجي  
State of Qatar



# Court orders Greenpeace to pay \$345mn to US oil pipeline company

AFP  
Washington

Greenpeace must pay \$345mn in damages to the operator of the US oil pipeline it protested, a North Dakota court ordered on Friday.

The decision finalises this phase of the explosive, years-long case that has pitted the environmental organisation against the company Energy Transfer, opening the door to an appeals process in the closely watched legal saga.

The Dallas-based energy conglomerate accused Greenpeace of orchestrating violence and defamation during the controversial construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline nearly a decade ago.

A jury last year took their side, awarding more than \$660mn in damages against three Greenpeace entities, citing charges including trespass, nuisance, conspiracy and deprivation of property access.

Judge James Gion of North Dakota cut

those damages in half, determining some damages had been counted twice.

However, the sum remains staggering. Greenpeace categorically rejects the accusations, denouncing the proceedings as abusive and a means to silence dissent.

Legal experts and advocacy groups alike have closely followed the case, given its potentially far-reaching implications for protest mobilisation and advocacy movements.

Greenpeace has indicated its intention to appeal and has repeatedly stated it cannot pay hundreds of millions of dollars.

"This legal fight is far from over," Kristin Casper, Greenpeace International general counsel, said in a statement to AFP.

Marco Simons, another Greenpeace legal official, said "speaking out against corporations that cause environmental harm should never be deemed unlawful".

"This is a setback, but the movement to defend people and the planet has always faced setbacks and resistance, and Energy

Transfer will fail in its goal of silencing its critics," he said.

Energy Transfer, meanwhile, has objected to the halving of its award.

Michael Gerrard, director of Columbia Law School's climate change law center, told AFP that the judgment was "devastating".

"It is very bad not only for Greenpeace, but for the global environmental movement," he said.

The case could have ripple effects worldwide.

When the initial verdict dropped last year, environmental defenders rallied around Greenpeace, denouncing the verdict as a chilling attack on climate action around the globe.

"Fossil fuel companies invest billions in new oil and gas while they spread misinformation, lobby against climate policies, and attempt to silence dissent against their destructive business model," Allie Rosenbluth, the US campaign manager of Oil Change International, said in a statement

to AFP. "They must not be allowed to act with impunity."

At the heart of the North Dakota court battle was the Dakota Access Pipeline, where from 2016 to 2017 the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe led one of the largest anti-fossil-fuel protests in US history.

The demonstrations saw hundreds arrested and injured, drawing the attention of the United Nations, which raised concerns over potential violations of Indigenous sovereignty.

Despite the protests, the pipeline - designed to transport fracked crude oil to refineries and on to global markets - became operational in 2017.

Energy Transfer, however, continued its legal pursuit of Greenpeace.

After its federal lawsuit was dismissed, it shifted its legal strategy to the state courts in North Dakota, one of the minority of US states without protections against so-called "Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation" or SLAPPs.

Throughout the years-long legal fight,

Energy Transfer's billionaire chief executive Kely Warren, a major donor to President Donald Trump, was open about his motivations.

His "primary objective" in suing Greenpeace, he said in interviews, was not just financial compensation but to "send a message".

Warren went so far as to say that activists "should be removed from the gene pool".

Energy Transfer did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Greenpeace maintains that it played only a small and peaceful role in the movement, which was led by Native Americans.

Greenpeace International in 2025 announced plans to counter-sue Energy Transfer in the Netherlands, where the non-governmental organisation (NGO)'s international headquarters are, accusing the company of using nuisance lawsuits to suppress dissent.

It is seeking compensation for the costs incurred in these legal battles.

## Mexico sends more aid to Cuba

AFP  
Havana

Two Mexican navy vessels carrying almost 1,200 tonnes of humanitarian aid arrived in Cuba yesterday in the second such shipment in a month.

President Donald Trump has vowed to starve Cuba of oil after the US military ouster of Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, which had been the communist nation's main supplier of the commodity.

Earlier this week his administration eased what amounts to an energy blockade, allowing oil shipments to private companies in Cuba but not the government or the military.

The Mexican navy ships Papaloapan and Huasteco, which were dispatched on Tuesday by the leftist President Claudia Sheinbaum, were seen arriving in the port of Havana early yesterday.

The Mexican foreign ministry said the ships are carrying 1,193 tonnes of aid for the civilian population, including 23 tonnes of food donated by everyday Mexican people as part of an aid drive.

In the first Mexican aid shipment, two ships arrived on February 12 carrying 814 tonnes of fresh and powdered milk, meat, beans, rice and personal hygiene items.

The island of 9.6mn inhabitants, under a US trade embargo since 1962, has for years been mired in a severe economic crisis marked by extended power cuts and shortages of fuel, medicine and food.

# Trump raises prospect of Cuba 'friendly takeover'

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

President Donald Trump has suggested a "friendly takeover" of communist-led Cuba, with tensions high between Washington and Havana in the wake of the US toppling of Venezuelan strongman Nicolas Maduro.

The Trump administration has imposed a strict oil embargo on Cuba since ousting Havana's key regional backer, bringing the island nation to the brink of economic collapse.

Trump described Cuba as a failing nation in need of change, adding that he had been hearing about the country's woes since he was a little boy.

"I can see that happening. Marco Rubio is dealing on it and at a very high level," he told reporters as he departed the White House on Friday. "They have no money, they have no oil, they have no food. And it's really right now a nation in deep trouble and they want our help."

"They're talking with us and maybe we'll have a friendly takeover of Cuba," Trump added. "The Cuban government is talking with us, and they're in a big deal of trouble."

The Cuban government has said that it is not in any high-level talks with the United States but has not outright denied press reports that US officials may be in informal talks with Raul Guill-



The Mexican Navy ship ARM Huasteco (AMPO1) arriving yesterday at Havana Bay carrying humanitarian aid. On February 24 the Mexican government dispatched two military ships carrying nearly 1,200 tonnes of supplies to Cuba, the second shipment sent to the island, which is mired in a deep economic crisis and under intense pressure from the US. - AFP

mo Rodriguez Castro, the grandson of former Cuban President Raul Castro.

Axios reported this month that Secretary of State Marco Rubio had been holding secret talks with the grandson of Cuba's former leader.

US officials close to Rubio met with the grandson again on the sidelines of this week's regional Caribbean Community conference in St Kitts and Nevis, the *Miami Herald* reported on Thursday.

Cuba has been under a US trade embargo since shortly after Fidel

Castro's 1959 revolution.

Relations thawed in recent years but have plunged again since Trump took office for his second term, with the US president seeking to tighten Washington's grip on Latin America.

On Wednesday, the Cuban Coast Guard said it had killed four people and wounded six others on board a US-registered speedboat that it said were armed and seeking to infiltrate the country.

Havana said all those on board the US boat were Cubans living in the United States, which has received several waves of emi-

gration from the island since the 1960s.

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed only that one US citizen was killed and another wounded in the incident.

Cuban authorities said a coast guard vessel came under fire from the speedboat around one nautical mile from Cuba's north shore, adding that assault rifles, handguns, Molotov cocktails and military-style gear were found onboard.

The response from the United States government was muted.

Rubio said that Washington was conducting its own investigation and would "respond accordingly".

He has railed against the Cuban government in recent weeks, calling the status quo there unsustainable, and saying Cuba needed to change "dramatically".

Cuban exiles who are largely concentrated in Miami have long dreamed of overthrowing the Cuban government or seeing it fall and have in the past plotted against the government that was established by the late revolutionary leader Fidel Castro.

Trump mentioned the large Cuban community, saying that a takeover of Cuba by the US could be "something good... very positive" for people who had been expelled from the country.

"We have people living here that want to go back to Cuba, and they're very happy with what's going on," he said.

## Argentina's Congress okays Milei's labour reforms

AFP  
Buenos Aires

Argentina's Congress has adopted President Javier Milei's flagship labour reform, handing victory to the libertarian leader in his push to boost hiring by loosening rules on working hours, dismissals and overtime.

The so-called "labour modernisation law" allows working days of up to 12 hours, reduces severance pay, limits the right to strike and lowers employer taxes, among other provisions.

It returned on Friday to the Senate for a second and final vote after being ratified last week by the lower house Chamber of Deputies following government concessions on issues such as sick pay.

Milei hailed the passing of the law, which is the centerpiece of his radical free market agenda.

"HISTORIC. We have labour modernisation," he wrote on X on Friday.

The law brought thousands of people onto the streets in the past two weeks in protest over what they see as a rollback in workers' rights.

Two protests outside parliament ended in clashes between the police and protesters but a third demonstration on Friday saw only minor disturbances.

Polls show Argentines divided on the reform, with 48.6% in favour and 45.2% against in a recent survey.

The General Confederation of Labour (CGT), which called a general strike last week that ground Argentina to a halt, said ahead of the Senate vote that it would now take its fight to the courts.

Milei insists that Argentina's labour laws are outdated, too restrictive and discourage formal hiring.

Over 43% of Argentine workers lack formal employment contracts.

Sergio Emiliozzi, a 60-year-old teacher, said that while the law was being promoted as a job creation tool, "it's quite the opposite".

"What this allows is for me to be easily fired," he said.

Opposition parties and unions have scorned Milei's claim that the reform will spur a hiring bonanza.

They point to the closure of some 21,000 companies and loss of 300,000 jobs since he took office as proof that his budget-slashing, deregulatory agenda, while praised for driving down inflation, is hurting the economy.

For Matias Cremonese, President of the Latin American Association of Labour Lawyers, the reform is "regressive" and "based on a false premise".

"Studies have shown that in no country in the world has labour legislation been decisive in creating or destroying jobs. That depends on economic policy," he told AFP.

A report by the national statistics institute Indec on business sentiment showed 80% of companies have no hiring plans for the next three months and 15% even planning to lay off staff.

The president of the Argentine Industrial Union, Martin Rappalini, welcomed the law's aim to reduce the number of workplace lawsuits but cautioned that unemployment "cannot be solved with a single law".

Milei has accelerated his reforms since winning October mid-terms, backed by US President Donald Trump, who promised to withhold a financial aid package for Argentina's currency unless his candidate won.

## Dramatic changes observed in one of universe's biggest stars

By Will Dunham  
Reuters

The largest stars in the universe live the life of a rock star - they are born brilliant, live fast and die young.

If that is the case, the one named WOH G64 might be considered the stellar equivalent of Jimi Hendrix.

WOH G64, which is 28 times the mass of the Sun and resides in a satellite galaxy to the Milky Way called the Large Magellanic Cloud, is one of a handful of the biggest stars known, just like Hendrix was in rock 'n' roll.

And observations spanning more than three decades show that it is behaving unlike any star seen before.

Astronomers have only an incomplete understanding of the life history of the largest stars, and the WOH G64 observations are providing new insight.

Researchers observed a change that occurred in 2014 in the star's colour, corresponding to an increase in its surface temperature, as it evolved from red to yellow.

The star had been classified as an extreme red supergiant but rapidly became a yellow hypergiant.

This transition happened quickly, in cosmic terms, and with no evidence of an eruption or explosion.

"Typically the evolution of a star takes place on timescales of billions of years," said astronomer Gonzalo Muñoz-Sanchez, lead author of the research published this week in the journal *Nature Astronomy*. "On human timescales, we only observe more abrupt and violent events, such as eruptions, the merger of two stars or their explosive deaths."

"No current stellar models can fully explain this transformation" in WOH G64, said Muñoz-Sanchez, who worked on the study at the National Observatory of Athens.

Compared to the Sun, its luminosity is about 300,000 times greater and its diameter about 1,500 times greater.

If it were in the place of the Sun, its surface would extend to a distance between the orbits of Jupiter and Saturn, our solar system's fifth and sixth planets.

Traveling at the speed of light would take six hours to circumnavigate the star's surface.

WOH G64, around 10mn years old, appears to be near the end of its lifespan.



The huge star WOH G64, surrounded by a thick donut-shaped cloud of dust and its blue binary companion, some 160,000 light-years from Earth, is seen in this illustration released on February 23. - Reuters

In contrast, the Sun is about 4.5bn years old and has an estimated 5bn more years left.

WOH G64 is located about 160,000 light-years from Earth. A light-year is the distance light travels in a year, 9.5tn miles (9.5tn km).

"WOH G64 is a massive star and very different from the Sun," Muñoz-Sanchez said.

Stars between about 8-23 times the Sun's mass are expected to

evolve into red supergiants and eventually explode as a supernova.

For stars in the range of 23-30 times the Sun's mass, their fate is less certain.

It remains unclear whether they go boom as a supernova, collapse directly into forming a black hole or evolve from a red supergiant phase into a yellow hypergiant stage before ending their lives.

Black holes are exception-

ally dense objects with gravity so strong not even light can escape.

"Hence, WOH G64 might be the solution to this question," Muñoz-Sanchez said.

Adding another layer of complexity to understanding WOH G64 is the fact that the observations indicated it is gravitationally bound to another star in what is called a binary system.

The researchers were unable to determine the size or characteristics of the stellar companion, but said the two might at some point merge.

The researchers have come up with hypotheses concerning WOH G64's recent changes.

They said it may have experienced a violent episode predating the observational data that turned it red and is now returning to its usual yellow quiescent state.

They said it also is possible that an interaction between WOH G64 and its companion had temporarily mimicked the appearance of a red supergiant.

"As astronomers continue to monitor this remarkable system, WOH G64 is poised to reshape our understanding of how the most massive stars live and die," Muñoz-Sanchez said.

## Judge blocks Virginia law restricting social media for children

A federal judge has blocked Virginia from enforcing a new law that aimed to protect children from being addicted to social media by requiring age verification and limiting use by those under 16 to one hour per day.

US District Judge Patricia Tolliver Giles in Alexandria, Virginia, said the technology trade group NetChoice was likely to establish that the law unconstitutionally infringed the free speech rights of adults, children and its dozens of members, in-

cluding Google, Meta Platforms, Netflix, Reddit and Elon Musk's X.

The judge issued a preliminary injunction against the law known as Senate Bill 854, which had been signed last May by then-governor Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, and took effect on January 1, 2026.

NetChoice has also challenged similar laws in states, including California.

Virginia argued that the law was reasonably tailored to protect children from the "addictive features" of social media, and

address a mental health crisis among youth.

However, the judge said that notwithstanding Virginia's interest in protecting children, the law was both over-inclusive by requiring everyone, including adults, to verify their age, and under-inclusive by exempting potentially addictive interactive gaming from coverage.

She also said the law treats "functionally equivalent" speech differently by preventing children from watching, for example, science, history and church programming

lasting more than an hour that they could watch elsewhere, including streaming platforms.

"The court recognises the Commonwealth's compelling interest in protecting its youth from the harms associated with the addictive aspects of social media," wrote Giles, an appointee of former Democratic president Joe Biden. "However, it cannot infringe on First Amendment rights, including those of the same youth it aims to protect." - Reuters

## Protest against US-Israeli attacks on Iran in Britain



Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his brother Piers Corbyn attend a protest against the US-Israeli attacks on Iran, in Parliament Square in central London, yesterday. **Right:** People hold placards during a protest against the US-Israeli attacks on Iran, in Parliament Square in central London, yesterday. (AFP)



## Starmer says UK warplanes involved in Mideast actions

AFP  
London

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday British warplanes were involved in “defensive operations” in Middle East skies but the UK had “played no role” in the US-Israeli attack on Iran.

In his first public response to the strikes, which triggered missile launches from Tehran, Starmer said that Britain’s operations were separate from the attack on Iran and “in line with international law”.

“The United Kingdom played no role in these strikes,” he said in a short televised statement.

“As part of our commitments to the security of our allies in the Middle East we have a range of defensive capabilities in the region — which we’ve recently taken steps to strengthen,” the UK leader added.

“Our forces are active and British planes are in the sky today as part of coordinated regional defensive operations to protect our people, our interests and our allies.”



Starmer spoke after holding an emergency meeting with senior UK ministers and officials and separate talks with European counterparts, in response to the evolving conflict in the Middle East.

In his comments, he argued Iran “can end this now” and that Tehran “should refrain from further strikes, give up their weapons programmes, and cease the appalling violence and repression against the Iranian people”.

“That is the route to de-escalation and back to the negotiating table,” Starmer said.

Earlier, his government warned the military strikes against Iran could blow up into a broader regional conflict, while adding the UK’s “immediate priority” was the safety of its citizens in the region.

In a message on X, the Foreign Office urged its citizens in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates to “immediately shelter in place” because of reported missile attacks on sites in those countries.

The ministry also updated its travel advice to urge “against all travel to Israel and Palestine”.

Meanwhile British Airways was among the airlines to say it has cancelled flights to and from Tel Aviv and Bahrain for several days, and its Saturday flight to Amman, because of the US-Israeli airstrikes and Iran’s retaliation.

Wizz Air, which also flies to the region from Britain, confirmed that it was suspending all flights to and from Israel, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Amman “with immediate effect up until and including March 7”.

“Flights to and from Saudi Arabia will be cancelled up until and including March 2,” it added, noting it was “closely monitoring developments”.

## China calls for ‘immediate halt’ to Iran escalation

China warned against any further escalation in the Middle East yesterday, calling for an “immediate halt” to violence after the United States and Israel launched attacks on Iran, which has retaliated with missiles. “China calls for an immediate halt to military actions, urges avoiding further escalation of tensions, and encourages the resumption of dialogue and negotiations to maintain peace and stability in the Middle East,” Beijing’s foreign ministry said. “Iran’s national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity should be respected,” it added. (AFP)

## ‘Indonesian president offers Iran-US mediation’

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto is prepared to mediate between Washington and Tehran, the foreign ministry said yesterday following US strikes against Iran. “Indonesia calls on all parties to exercise restraint and to prioritise dialogue and diplomacy,” it said in a statement on X. “The Government of Indonesia... expresses its readiness to facilitate dialogue to restore a conducive security condition and, if agreed by both parties, the President of Indonesia is prepared to travel to Tehran to carry out mediation.” (AFP)

## India calls for ‘dialogue and diplomacy’

India called for diplomacy to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East yesterday, after the US and Israel launched strikes on Iran, which has responded with missile attacks. “We urge all sides to exercise restraint, avoid escalation, and prioritise the safety of civilians,” the foreign ministry said in a statement. “Dialogue and diplomacy should be pursued... Sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states must be respected,” it added. (AFP)

## Air India, IndiGo suspend all ME flights

India’s two largest private carriers IndiGo and Air India suspended flights to all destinations in the Middle East yesterday after Israel and the US launched strikes on Iran.

“In view of the developing situation in parts of the Middle East, all Air India flights to all destinations in the Middle East have been suspended,” Air India said in a statement posted on X.

IndiGo said it was also suspending flights temporarily in

view of the safety and security of customers and crew.

“Our teams are continuously monitoring the evolving situation and recalibrating operations to minimise disruption as much as possible,” the carrier said on X.

New Delhi has historically balanced its ties with Israel while engaging widely with other Gulf nations, home to millions of Indian migrants.

The region is also a criti-

cal source of energy for the world’s fastest growing major economy.

It also maintains strong relations with Tehran, including developing its Chabahar port — a trade gateway to Afghanistan, where New Delhi has built a relationship with Taliban authorities.

India’s foreign ministry estimates there are usually around 10,000 Indian citizens in Iran. (AFP)

## Blast at India firecracker factory kills 21

AFP  
New Delhi

An explosion at a firecracker factory in India killed at least 21 people and injured eight others yesterday, officials told local media.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X he was “pained by the loss of lives” and extended his condolences after the blast

in Kakinada, in the southeastern state of Andhra Pradesh.

The Press Trust of India news agency quoted state minister Kandula Durgesh as confirming there were 21 deaths, out of around 30 people who were at the factory at the time of the explosion.

“Another eight persons are undergoing treatment in hospitals,” Durgesh added.

Authorities have launched a probe into the incident, which the

state’s chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu called “heartbreaking”.

Fireworks are hugely popular in India, particularly during the Hindu festival of Diwali and wedding celebrations.

Explosions are common in firecracker workshops, often due to disregard for safety requirements and lax enforcement.

Last year, a firework factory explosion in western India killed 21 people.

## Vietnam AI law takes effect, first in Southeast Asia

AFP  
Hanoi

A law regulating artificial intelligence (AI) went into effect in Vietnam yesterday, making it the first country in Southeast Asia with a comprehensive framework on the booming technology.

Passed by the National Assembly in December, the law focuses on the risks posed by generative AI, requiring human oversight and control along the lines of the European Union’s landmark AI Act.

Many nations are moving to address the dangers of chatbots and image generators — from misinformation to online abuse and copyright violations — but few have enacted legislation.

The legislation, which is in force as of March 1, “paves the way for Vietnam to deeply integrate with international standards while maintaining digital sovereignty”, the government said in a December report.

It requires companies to clearly label AI-generated content such as deepfakes that cannot readily be differentiated from reality.

It also requires them to disclose to customers when they are interacting with an artificial rather than human agent.

The law applies to developers as well as providers and deployers of the technology, whether they are Vietnamese organisations or foreign entities operating in the country.

Vietnam has set ambitious double-digit growth targets for the next five years, with expansion of the digital economy a key part of its development strategy.

AI and the data economy are “pillars” of a “more sustainable and smarter new development” model, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh was quoted as saying Wednesday on the government’s website.

Under the law, the government will establish a national AI computing centre, improved data resources and large language models in Vietnamese.

So far only a handful of countries have implemented far-reaching regulatory frameworks on AI.

The US has opposed what Vice-President J D Vance called “excessive regulation”, warning it could stifle innovation in the key sector.

In January, South Korea became the first country to have an AI law take full effect, while the European Union is gradually phasing in a set of rules that will become completely applicable in 2027.

While Vietnam’s law is a regulatory milestone, analysts said its impact would depend on how the government enforces it and on what guidance it issues on implementation.

The law is “not the final word” but rather a “decisive starting point”, Vietnam-based LNT & Partners law firm said in an analysis on its website.

“It establishes responsibility, human control, and risk management as the governing themes of AI regulation,” the firm said.

However, it added, “the true impact will depend on implementing decrees, sectoral regulations, and enforcement practice”.

Patrick Keil, senior legal adviser at law firm DFDL, called the law “a significant statement of national ambition” but told AFP businesses will continue to face some uncertainty about their obligations until the government issues further guidance.

At an AI summit hosted by New Delhi in February, 91 countries and international organisations called for “secure, trustworthy and robust” AI.

But their declaration, signed by the US and China, was criticised by AI safety campaigners for being too generic to protect the public.

## N Korea unveils image of Kim Ju-ae firing rifle

North Korea released a rare image yesterday of leader Kim Jong-un’s teenage daughter firing a rifle at a shooting range, adding to speculation that she is being groomed as his successor.

Kim’s daughter Ju-ae has long been seen as the next in line to rule the secretive, nuclear-armed state, and took part in a string of recent high-profile outings, including this week’s military parade marking the closing stages of North Korea’s key party congress.

Pyongyang’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) released a photo of Ju-ae shooting a rifle at an outdoor shooting range, peering through a rifle scope with her finger on the trigger, smoke rising from the barrel.

She was wearing what appeared to be a leather jacket, a garment of ten worn by both her and her father at major political events, symbolising authority and legitimacy.

KCNA reported on Saturday that Kim presented new sniper rifles to senior party and military officials, describing the move as a gesture of



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s daughter Kim Ju-ae firing a new sniper rifle, at an undisclosed place in North Korea. (AFP)

appreciation and “absolute trust”, without mentioning Ju-ae.

He then visited a shooting range with the officials, where he fired the rifle and took a group photo, it added.

South Korea’s spy agency said this month that Pyongyang appears to have started the process of designating Ju-ae as leader Kim’s successor.

By underscoring Ju-ae’s ability to handle and fire a weapon, the photos “suggest she is indeed receiving training as a successor”,

Yang Moo-jin, former president of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, told AFP.

KCNA also said yesterday that Kim Jong-un’s powerful sister Kim Yo-jong will head the party’s general affairs department — a role analysts describe as akin to a party secretary-general.

The Kim family has ruled North Korea with an iron grip for decades, and a cult of personality surrounding their “Paektu bloodline” dominates daily life in the isolated country. (AFP)

## Man charged after defacing Churchill statue

AFP  
London

London police said yesterday a man had been charged with criminal damage for defacing a statue of Britain’s World War II prime minister Winston Churchill with pro-Palestinian slogans. The monument in the central Parliament Square was smeared with red paint early on Friday and “Zionist war criminal” among the slogans written on it.

The Metropolitan Police said Caspar San Giorgio,

38, of no fixed address, was charged early yesterday, some 24 hours after his arrest.

He had been detained within minutes of officers being alerted to the incident, according to the force.

He was due to appear at a London magistrates’ court later yesterday.

The words “free Palestine” and “stop the genocide” were also sprayed on the statue, which workers cleaned off Friday.

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.



**CHAIRMAN**

Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Attiyah

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka

**Deputy Managing Editor**

Kamran Rehmat

- ✉ P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- ✉ editor@gulf-times.com
- ☎ 44350478 (News),
- ☎ 44466404 (Sport),
- ☎ 44466636 (Home delivery)
- ☎ 44350474
- 📘 facebook.com/gulftimes
- 🐦 twitter.com/gulftimes\_Qatar
- 📷 instagram.com/gulftimes
- 📺 youtube.com/GulftimesVideos



## How AI is now being used to look for evidence and clues

Forty years after Prime Minister Olof Palme was shot dead on a Stockholm street, Swedes are still wondering whether the murder was the work of a lone gunman or a political assassination. Decades later, the murder remains unsolved, and amateur detectives have turned to Artificial Intelligence in the hope of identifying new leads and persuading authorities to reopen an investigation that was shut down in 2020.

The team on a crime podcast called Spar (Track) has started investigating leading theories about the murder with an AI engine developed for them by Swedish and Belgian software firms. "This is about the murder of our leader, a democratically elected prime minister. You can't just close the case," said Anton Berg, a co-presenter of the podcast, which intends to present the findings using AI gradually.

So far, Spar has announced no breakthrough in the case. But, pointing to the ability of AI tools to learn and improve, Berg said: "Our hope is that this tool will get so advanced that we can open up the investigation again." Palme was shot dead at close range on his way home from a visit to the cinema on February 28, 1986.

Over the years, the finger of blame has been pointed at South Africa's apartheid-era security services, Kurdish freedom fighters, right-wing extremists within the Swedish state and various lone gunmen.

One man was convicted, but later freed, and prosecutors closed the case in 2020. A review last year confirmed the case would remain shut despite the main suspect being absolved.

### The AI engine developed for the Spar crime podcast mimics a team of human investigators to probe evidence, evaluate findings and identify gaps, but can do so much more rapidly

"We don't know any more than we knew on the day of the murder, essentially," said Gunnar Wall, who has written several books on the Palme killing.

The AI engine developed for the Spar crime podcast mimics a team of human investigators to probe evidence, evaluate findings and identify gaps, but can do so much more rapidly. It can analyse the case's around 30,000 publicly available digital documents in less than a second. Otherwise the entire case files – about 500,000 pages – would take a decade just to read, police say.

From fingerprinting to DNA profiling, forensic technology has reshaped criminal investigations. AI could be another game-changer, experts say. In 2018, AI-assisted DNA analysis helped Los Angeles police catch Joseph DeAngelo, known as the Golden State Killer, who had murdered 13 people and raped at least 50 people many years earlier. "AI is a paradigm shift," said Lena Klaseen, the former head of Sweden's National Forensic Centre and now Adjunct Professor in Digital Forensics at Linköping University. "It is going to change how we work in the way that computers did. But this is bigger."

Gaining access to police files takes time, with only around 1,000 pages per year released. At this rate, it would take hundreds of years to be able to review all the information. Despite such problems, "our goal is to solve the murder," Lundell said. There is also no guarantee that the evidence needed to solve the Palme case even exists. Three public commissions concluded that police bungled the early investigation. Documents were lost and leads were not followed up.

"There is no technique that can help with information that isn't there, and that is a big part of the problem that there are gaps in the information," said Lennart Gune, Director of Prosecution at the Swedish Prosecution Authority. The use of AI in investigations also comes with some concerns. The Golden State Killer case caused a fierce debate about privacy after millions of people had their DNA data scanned without their explicit consent.

In 2025, Sweden proposed a law that will allow police to use real-time, AI-powered face-recognition as a tool to fight gang crime, but its use will be limited over concerns about privacy and AI surveillance. — Reuters

**To Advertise**

✉ gtadv@gulf-times.com

**Display**

☎ 44466621  
☎ 44418811

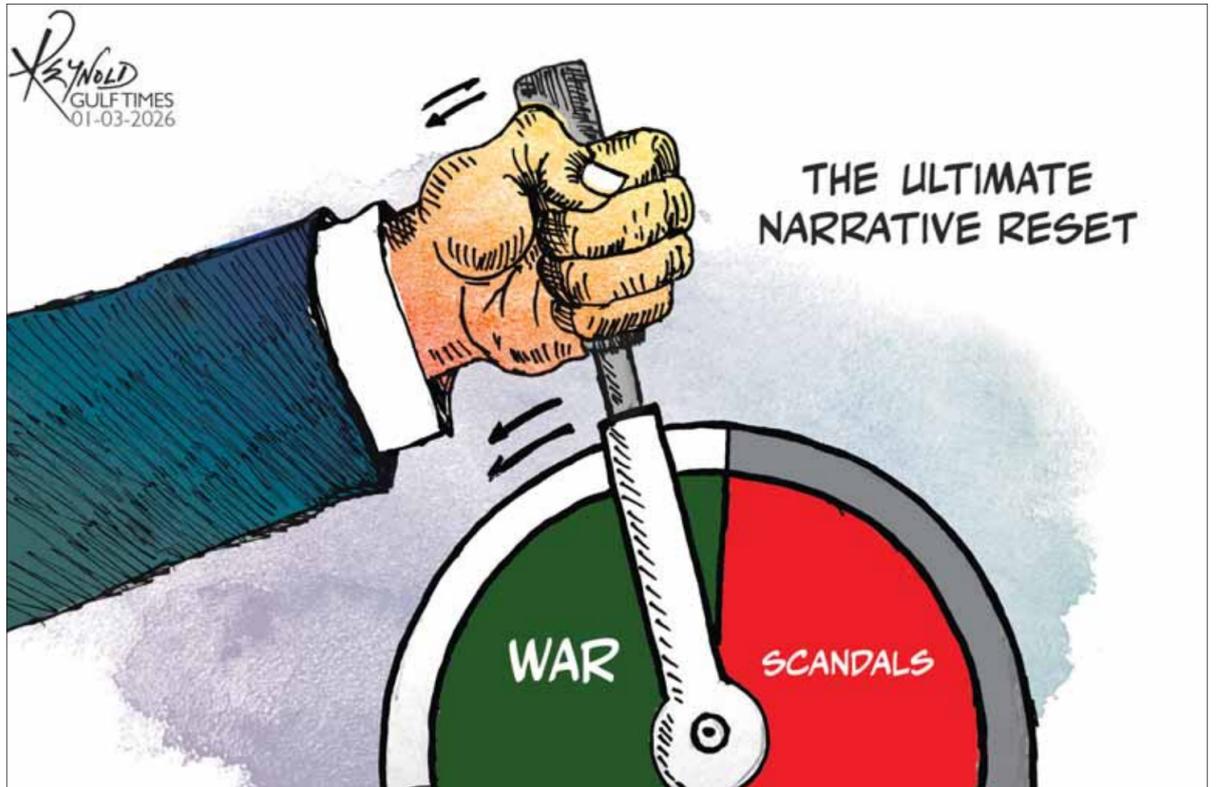
**Classified**

☎ 44466609 ☎ 44418811  
✉ gtcad@gulf-times.com

**Subscription**

✉ circulation@gulf-times.com

© 2026 Gulf Times. All rights reserved



## Qatar mosques: Places of worship and beacons of knowledge

**QNA**  
Doha

In Islam, the mosque plays a fundamental role as a comprehensive institution for worship, spiritual purification, raising awareness, promoting religious and moral values, and strengthening community bonds. Historically, its role has not been limited to performing rituals; it has also served as a space for learning, disseminating knowledge, and engaging in dialogue, contributing to human development and refining religious and social awareness.

In this context, Qatar has given special attention to mosques in terms of planning, construction, and equipping them, as well as developing their functional role to become centres of learning and beacons of cultural influence. The State has ensured that mosques fulfill integrated roles, combining worship, education, and cultural enrichment, reflecting a comprehensive vision that enhances the mosque's presence in the daily life of the community.

Today, mosques in Qatar, in addition to their religious role, have become platforms for lectures and cultural seminars, spaces for discussing pressing social issues, and venues for activities aimed at children and youth, contributing to the consolidation of Islamic values, building awareness, and strengthening social cohesion.

Several leading examples exemplify this integrated role, including the Imam Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab Mosque, one of the key religious landmarks in the country. Inaugurated in December 2011, it is one of the largest religious projects completed and serves as a destination for worship and learning. It embodies the mosque's significance in Qatar's vision, as a comprehensive institution fulfilling religious, educational, and social roles. It also reflects the State's commitment to preserving Islamic heritage and authentic architectural identity.

**Qatari architecture**

The Imam Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab Mosque is distinguished by its design, inspired by traditional Qatari architecture, particularly the historic Al Qubaib Mosque, while incorporating modern elements for contemporary use. Spanning a vast area, it can accommodate tens of thousands of worshippers and features courtyards, arcades, and multiple domes that reflect the aesthetics of Islamic architecture.

The mosque also includes Qur'an memorization facilities, libraries, and lecture halls, in addition to hosting major religious events. This reinforces its role as a religious and educational centre that contributes to the dissemination of knowledge and the consolidation of Islamic values.

Furthermore, Al-Mujadilah Center and Mosque for Women serves as a distinguished example of a mosque's role in intellectual discourse and community dialogue, drawing inspiration from the story of the female companion Khawla bint Tha'labah, whose story is immortalized in the Qur'an in Surah Al-Mujadila. The mosque provides a platform to enhance the presence of Muslim women in the fields of science and knowledge, offering a suitable educational and research environment.

The centre aims to empower women through research and educational programs, intellectual initiatives, and specialized workshops, contributing to raising awareness and presenting a practical model for applying Islamic values in contemporary life. The Al-Mujadilah Mosque hosts community events and open dialogues, creating a space that combines worship and knowledge, and affirming that mosques in Qatar have become vibrant institutions serving all segments of society.

Among the most prominent religious and cultural landmarks is the Katara Mosque, distinguished by its unique architectural design. This design, created by the Turkish architect Zeynep Fadiloglu in collaboration with restoration experts from Istanbul, lends the mosque a distinctive artistic character.

The mosque, located in the Katara Cultural Village, is known for its distinctive blue colour, achieved through the use of glass mosaics and hand-carved tiles. Its design blends elements of classical Islamic architecture with exquisite

**Today, mosques in Qatar, in addition to their religious role, have become platforms for lectures and cultural seminars, spaces for discussing pressing social issues, and venues for activities aimed at children and youth, contributing to the consolidation of Islamic values, building awareness, and strengthening social cohesion**



An outside view of Imam Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab Mosque. (QNA/File Photo)

artistic embellishments, making it one of the most beautiful mosques in the country and a popular destination for visitors as well as worshippers.

The Katara Mosque plays both a religious and cultural role. It showcases the rich heritage of Islamic arts and reflects the cultural diversity of the Islamic world, while also serving as a space for learning and celebrating religious and cultural occasions. With its two minarets, the mosque stands as a model that integrates worship and knowledge within a global academic environment. Opened in 2015 as part of the College of Islamic Studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), it embodies the historical role of the mosque as a centre of learning and knowledge alongside worship.

The mosque is distinguished by its minarets, each reaching a height of approximately 90m and adorned with Arabic calligraphy. The building rests on five pillars representing the pillars of Islam, courtyards featuring fountains, alongside the Quranic Botanic Garden, which showcases plants mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The mosque offers educational programs, competitions, and community events, and provides translation services in several languages, serving as an open space for intercultural dialogue. It has also received several international awards, reflecting its architectural and intellectual value. Assistant Director of the Mosques Department at the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, Mohammed bin Abdul Latif al-Mahmoud affirmed that the Ministry views the mosque today as an integrated religious, educational and social institution whose role extends beyond simply performing rituals to include guidance, instruction, and the building of values.

He pointed out that rapid social and cultural changes necessitate activating the mosque's role in promoting moderation and balance, consolidating national identity, and addressing societal issues with a spirit that blends tradition and modernity.

**Comprehensive standards**

In a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Mahmoud explained that the Mosques Department places great importance on enhancing the role of mosques as centres of learning and knowledge. This is achieved through organizing regular religious lessons and Quran memorization circles, and qualification programs for imams and preachers. The Department of Da'wah and Religious Guidance at the Ministry to host scholars and specialists, while encouraging youth and school students to participate in calling the adhan and leading Taraweeh prayers, thereby deepening their connection to the mosque.

He pointed out that religious programs and lectures organized in mosques contribute to establishing a correct understanding of Islamic texts, promoting the values of tolerance and belonging, correcting misconceptions, and raising awareness of societal issues such as the importance of family, social solidarity, and respect for public order. These efforts, he said, positively reflect on individual behaviour and community stability, alongside enhancing the role of imams in family, social and educational matters.

The Assistant Director of the Mosques Department further stated that the ministry adopts comprehensive standards in mosque development, combining Islamic architectural

identity with contemporary requirements, while prioritizing construction quality, facility safety, and the provision of advanced sound, air-conditioning and lighting systems. Attached facilities supporting educational and cultural activities are also provided to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for worshippers.

He added that mosques play a pivotal role in promoting the values of social cohesion and solidarity through charitable initiatives, encouraging donations and the payment of Zakat (obligatory alms), addressing societal issues in sermons and lessons in a constructive and educational manner, and contributing to reconciliation and strengthening the bonds of brotherhood and compassion among members of society.

Al-Mahmoud revealed that the next phase will witness the implementation of qualitative plans to enhance the religious and cultural message of mosques. This will be achieved by supporting the national strategy through dedicating Friday sermons to addressing national issues in coordination with relevant authorities, developing programs targeting youth, expanding the use of digital platforms to disseminate religious content, training religious and administrative staff according to the latest standards, and launching initiatives that strengthen community partnerships and keep pace with the aspirations of the next phase.

For his part, Consultant Imam at the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Hassan al-Muraikhi, stated that mosques in the State of Qatar play a pivotal role in promoting religious and moral awareness in society, noting that they remain open in service of Islam and the dissemination of its tolerant values. In a similar statement to QNA, Dr al-Muraikhi explained that mosques maintain continuous scholarly and da'wah activity, including daily Qur'an memorization and teaching by specialists, as well as the organization of the main Qur'an memorization competition, 'Sheikh Jassim Competition', in addition to regular lectures and sermons.

He added that the ministry exerts significant efforts to advance mosque activities by closely monitoring programs and lessons, ensuring diversity of topics and alignment with community needs. These efforts, he noted, have yielded positive and encouraging results, reflected in the growing number of participants in mosque activities and the visible impact of virtuous conduct on individual behaviour.

Dr al-Muraikhi also highlighted the important role of Friday sermons, which address contemporary issues and topics of concern to Muslims, guiding them according to the correct methodology derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. He expressed his appreciation for the material and moral support provided by the authorities to preachers, which contributes to enlightening people and clarifying the true path.

Concluding his statement to QNA, Dr al-Muraikhi noted that mosques across Qatar are witnessing strong attendance, with worshippers performing their rituals in an atmosphere of tranquillity and without disturbance. He emphasized that moderation prevails, with no sectarian intolerance or deviant ideology, adding that society has developed a firm religious awareness enabling it to distinguish truth, reject heresies, and preserve the purity of the faith.

# US backs Pakistan's 'right to defend itself' after strikes on Afghanistan

AFP  
Islamabad

Pakistan air strikes on Afghanistan drew diplomatic support from Washington as Islamabad said yesterday it would not stop military operations pressuring the Afghan government, which it accuses of backing militancy.

The Taliban government has denied harbouring militants and its spokesperson has called for "dialogue" to resolve a previously simmering conflict that Pakistan's defence minister said on Friday was now "open war".

After both countries' forces clashed at the border intermittently for months, Pakistan launched the strikes in the early hours of Friday morning in re-

sponse to a cross-border Afghan offensive on Thursday night.

Pakistan's information minister said yesterday that 37 locations across Afghanistan had been subject to aerial targeting since its operation began.

It was not clear if strikes had taken place on Friday night, but authorities signalled operations were still taking place.

"Pakistan's immediate and effective response to aggression continues," Mosharraf Zaidi, a spokesman for Pakistan's prime minister, posted on X late on Friday.

The US "expressed support for Pakistan's right to defend itself against Taliban attacks," Allison Hooker, the under secretary of state for political affairs, wrote on X after talks with her Pakistani counterpart.

The operation was Pakistan's most widespread bombardment of the Afghan capital Kabul and its first air strikes on the city of Kandahar, the southern power base of the Taliban's supreme leader since they returned to power in 2021.

Zaidi did not confirm whether Pakistan had carried out air strikes overnight between Friday and Saturday.

The sharp surge in hostilities drew international concern, with China, Britain, the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross calling for immediate de-escalation and return to dialogue.

Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said on Friday Afghan forces had killed 55 Pakistani soldiers and captured several others, while putting the death toll among Afghan troops at 13.

Zaidi, the Pakistan government

spokesman, said 297 Afghan Taliban and militants had been killed. Islamabad earlier said 12 of its soldiers had been killed.

The Afghan government's deputy spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat said at least 19 civilians had been killed in eastern Khost and Paktika provinces.

Casualty claims from both sides are difficult to verify independently.

This week's escalation marked the first time in on-off fighting that Pakistan had focused its air strikes on Afghan government facilities, analysts noted, a stark change from previous operations it had carried out on Afghan territory that it said were targeting militants.

Relations between the neighbours have plunged in recent months, with land border cross-

ings largely shut since deadly fighting in October that killed more than 70 people on both sides.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of failing to act against militant groups that carry out attacks in Pakistan, which the Taliban government denies.

Most of the attacks have been claimed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a militant group that has stepped up assaults in Pakistan since 2021.

Zaidi told AFP yesterday that there had been no reports of border clashes during the night, but that gunmen — who he said were associated with the Pakistani Taliban — had attacked a checkpoint in northwest Pakistan near Afghanistan's Khost province. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar moved to allay tensions, and China said it was "working with" both countries while calling for calm.

In Geneva, ICRC president Mirjana Spoljaric said the organisation was preparing relief operations but stressed that "no humanitarian response can compensate for political will to respect the rules of war and prioritise de-escalation".

Last year, several rounds of negotiations between Pakistan and Afghanistan followed a ceasefire brokered by Qatar and Türkiye, but the efforts have failed to produce a lasting agreement.

After repeated breaches of the initial truce, Saudi Arabia intervened this month, mediating the release of three Pakistani soldiers captured by Afghanistan in October.

## EU urges 'de-escalation' between Afghanistan and Pakistan

The European Union called yesterday for an "immediate de-escalation" between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as Islamabad launched air strikes in a flare-up of fighting.

"We call on all actors for immediate de-escalation and a halt of hostilities following the sharp increase of violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including cross-border attacks and reported strikes over the past 24 hours, which could have serious implications for the region," the EU's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, said in a statement.

"The EU reiterates that Afghan territory must not be used to threaten or attack other countries and calls on the Afghan de facto authorities to take effective action against all terrorist groups operating in or from Afghanistan." (AFP)

## Pakistan says Afghanistan jet crash claim 'totally untrue'

Islamabad's foreign ministry said yesterday that claims by Afghan military and police of downing a Pakistani jet and capturing a pilot were "totally untrue".

"That's a false claim. Totally untrue," ministry spokesman Tahir Hussain Andrabi told AFP.

## Strongly condemns unwarranted Iran attacks: Pakistan FM

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar told his Iranian counterpart in a call yesterday that Islamabad "strongly condemned the unwarranted attacks against Iran", following US-Israeli strikes. Pakistan "called for an immediate halt to escalation through urgent resumption of diplomacy", Mohammad Ishaq Dar said, according to a statement. (AFP)

## Pakistan national carrier suspends Middle East flights

Flag carrier Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) suspended its Middle East flights yesterday "due to the changing situation" in the region, the airline said following US and Israeli strikes on Iran. "PIA's flights to the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Doha, and Kuwait have been suspended," it said in statement. (AFP)

## Climate change forces facelift for Michelangelo masterpiece

AFP  
Vatican City

Michelangelo's famous The Last Judgment fresco in the Sistine Chapel is getting its biggest facelift in more than three decades to remove a light whitish residue left by sweaty visitors.

The restoration of the 16th-century masterpiece in the Vatican is aimed at bringing back to light the vibrant colours of the work, which measures nearly 14m (46 feet) high.

Visitors will still be able to access the Sistine Chapel during the restoration but the fresco is obscured by a large scaffolding covered with a reproduction of the work.

Vatican Museums director Barbara Jatta described the veil being removed as "a bit like a cataract", during a press tour on Saturday of the project, due to be completed before Easter.

The Vatican said the substance was "invisible to the naked eye".

The fresco is being dabbed with distilled water through a layer of Japanese paper to remove the substance, identified as calcium lactate.

"Transpiration has increased in recent years because of climate change. Due to transpiration we produce lactic acid... which becomes calcium lactate," Fabio Morresi, head of scientific research at the Vatican Museums, told reporters.

Vatican Museums staff said measures had already been taken to reduce the number of visitors present at any one time in the Sistine Chapel, which is also the place where cardinals meet in closed-door conclaves to elect new popes.

Morresi described the difference in the fresco before and after the treatment as like "two different worlds" and said working on



The director of the Vatican Museums Barbara Jatta addresses journalists during a press visit yesterday. (AFP)

the masterpiece was an "emotional" process.

The Last Judgment, which was completed between 1536 and 1541, is the centrepiece of the Sistine Chapel, located just behind the altar.

Then pope Paul III was said to have been so impressed by the work that he fell on his knees and ask for forgiveness when he first saw it.

It covers an area of 180 square metres and has 391 figures.

The many nude and semi-nude figures in the painting caused scandal and many were covered up with cloths painted over the original following Michelangelo's death.

Some of the painted cloths were removed in 1994 during the last major restoration.

The current project is being sponsored by US donors.

The Sistine Chapel is being restored by section in a major overhaul that started in 2010.

Work is normally carried out when the Sistine Chapel is closed to visitors and without the need for scaffolding but Vatican Museums officials said this was not possible for The Last Judgment because of the scale of the work.

Morresi said the restoration felt personal for him because he was hired in 1988 when the last major facelift of the Sistine Chapel was just starting and he is now nearly at retirement age.

## Moscow says attacks on Iran 'dangerous'

Russia yesterday condemned US and Israeli strikes on Iran as a "dangerous adventure" that could spark "catastrophe" in the region and urged its citizens to leave Iran and Israel.

Tehran emerged as one of Russia's closest allies during Moscow's Ukraine offensive and the Kremlin has been calling for restraint amid growing tensions and reports of a possible US intervention in Iran.

"Washington and Tel-Aviv have once again embarked on a dangerous adventure that is rapidly bringing the region to the brink of a humanitarian, economic, and — this cannot be ruled out — radiological catastrophe," Russia's foreign ministry said yesterday.

"The aggressors' intentions are clear and openly declared: to destroy the constitutional order and

overthrow the government of a state they find undesirable, which has refused to submit to the dictate of force and hegemonism," it added.

"The responsibility for the negative consequences of this man-made crisis, including an unpredictable chain reaction and an escalating spiral of violence, lies entirely with them," the ministry said.

Russia said it was "ready to contribute to the search for peaceful solutions" that are "based on international law, mutual respect and balance of interests."

Moscow has urged Russians to leave Iran and issued a similar warning for its citizens in Israel.

In 2025, Russia and Iran signed a strategic partnership treaty aimed at strengthening ties — including in the military sphere. (AFP)

## France not involved in US strikes on Iran: Macron

French President Emmanuel Macron told an emergency defence council he chaired late yesterday that diplomacy must prevail to calm the conflict pitting the US and Israel against Iran.

He also emphasised that "France was neither warned of nor involved in" the US-Israeli strikes on Iran, "just like all the other countries in the region and our allies".

"I hope we can take all necessary initiatives so that diplomacy prevails," he said at the defence council meeting held at the Elysee Palace.

"Nobody can think that the issues of Iran's nuclear programme, ballistic (missile) activities, can be simply solved with strikes," he said.

His comments, and the defence council meeting, followed a



Macron addresses a national defence council meeting at The Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

joint call he had earlier yesterday with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz that resulted in a statement condemning Iran for its retaliatory attacks on Gulf nations.

Britain, France and Germany — all Nato member countries — said in their statement "we did not participate in these strikes". (AFP)

# 'Russia accepted US plan for Ukraine security guarantees'

Reuters  
Kyiv

Russia said at recent talks in Geneva it would accept the US proposal for Ukraine's post-war security guarantees, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's chief of staff said yesterday.

"At the last talks, the Russian side said for example that they would accept the security guarantees offered to Ukraine by the United States," said top aide Kyrylo Budanov in an interview aired on Ukrainian television.

US President Donald Trump is urging Moscow and Kyiv to strike an agreement to end Europe's biggest war since 1945, though

Zelensky has complained that his country is facing more pressure to make concessions.

Ukraine is seeking iron-clad security guarantees which commit the U.S. and its European allies to action if Russia attacks again after a peace deal is reached.

The last round of peace talks, which took place in Geneva last week, did not achieve a break-

through and was described as difficult by Kyiv and Moscow, although Washington said it saw "meaningful progress."

Budanov also said that at present, Russia had not agreed to a summit between Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin, which had been floated earlier as a possibility by US special envoy Steve Witkoff.

## Protests nationwide mark Greece's train disaster

AFP  
Athens/Marina

Tens of thousands of people across Greece demonstrated yesterday in solidarity with victims of the country's worst train tragedy, which claimed 57 lives in 2023 and rattled the government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

More than a hundred gatherings were held in Greece and abroad to demand justice for the victims, most of whom were young students returning from a three-day carnival weekend.

"We are here because, three years after the Tempe disaster, we still don't know exactly what happened, justice has not yet been served and those responsible are still walking free," Lydia Pagkali, a 28-year-old woman protesting in Athens, told AFP.

"Even today we don't feel safe taking the train or the metro," she added.

At the close of the mostly peaceful protest, riot police fired tear gas and stun grenades at small groups of youths throwing stones and bottles at them. Nearly a dozen people were arrested.

The crash on February 28, 2023 took place when a passenger locomotive carrying some 350 people from Athens to Thessaloniki hit a freight train in the dead of night, in the Vale of Tempe in central Greece.

The two trains had run on the same track for more than 10 minutes without triggering any alarm, laying bare the parlous state of the Greek railway network's security fail-safes — despite European Un-

ion grants for their modernisation.

"We are protesting against a government, a state that has proven it does not take us into account," 21-year-old student Yiannis Angelidis said in Thessaloniki.

"We demand that everyone responsible be punished, no matter how high up they are," he said.

The head of an association of relatives of the victims, Pavlos Aslanidis, said the families demanded "justice for the dead".

"We will allow nothing to be forgotten," Aslanidis told a large crowd in Athens's Syntagma Square, accusing the government and justice officials of attempting to "bury" the truth and "insulting" the victims' families by repeatedly turning down requests to exhume the dead for tests.

"Murderers," the crowd shouted back.

According to police, at least 40,000 people gathered in central Athens, with another 25,000 in Thessaloniki.

Many relatives believe their loved ones were not killed by the collision, but by an ensuing fire that could have been averted if the passenger train had better insulation.

With a long-awaited trial into the disaster looming in March, unanswered questions remain about the accident and the ensuing investigation, which victims' relatives argue was deficient and left state officials largely untouched.

"Responsibility for the tragedy must be assigned in a strict yet impartial manner in the trial that is beginning," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a statement yesterday.

The accident had "wounded

all Greeks," he said.

In the hours after the tragedy, he had been strongly criticised after stating that "everything indicates" that the collision was "due, unfortunately, mainly to a tragic human error".

More than 300,000 people rallied to mark last year's anniversary, one of the biggest demonstrations the country has seen since the decade-long financial crisis which began in late 2009.

European Chief Prosecutor Laura Kovesi last year noted that the accident could have been avoided if an EU-funded railway signalling project had been completed on time.

The victims' families have also protested that valuable clues were lost when the crash site was bulldozed soon after the accident, sparking allegations that the government was literally trying to bury the evidence.

Despite the disaster, Mitsotakis

comfortably won re-election just months later, and went on to defeat two votes of no-confidence on the issue.

But anger continues to simmer, increasing support for smaller opposition parties, including one headed by a leading lawyer for the accident victims.

The mother of another victim, Maria Karystianou, has announced plans for a new party. "We don't just want to remain a protest movement. We really want to see some things change in the country," Karystianou told AFP in an interview this week.

Nearly 40 people will go on trial on March 23, including railway executives and the station master on duty that night. They risk prison sentences of up to 20 years.

Two former ministers, including the ex-transport minister, were also referred to justice by parliament, but face only misdemeanour charges at present.



People take part in a demonstration outside the Greek parliament, marking the third anniversary of the Tempi train crash that killed 57 people in 2023, in Athens, yesterday. (AFP)

# Fraudsters exploit regional tensions to dupe public

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

With the geopolitical tensions escalating in the region, fraudsters are on the prowl to exploit the situation and dupe the public with new ploys. While life in Qatar continues to be normal and people are well into their daily activities, such fraudsters are making use of the situation to create fear and panic among the people with fraud calls.

Cyberfraudsters pretending as officials from various ministries are contacting people detailing the current situation and asking for personal details in the pretext of helping them out of the current condition. They also claim that they can make travel arrangements to get out of the country to their home country as the "tensions are getting escalated".

One expatriate who received such a call, told 'Gulf Times' that the caller identified himself as an official from the Ministry of Interior. "He told me to get ready to travel immediately as the situation can get worse. He asked me to disclose the details of the residence permit

**Cyberfraudsters pretending as officials from various ministries are contacting people detailing the current situation and asking for personal details on the pretext of helping them out of the current condition**

as well as the passport number to prepare the travel documents. This was enough for me to understand it was a fraud call and I immediately hung up."

The Ministry of Interior has time and again advised the public not to fall prey to such calls and tricks of the cyber frauds.

The ministry has also urged the public to get information from verified sources and not to trust the unofficial sources.

Meanwhile another person said somebody called him saying that it was from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs getting information of all the expatriates to be evacuated in the coming days. "The person, a lady, told me that all the details should be submitted at the earliest possible to make the list of people to be evacuated. In addition to my personal details, she also asked

me to share the bank account details in my country so that all the money due from my company can be transferred to my account."

He noted that he could easily understand that it was not a genuine call and got out of the situation but lamented that the fraudsters are using such a situation to trick the people.

It could be observed across the country that people are well into their daily routine with shops and supermarkets well stocked with all the necessary supplies and business as usual taking place at every realm of life.

Authorities have urged the public to rely only on official sources and never depend on rumours or gossips for any news and make sure to verify any of the news items with government sources for their authenticity.



Qatar residents going about their daily routine.



Streets are quite empty as residents follow government safety protocols.

## Scents of healing: The enduring legacy of herbal medicine in Qatar

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

In the winding alleys of Souq Waqif, where spices perfume the air and tradition lingers in every corner, a modest shop stands as a living archive of Qatar's herbal heritage. Al Mokhtar, serving customers since the late 1950s, is more than a store, it is a repository of remedies passed down through generations.

Though herbal medicine was once widespread across the country, only two shops in the souq became known for specialising in this traditional craft. One is Al Mokhtar, whose 92-year-old owner, Khalid Easa al-Muslimani, is currently receiving treatment. The other shop belongs to Ahmed Jassim al-Khuzai. While his shop is now closed, al-Khuzai's knowledge was preserved in an earlier interview with Al Rayan TV.

### Different story

From the outside, Al Mokhtar resembles any other traditional storefront. Inside, however, the fragrance of dried herbs and oils tells a different story. Two brothers, shop assistants of Iranian origin who have worked there for over four decades, guide customers through shelves of carefully packaged remedies bearing the Al Mokhtar label, complete with images, Arabic and English names, and usage instructions.

The clientele is as diverse as the remedies. Qataris arrive with specific requests, often recommending treatments to one another. Visitors from North Africa, Sudan, Iran, Asia, and even Europe browse alongside them, drawn by word of



mouth and long-standing reputation. Faisal Ahmad al-Shamari told *Gulf Times*, "I usually buy herbal medicine from Al Mokhtar, I came tonight to buy a traditional soap made from olive oil, great for the skin, and a concoction made of licorice and borage which treats coughs and relieves colds and phlegm. It is better than generic medicine. I recommend this mixture to people who suffer from the seasonal cold."

His cousin, Faisal Ghanim al-Shamari, added: "My father always buys herbal medicine from

Al Mokhtar and I came to get him a medicinal herbal mixture consisting of marjoram and rosemary, which he takes as a treatment for his high blood sugar, and it has helped him a lot and reduced its levels. Also my mum needs wormwood herb, she drinks its infusion regularly, and it has greatly helped her in relieving stomach inflammation. She also brews and drinks it like tea because it is used to treat diabetes."

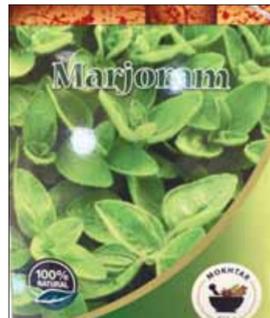
Ali, the shop's senior assistant, confirmed the popularity of these remedies. "I can tell you



Faisal Ahmad al-Shamari.



Faisal Ghanim al-Shamari



about some of the popular herbs, like Ashraj leaves which are a good laxative, relieve abdominal pain, a mixture of licorice and borage is for cough relief, phlegm, or for cold relief," he said.

"Marjoram and rosemary are used to relieve accumulated blood sugar. All are infused and should be taken twice or three times a day according to personal needs. For instance, licorice is good for the treatment of cough, inflammation,

and can be used as an antibacterial. The violet blossom with borage, relaxes the nerves, and relieves from stress. Another popular herb is the milk thistle, which is efficient for the treatment of those who suffer from fatty liver," Ali also said.

### Scientific surveys

Other remedies line the shelves: hawthorn leaves for clearing heart arteries and reducing blood pres-

sure; medina herb for relieving the menstrual cycle; wormwood for stomach inflammation, diabetes, and as incense.

Beyond the souq, scientific surveys echo aspects of this traditional knowledge. In 2017, around 75 plant species were recorded in Al Reem Reserve, representing roughly a quarter of Qatar's documented flora. Species such as *Acacia tortilis*, *Lycium shawii*, *Limonium axillare*, *Tetraena qatrensis*, *Ziziphium nummularia*, *Aeluropus lagopoides*, and *Prosopis cineraria* hold environmental, nutritional, and medicinal value.

According to the Arabic edition of Al Reem Biosphere Reserve: Environmental Awareness and Education Booklet, prepared by the Ministry of Municipality and Environment and Unesco Doha Office, plants such as *Ziziphium nummularia* are used to treat coughs and stomach ailments; *Lycium shawii* offers edible fruits and laxative stems; and *Prosopis cineraria*—the local name ghaf tree—has medicinal applications ranging from treating inflammations and parasites to asthma and hemorrhoids.

The convergence between popular practice and scientific documentation underscores the depth of Qatar's herbal legacy. Yet beyond pharmacological value lies something less tangible: a cultural inheritance sustained by elders, shopkeepers, and families who continue to trust remedies measured not only in grams, but in generations. As Qatar advances rapidly into the future, the scent of dried herbs in Souq Waqif remains a reminder that modernity and memory can coexist—one prescription at a time.

## All ready to celebrate Garangao with steady supply of sweets, nuts

Traditional markets across the country are currently witnessing growing activity in preparation for Garangao Night, one of the most prominent heritage celebrations in Qatar and the Gulf regions. Accordingly, intensive preparations and strong commercial movement are going on to meet the rising demand from families and children for sweets and gifts associated with this deeply rooted occasion.

Celebrated in the middle night of the holy month of Ramadan, Garangao blends religious, social, and cultural significance. On this night, children dress in traditional attire, chant folk songs, and visit homes to receive sweets, nuts, and small gifts in a joyful and heartwarming atmosphere.

Preparations are clearly visible across shops in mar-

kets and shopping centres. Storefronts prominently feature Garangao items ranging from traditional sweets and assorted nuts to modern themed gifts for boys and girls. Local retailers are also offering dates and traditional treats that reflect the occasion's heritage, while larger stores have introduced ready-made bundles combining various sweets and nuts. These packages simplify shopping for families and are priced to suit different budgets.

Hussein, a vendor at Souq Waqif, noted that customer interest began early this year. Families are purchasing generous quantities for home use and distribution among children and neighbours. Popular choices include small pieces chocolates, nuts, traditional candies, and stuffed dates that remain a staple during Ramadan.

Special Garangao gift bags are available at prices ranging from QR55 to QR70, containing assorted sweets and nuts. Nut bundles are also offered, starting at QR65 for 5kg and reaching up to QR160 for 10kg, with a variety suitable for children's tastes. Colourful children's bags designed for collecting treats are also in high demand, with options in different sizes and price ranges.

For families, Garangao serves as a meaningful social occasion that strengthens bonds and encourages togetherness. Relatives gather, exchange gifts, and create moments of joy for children who eagerly anticipate the night. Dressed in traditional clothing, youngsters roam neighborhoods singing folk chants, reflecting the community's attachment to its customs.

