



Qatar Insurance
Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)
9%
QAR 9.9B

Net Profit Before the Impact of P/L Tax
19%
QAR 874M

Net Profit Profit attributable to QIC shareholders
9%
QAR 791M

Earnings Per Share:
10%
QAR 0.188

qic-group.com

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Qatar arrests 10 suspects of two cells linked to IRG

As part of ongoing efforts to protect the country's security and stability, the competent authorities have successfully arrested two cells operating for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRG) in Qatar. The precision monitoring and tracking operations resulted in the capture of ten suspects, seven of whom were tasked with espionage missions to gather intelligence on the nation's vital and military infrastructure, alongside three others assigned to conduct sabotage activities and trained in the use of drones. Authorities also found in their possession locations and coordinates of sensitive facilities and installations, along with communication devices and technological equipment. During the investigations, the suspects confessed their links to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and stated that they had been assigned to conduct espionage and subversion missions. As such, the State Security urges citizens and residents to remain vigilant and report any suspected activities to the authoritative agencies. (QNA)

Qatar: Iranian attacks won't go unpunished

MoFA rejects claims of prior warning; reserves all options in response; hails Armed Forces for defence of country

By Tawfik Lamary
Staff Reporter

Qatar has declared that Iranian attacks on its territory have crossed clear red lines and will not go unanswered, as its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) revealed the full scale of an assault that saw more than 140 missiles, drones, and fighter jets launched against the country since Saturday – the vast majority of which were intercepted and destroyed by Qatar's armed forces.

HE the Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari, speaking at the ministry's weekly media briefing yesterday, delivered a comprehensive and at times pointed account of events, flatly rejecting Iranian claims that Doha had been forewarned of the attacks. "Completely untrue," he said, stressing that Qatar was taken entirely by surprise by what he described as wholly unjustified aggression.

The scale of the attack

Since the Iranian assault began on Saturday, Qatari territory has



HE the Adviser to the Prime Minister and MoFA's Official Spokesperson Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari at the press briefing yesterday.

been targeted by three cruise missiles – all intercepted – 101 ballistic missiles, 98 of which were shot down, and 39 drones, 24 of which were brought down. Two Iranian SU-24 fighter jets that violated Qatari airspace were also destroyed in accordance with rules of engagement, after the necessary warnings were issued.

A search is under way for the crews of both aircraft. In total, Qatar's air defences have neutralised the overwhelming majority of every category of weapon deployed against it.

Dr al-Ansari was emphatic that the targeting was not confined to military installations or American interests, but extended deliberately to Qatari lands and vital civilian infrastructure, including sites in Mesaieed and Ras Laffan.

Attempts to strike Hamad International Airport were also made, though every missile and drone aimed at the airport was intercepted before reaching its grounds. The airport, he confirmed, is completely safe and fully operational.

He stressed that a tank struck in Mesaieed belongs to a factory and has no connection to the drinking water supply, adding that Qatar's strategic reserves of water and electricity remain secure and plentiful, with no threat on either front.

'Missile stockpile not depleted'

Dr al-Ansari praised the performance of Qatar's armed forces in unequivocal terms, saying they dealt with every threat with high efficiency and without any real losses. He rejected outright the media reports – including a Bloomberg article – suggesting that Qatar's Patriot interceptor missile stockpile had been depleted, calling such claims entirely without foundation. **To Page 3**

Amir receives backing from India, Indonesia, Ukraine

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone yesterday from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During the call, His Highness the Amir reassured the Indian prime minister about the welfare of the Indian community residing in Qatar. In response, Prime Minister Modi expressed his gratitude for Qatar's care and attention towards Indian nationals, particularly under the current exceptional circumstances. The two leaders also discussed the recent military developments in the region, with Modi condemning the Iranian aggression against Qatar as a clear violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and reaffirming India's solidarity with Qatar and its people. Both leaders stressed the importance of restoring regional peace and stability, calling for an end to escalation and a return to political dialogue and negotiations as the path to managing the crisis and safeguarding regional security. The Amir also received a phone call from Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto. The Indonesian president expressed his country's full solidarity and support for Qatar and its people in the face of the blatant Iranian aggression. He condemned any targeting of national territory and sovereignty in the region and emphasised the urgency of de-escalation and a return to negotiations. The Amir expressed his deep appreciation for Indonesia's stance and support, noting that it reflects



the strong bilateral relations and mutual understanding between the two countries. Both leaders also discussed current regional developments, underlining the importance of dialogue and diplomatic efforts as the way to contain the crisis and preserve regional security and stability. In his call with His Highness the Amir Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky inquired about the situation in Qatar following the Iranian aggression, expressing his absolute condemnation of this aggression and affirming his country's solidarity with Qatar. They also discussed the latest developments in the Middle East region, particularly the military escalation in the Gulf region and its repercussions on international peace and security. The two sides agreed to continue exchanging views and coordinating efforts to enhance stability and security in the region and the world. (QNA)

RAMADAN THOUGHT



And the life of this world is nothing but play and amusement. But far better is the house in the Hereafter for those who are Al-Muttaqun (the pious). Will you not then understand? (Qur'an 6: 32)

Prayer times

Fajr...4.37; Zuhr...1.46; Asr...3.07; Maghrib...5.40; Isha...7.10

Fasting times

Iftar today5.40pm
Imsak tomorrow.....4.26am

Defence ministry provides details of interceptions

By A Staff Reporter
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Defence has disclosed the full scale of its military response since the start of Iranian aggression, confirming that its air defence systems have successfully intercepted the vast majority of aerial and missile attacks launched against the country.

In a comprehensive tally, the military confirmed the interception of two SU-24 fighter jets, three cruise missiles, 98 out of 101 ballistic missiles, and 24 out of 39 drones. Among the intercepted threats were two ballistic missiles that targeted several areas within Qatar, both of which were neutralised before reaching Qatari territory. The ministry stressed that the threat was identified and engaged immediately upon detection, in line with pre-approved operational plans.

"Qatar Armed Forces possess full capabilities

Late night, the ministry disclosed that the air defence systems successfully intercepted one of the two ballistic missiles launched from Iran while the second struck Al Udeid base without causing any casualties

and resources to safeguard and defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and to respond firmly to any external threat," the ministry said. Separately, Qatar's International Media Office moved to rebuff a Bloomberg report suggesting that the Qatar Armed Forces' inventory of Patriot interceptor missiles had been depleted, calling the claim flatly false.

In a pointed statement, the office said the Patriot stockpile "has not been depleted and remains well-stocked," adding that the Armed Forces "remain at full readiness to protect all citizens, residents, and visitors for as long as necessary."

MoI: Security agencies have situation under full control

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has issued a series of official statements reassuring the public that security and emergency teams have the situation fully under control, operating around the clock at the highest levels of readiness in line with pre-approved emergency protocols.

Authorities are urging residents to stay indoors and to venture outside only when absolutely necessary. People are also advised to keep away from windows and open or exposed areas as a precautionary measure during this period. The ministry stressed that all updates and information should be sourced exclusively from official channels, warning the public against spreading unverified claims or rumours.



It explained that the activation of its early warning and alert systems is driven by precise on-the-ground assessments, and that additional precautionary steps may be taken as the situation develops.

Alongside these safety directives, authorities issued a firm warning against gathering at incident sites or recording and sharing footage related to ongoing developments in the field. Members of the public were further urged to stay clear of reporting areas and active emergency response teams in the field, and to give way to ambulances and patrol vehicles so they can reach their destinations without delay.



Doha carries on undeterred – rain-slicked streets reflect the city's calm composure amid regional tensions last night. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen **Page 12**

Qatar's resilience holds firm when it matters most

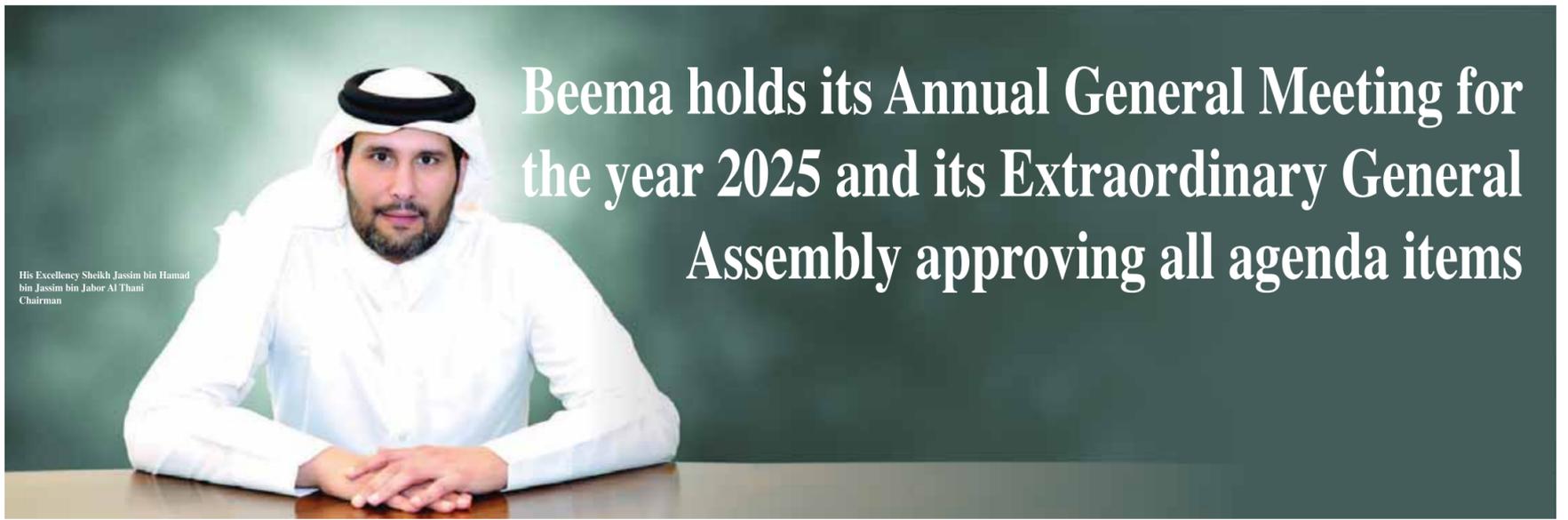
It is the product of years of methodical investment in governance and infrastructure

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

How Qatar has met the unprovoked missile and drone barrage from Iran this week has proved more than a statistical point: it is the product of years of quiet, methodical investment in governance, infrastructure, and national resilience. The attacks were repelled with a remarkably

high success rate, the country kept functioning normally, and its people went about their daily lives in safety. It was, in many ways, governance under the ultimate stress test – and Qatar passed. Qatar has ranked first in the region on the World Bank's global governance indicators, according to the latest 2024/2025 reports, due to the high efficiency of government performance across various related fields. The country ranked high in several practical areas, including political stability, the rule of law, government effectiveness, and the quality of regulations. Besides, the latest reports have rated Qatar very highly in terms

of economics and logistics, as Hamad Port ranked 1st in the Gulf and 11th worldwide in the 2024 Container Port Performance Index. Further, Qatar has maintained an excellent high ranking in advancing e-government services, with a target of digitalisation. The government has been consistently investing in upgrading and developing its systems to improve public services and make them easily and securely accessible online for citizens, expatriate residents, visitors, and the business community, enhancing the customer experience and speeding up related procedures. **To Page 3**



Beema holds its Annual General Meeting for the year 2025 and its Extraordinary General Assembly approving all agenda items

His Excellency Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani
Chairman



 **AGM and EGA on 3 March 2026 endorses all agenda items**

Strong financial performance in FY 2025, with Shareholders' Net Profit increasing by 12.9%

Approved dividend distribution of QAR 0.25 per share, amounting to a total of QAR 50 million

Damaan Islamic Insurance Company Q.P.S.C. ("Beema" or the "Company"), one of Qatar's leading Islamic insurance providers, held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Extraordinary General Assembly (EGA) on Tuesday, 3 March 2026, at its Head Office in Lusail. The meeting was chaired by His Excellency Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani, Chairman of Beema's Board of Directors, with the attendance of Board members, shareholders, and senior management.

The EGA approved the amendment of Article (58) of the Company's Articles of Association (Binding Effect of General Assembly Resolutions).

Additionally, the AGM addressed and approved all agenda items, including the Board of Directors' Report on the Company's activities and financial position for the year ended 31 December 2025, as well as its business strategy. The meeting reviewed the Auditor's Report, approved the balance sheet and profit and loss statement, and endorsed the Sharia Supervisory Board Report for the year. Shareholders also approved the Company's Governance Report for 2025, along with major transactions and related-party transactions entered into during the financial year.

Based on strong financial results for FY 2025, the AGM approved the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute an annual dividend of QAR 0.25 per share, representing 25% of Beema's issued and paid-up share capital, amounting to a total of QAR 50 million.

The AGM also approved the discharge of the Board of Directors for the financial year 2025 and endorsed their remuneration. Additionally, shareholders appointed the external auditor for FY 2026 and approved their fees.

Financial and Strategic Highlights

The AGM followed the announcement of Beema's financial results for FY 2025, reflecting strong growth in key metrics:

- **Recognised Takaful Contributions:** Rose 28.3% year-on-year to QAR 605.2 million (FY 2024: QAR 471.8 million), driven by growth across all segments
- **Shareholders' Net Profit:** Grew by 12.9% to QAR 95.6 million (FY 2024: QAR 84.6 million)
- **Earnings Per Share:** Reached QAR 0.478, up by approximately 12.9% (FY 2024: QAR 0.423)
- **Shareholders' Equity:** Increased by 11% to QAR 619.2 million (FY 2024: QAR 557.6 million)
- **Net Investment Income:** Increased by 31.6% to QAR 49.1 million (FY 2024: QAR 37.3 million)

Commenting on the Company's achievements and strategic direction, His Excellency Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani, Chairman of Beema's Board of Directors, stated:

"Beema delivered a year of solid progress in 2025, marked by continued growth across our core lines and strengthened profitability. Our performance reflects disciplined underwriting, prudent investment management, and a clear focus on operational efficiency.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to advancing our digital initiatives, enhancing customer engagement, and reinforcing our role within Qatar's Islamic insurance landscape. Our priority continues to be the creation of long term, sustainable value for our shareholders and policyholders, aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030."

Beema is listed on the Qatar Stock Exchange Main Market under the ticker BEMA. The Company maintains an A3 Long-Term Insurance Financial Strength Rating from Moody's and an A- (Excellent) Financial Strength Rating from AM Best, both with stable outlooks.

For additional information, including the complete financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2025, please visit www.beema.com.qa. For any inquiries, please contact Beema's Investor Relations Department at investorrelations@beema.com.qa

Important information

This press release has been prepared by Damaan Islamic Insurance Company "Beema" (Q.P.S.C.) (the "Company") for informational purposes only. This press release does not constitute an offer or invitation or solicitation of any offer to subscribe for or purchase any shares or other securities or recommendation to invest in any shares or other securities. This press release is not intended to be relied upon as the basis for an investment decision, and is not, and should not be assumed to be, complete. It is provided for information purposes only. Any investment is subject to various risks, none of which are outlined herein. All such risks should be carefully considered by prospective investors before they make any investment decision.

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Statements contained in this press release that are not historical facts are based on current expectations, estimates, projections, opinions and beliefs of the Company. Such statements involve known and unknown risks, uncertainties and other factors, and reliance should not be placed thereon. In addition, this press release contains "forward-looking statements." Actual events or results or the actual performance of the Company may differ materially from those reflected or contemplated in such forward-looking statements.

This press release has not been approved by the securities regulatory authority of Qatar or any other state or jurisdiction.



Announcement for Shareholders of Damaan Islamic Insurance Company - Beema -

Damaan Islamic Insurance Company (BEEMA) is pleased to announce to its honorable shareholders that dividend for the financial year ending on December 31, 2025, which were decided to be distributed by the company's ordinary general assembly held on 3/3/2026, have been transferred to Qatar Central Depository (EDAA) pursuant to the Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Qatar Financial Markets Authority No. (7) of 2023 dated 11/15/2023. As per the decision, (EDAA) will distribute dividends according to the latest provided list of shareholders

From Page 1

Qatar: Iranian attacks won't go unpunished

"The missile stockpile has never been depleted," he said, confirming that Qatar maintains full readiness with reserves sufficient to address any further threat.

The country is reviewing legal options to have such misinformation corrected.

Recalling that Iran had also attacked Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base in 2025, al-Ansari said Qatar had at that time chosen to prioritise regional stability over retaliation, even though it had every right to respond.

That restraint, he made clear, should not be mistaken for weakness.

Qatar reserves the right to respond to the current attacks, all options remain on the table, and the Qatari leadership is actively weighing how to proceed whilst simultaneously calling for an immediate halt to the escalation.

Diplomacy under fire

On the diplomatic front, Qatar has moved

swiftly and on multiple tracks.

The Iranian ambassador was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Saturday, where Qatar expressed its strong protest and outright rejection of the attacks, describing them as a brazen violation of sovereignty and a flagrant breach of international law and the UN Charter.

Minister of State Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi warned the ambassador directly that a repetition of such conduct would carry dangerous consequences for the bilateral relationship.

Al-Ansari also dismissed the Iranian foreign minister's claims of prior notification as a fabrication, clarifying that an earlier contact - made during last year's attack - amounted to nothing more than a vague reference to a reaction directed generally against Gulf

states, with no specification of time, place, or targets.

Global support for Qatar

Qatar has since received more than 88 expressions of solidarity from world leaders.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received 34 calls from heads of state, whilst HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received 27 calls from heads of government and foreign ministers.

Senior ministers received a further 18 calls from their counterparts.

The prime minister also participated virtually in the 50th extraordinary meeting of the GCC Ministerial Council on Sunday, at which Gulf foreign ministers condemned Iran's attacks in the strongest terms, affirmed their collective solidarity,

and reserved the right to respond in line with the UN Charter.

Qatar additionally joined Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, the UAE, and the United States in a joint statement condemning Iran's missile and drone campaign as a menacing escalation that violates the sovereignty of multiple states.

On Monday, Qatar dispatched identical formal messages to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and US Permanent Representative to the UN Michael Waltz - current president of the Security Council - calling for urgent international attention to what Doha described as an unacceptable assault imperilling regional security and stability.

Life goes on

Despite the gravity of the situation, al-Ansari was keen to stress that daily life

across Qatar continues normally, underpinned by transparent governance and emergency plans that have proved effective at both the military and civilian levels.

More than 8,000 transit passengers stranded at Hamad International Airport have been accommodated in hotels at the state's expense, with visas, residencies, and official documents extended for an initial period of one month, or until the crisis concludes.

Passengers stranded on cruise ships have similarly been provided for.

Qatar's attention, al-Ansari concluded, is now squarely focused on defending its territory.

A nation that consistently chooses peace, dialogue, and de-escalation as the cornerstones of its foreign policy, Qatar will nonetheless never hesitate to defend its sovereignty - and those who have tested that resolve, he made plain, will not find it lacking.

Deputy PM discusses regional security with counterparts

Al-Khulaifi discusses Iran war with Belgium's deputy premier

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi received a phone call yesterday from Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Development Co-operation Maxime Prevot.

They discussed developments related to the military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions on regional and international security and stability, as well as ways to resolve all disputes through peaceful means. - QNA



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani received phone calls yesterday from Oman's Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs Shihab bin Tarik al-Said, the Netherlands' Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Dilan Yesilgöz-Zegerius, Sweden's Minister of Defence Pal Jonson, and Italy's Minister of Defence Guido Crosetto.

The calls were on the latest developments and security updates in the region, in addition to going over aspects of joint co-operation and co-ordination in light of the current circumstances. - QNA

Al-Muraikhi receives call from Estonian minister

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received a phone call yesterday from Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Margus Tsahkna.

They discussed the developments of the military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions on regional and international security and stability as well as ways to resolve all disputes peacefully. - QNA



HE Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani

GCC condemns Iranian attacks

Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Jassem Mohamed al-Budaiwi has strongly condemned the continued Iranian attacks targeting GCC member states, including civilian and diplomatic facilities.

He said in a statement that the assaults are unjustified, illegal, and a clear attempt to destabilise regional and global security. - QNA

QA flights remain suspended

Qatar Airways (QA) announced yesterday that its flight operations remain temporarily suspended.

In a statement posted on its official account on X, the airline said that operations will resume once the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority announces the safe reopening of the country's airspace. - QNA

QatarEnergy halts some products

QatarEnergy announced that it will halt production of some of its chemical, petrochemical, and downstream industries' products. Following its announcement on Monday of the halting of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) production and relevant products, the products halted in yesterday's announcement include Urea, Polymer, Methanol, Aluminium, and more. - QNA

MoPH 'has taken all measures to handle potential emergencies'

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has affirmed that all health facilities and institutions in Qatar are continuing to provide their services and are at the highest level of readiness to deal with emergencies.

Assistant Undersecretary for Healthcare Regulatory Affairs at the MoPH Dr Ghanim Ali al-Manna stated that, given the situation in the region, the MoPH, in co-

operation with the relevant authorities, has intensified its efforts and taken all necessary measures to safeguard the health and well-being of the residents of Qatar.

He said that health facilities operating in the country are continuing to provide their regular health services, and that emergency centres and departments are operating around the clock.

Dr al-Manna reiterated that



the stock of medicines and medical supplies is sufficient to meet the needs of all residents, urging citizens, residents, and visitors to follow the guidelines issued by the relevant authorities. - QNA

Qatar extends condolences to Kuwait on death of officers

Qatar has expressed its condolences to the government of Kuwait and its people, on the death of two members of its armed forces while performing their national duties. In a statement issued on Monday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) affirmed Qatar's full solidarity with Kuwait in this tragic loss and its support for all measures taken by Kuwait to preserve its sovereignty and security. - QNA



Qatar's resilience holds firm when it matters most

From Page 1

Such e-services have been expanding continuously and covering many fields, including the courts and judiciary.

Accordingly, such digital transformation has reflected positively on public services and business, enabling the government to maintain the desired flexibility, allowing it to address challenges or emergencies immediately without significant disruption to essential public services, as the country has already built the necessary infrastructure and mastered the skills to run it.

During the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, the government acted swiftly and efficiently, implementing positive measures that expanded health facilities, saving the lives of thousands of people.

At the same time, the country's economy remained stable, and major construction and infrastructure projects were managed and completed on schedule.

The country was among the first in the world to roll out a highly organised, regulated nationwide vaccination campaign, which helped

contain the spread of the disease and speed the gradual return to normal life.

Further, the government adopted flexible measures and launched dedicated online platforms to facilitate the return of expatriates whose residency permits had expired during such a crisis.

The process was managed efficiently and easily to minimise the associated negative human and economic impacts.

When the country was faced with a difficult situation back in 2017, the government was able to swiftly find excellent supply alternatives and travel routes, where quick and steady food, medicine and other supplies were secured and flooded the local market with goods from different parts of the world at even better and competitive prices than before the crisis.

The tough challenges were converted into new investment and business opportunities with Hamad Port maintaining more international trade routes and sophisticated ship and cargo handling facilities.

Besides, local food production has been steadily increasing, marking a dramatic shift towards achieving food sufficiency in various

areas, with the number of local farms and food companies rising at an outstanding rate, despite the involved natural and environmental challenges.

Recently, the multiple hostile attacks of the Iranian missiles and drones were effectively fended off with minimal losses and an amazingly high success rate that saved the country and its people from the intended potential havoc.

The country has continued to function and operate normally, with all services active and the people going about their daily lives safely and securely, due to the high-efficiency governance established over the years, with serious, sincere work under the guidance and vision of the country's wise leadership.

In such exceptional and critical circumstances in Qatar and the region, the people living in the country feel assured that their protection, safety and well-being are the top priorities of the government.

They can go about their daily affairs worry-free despite the negative rumours spread by some, as the reality of life proves that the situation is safe and under control.

Qatar condemns attacks on US embassies in Saudi, Kuwait

Qatar strongly condemned the Iranian attacks that targeted the embassies of the United States in Riyadh and Kuwait, deeming them a blatant violation of international conventions and laws. In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that the Iranian attacks on the two embassies contravene international agreements and diplomatic norms that criminalise assaults on diplomatic missions and grant immunity to their premises and staff. The ministry affirmed Qatar's full solidarity with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in all measures they take to safeguard their security and the safety of their territories. Earlier, he Saudi Ministry of Defence announced that the US embassy in Riyadh was targeted by two drones, according to preliminary assessments. Official Spokesperson for the ministry, Major General Turki al-Malik stated that the attack resulted in a localised fire and minor material damage to the building. (QNA)

Mol extends all entry visas for a month

The Ministry of Interior has extended all categories of entry visas that have expired or are nearing expiration for a period of one month, subject to further extension in line with developments, effective Saturday, February 28, 2026.

In a statement issued yesterday, the ministry confirmed that the extension will be processed automatically through the approved electronic systems, with exemption from fees, and without the need to visit the relevant departments or submit additional applications.

Regarding entry visas of all types that incurred violations prior to February 28, the Ministry clarified that the concerned individuals must first settle the prescribed reconciliation fine for the period of overstay. Thereafter, the extension and fee exemption shall apply to them effective from the aforementioned date.

The ministry continues to monitor developments and take necessary measures as needed to ensure the stability of the legal status of residents and visitors. (QNA)

QF's Ability Friendly Programme shaping sport, inclusion

Qatar Foundation (QF)'s Ability Friendly Programme began in 2018 with just 21 swimmers and nine footballers, offering a safe, supportive environment where children and adults with special needs could build skills and confidence.

Today, it welcomes more than 300 participants each week across swimming, football, basketball, golf, equine therapy, playball, and multi-activity programmes.

Kathleen V Bates, head of the Ability Friendly Programme, explains that the programme ensures accessibility and inclusion by focusing first and foremost on the abilities of each participant and what they can do.

"Our sports curriculum has been designed and developed over many years, with a strong emphasis on proper sport development rather than limitations," she says. "All activities are adapted and modified based on individual needs, and adjustments are made continuously to create an inclusive and supportive environment."

"Our coaches play a critical role in this process, using their experience and creativity to adapt skills and movements so every participant can engage, progress, and succeed," Bates added. "And we intentionally work to engage individuals with more complex needs who may not have access to other available programmes."

According to Bates, community participation is essential because inclusive sport cannot exist in isolation.

A key focus for the Ability Friendly Programme is education, which engages practitioners, coaches, physical education teachers, and organisations across the country and region.



By equipping them with knowledge and tools to be more inclusive, they can return to their clubs, schools, and community programmes better prepared to welcome and support individuals of all abilities.

Beyond athletic achievements, the programme aims to have a deeper impact on families.

Through initiatives such as the Qader Award, the Ability Friendly Programme enables access for those who may not otherwise be able to afford to participate by providing financial support.

Families become part of the community, sharing milestones, celebrating birthdays, and forming lifelong connections.

In this way, the programme extends beyond sport, becoming a meaningful part of families' lives.

The impact of this inclusive philosophy is best reflected in the journeys of the participants themselves.

"One young swimmer, who was initially asked to leave a mainstream programme because her needs could not be met, thrived after



joining the Ability Friendly Programme," Bates said.

"With the right coaching and inclusive support, she not only caught up with her peers but became the programme's top female swimmer," she continued.

"Her journey underscores a critical lesson: ability was never the barrier - access and inclusion were," Bates said. "Many participants have progressed to compete in mainstream events nationwide, achieving remarkable success and showcasing the programme's dedication to removing barriers."

The Ability Friendly Programme is growing. New initiatives include a comprehensive coaching education programme with eight courses covering everything from disability awareness to advanced inclusive coaching strategies.

And competitive pathways continue to expand, exemplified by events like the Al Dasha Football Cup, which hosted 168 footballers across 24 teams, and the Yalla swimming competition, which brought together more than 120 swimmers from 12 teams.

Enter the gate of repentance

O slaves of Allah, Allah has opened the gate of repentance for you, so why not enter it? It was reported that repentance has a gate whose width is like the distance between East and West [according to another report: its width is like the distance travelled in 70 years]. It will not be closed until the sun rises from the West. (Reported by al-Tabaraani in al-Kabeer; see Saheeh al-Jaami; 2177).

Listen to the call of Allah: "O My slaves, you err night and day, but I forgive all sins, so ask Me for forgiveness and I will forgive you." (Reported by Muslim). So why not seek forgiveness?

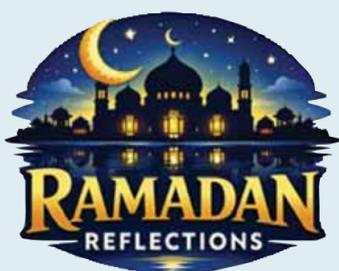
Allah stretches forth His hand at night to forgive those who have done wrong during the day, and He stretches forth His hand by day to forgive those who have done wrong during the night. Allah loves our apologies and pleas, so why not turn to Him?

How beautiful to Allah are the words of the one who repents: "O Allah, I ask You by Your power and by my own shame to have mercy on me. I ask You by Your strength and my own weakness, by Your self-sufficiency and my own dependence. To You I submit my lying, sinful forelock. You have many slaves besides me, but I have no Master except You. I have no refuge or escape from You except with You. I beseech you in the manner of a poor and destitute man, I pray to you with the prayer of one who is humble, I call upon you with the supplication of one who is blind and afraid. This is a plea from one whose head is humbled before You, whose nose is in the dust, whose eyes are filled with tears and whose heart has submitted to You."

It was reported that one of the righteous people was passing through the street when he saw an open door out of which came a boy who was crying and weeping, followed by his mother who was pushing him out. She shut the door in his face, and went back inside.

The boy went a short distance away, and stood there, thinking, but he could find no other refuge than the house from which he had been expelled and no one else who would care for him as his mother would. Broken hearted, he went back, and found the door still locked. So he lay down on the doorstep and went to sleep, with the tear marks still streaking his face. A little while later, his mother came out. When she saw him in this state, she could not help herself. She embraced him, kissed him and started to weep, saying: "O my son, where did you go? Who would care for you except me? Didn't I tell you not to disobey me and not to make me punish you, when Allah has made me merciful and caring towards you?" Then she picked him up and went back inside.

But the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told us: "Allah is



more compassionate towards His slaves than this mother towards her child." (Reported by Muslim). There is no comparison between a mother's compassion and the Mercy of Allah, which encompasses everything. Allah rejoices when His slave repents to Him, and we can never despair of goodness from a Lord who is rejoices. Allah rejoices more over the repentance of a slave when he repents to Him than a man who was travelling through the wilderness and stopped to camp awhile in an isolated and dangerous place, but he had his camel by his side, with his food and drink loaded on it.

He sought out the shade of a tree, where he lay down and went to sleep. When he woke up, his camel had disappeared, so he went looking for it. He came to a hill and climbed it, but he could not see anything. He climbed another hill and looked around, but he could not see anything. When heat and thirst overcame him, he said: "Let me go back to where I was and sleep there until I die." He went back to the tree and lay down in its shade, despairing of ever seeing his camel again. Whilst he was lying there, he opened his eyes, and saw his camel standing next to him, with its halter dangling and his food and drink still loaded on it, so he grabbed hold of its halter.

Allah rejoices even more when the believer repents to Him than this man rejoiced over the return of his camel and his supplies." (Compiled from saheeh reports; see Tarteeb Saheeh al-Jaami; 4/368)

You should know that sincere repentance brings contrition and humility before Allah, and the pleading of the one who repents is dearly beloved to the Lord of the Worlds.

The believing slave still remembers his sin, and is filled with sorrow and regret. He follows his error with so many acts of obedience and goodness that Shaytaan may even say, "Would that I had never led him into this sin in the first place!" Thus some of those who repent may become better after repenting than they ever were before.

Allah will never forsake His slave who turns to Him in repentance.

[Taken from The Book I Want To Repent, But...!]

CMC assures availability of food, medicine and essential goods

QNA
Doha

The Central Municipal Council (CMC) affirmed that the State of Qatar possesses a sufficient strategic stock of food supplies, medicines, and essential goods, as part of carefully developed crisis management plans that ensure their continued availability in markets and healthcare facilities without interruption.

During its 51st meeting of its seventh term, the council commended the adoption of the early warning system via mobile phones, which has proven effective in delivering official alerts quickly and accurately to the public, thereby enhancing preparedness and community awareness in various emergency situations.

In light of the current developments and the tensions witnessed in the region, the council expressed its strong condemnation of the blatant Iranian aggression against the State and its sovereignty, affirming its full confidence in the wise leadership and state institutions and their ability to address various



challenges with their readiness and capabilities, supported by the cohesion of Qatari society. The council stressed the importance of not being swayed by rumours or engaging in excessive purchasing and stockpiling of goods due to the negative impact this could have on markets. It also emphasized the need to obtain information solely from approved official sources, highlighting that the various state agencies possess extensive experience in crisis management, as demonstrated in previous instances by ensuring the uninterrupted continuation of essential services.

It praised the success of the Armed

Forces and security agencies in confronting the attacks and handling developments, as well as the effective role of the early warning system in strengthening community preparedness.

At the conclusion of its meeting, the Central Municipal Council (CMC) discussed the items on its agenda and took the appropriate decisions. Its members affirmed their continued follow-up on service and development issues affecting citizens and residents, and their commitment to submitting recommendations that contribute to improving service levels and enhancing quality of life.

Qatar despatches 2nd identical message to UN, UNSC concerning Iranian attack on territory

QNA
New York

The State of Qatar sent yesterday a second identical message to each of Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) Antonio Guterres and Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the UN and President of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the month of March Michael Waltz regarding the Iranian aggression against its territory that constitutes a flagrant violation of its national sovereignty, a direct infringement upon its security and territorial integrity, and an unacceptable escalation that threatens the security and stability of the region.

The message was sent by HE Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the UN Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani. The message indicated that the Ministry of Defence of the State of Qatar announced on Monday the success of the Qatar Amiri Air Force in shooting down two (SU24) aircraft coming from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Seven ballistic missiles were also successfully intercepted by air defenses, and five drones were also intercepted by the Qatar Amiri Air Force and the Qatar Amiri Naval Forces, which targeted several areas in the country. In this regard, the message added that the Ministry of Defence also announced that Qatar was subjected to two drone attacks from Iran. The first targeted water tanks owned by Mesaieed Power Plant, while the second targeted one of the energy facilities in Ras Laffan Industrial City belonging to QatarEnergy, without any human casualties.

The message added that all damages and losses resulting from the attack will be assessed by the relevant authorities, and Qatar will keep the UN and the UNSC informed of developments. In this context, it emphasized that the Qatar strongly condemns this targeting and reserves its full right to respond in accordance with Article (51) of the Charter of the United Nations, and in a manner commensurate with the nature of the attack, in defense of its sovereignty and in preservation of its security and national interests. Qatar also called for this letter to be circulated as an official document of the UNSC.

First message

Qatar has sent an identical message to each of Secretary-General of the United

The message added that all damages and losses resulting from the attack will be assessed by the relevant authorities, and Qatar will keep the UN and the UNSC informed of developments

Nations (UN) Antonio Guterres and Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the UN and President of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the month of March Michael Waltz regarding the Iranian aggression against its territory that constitutes a flagrant violation of its national sovereignty, a direct infringement upon its security and territorial integrity, and an unacceptable escalation that threatens the security and stability of the region.

The message was sent by HE Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the UN Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani on Monday. In the message, Qatar strongly condemned this attack, affirming its full right to respond in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter and in a manner commensurate with the nature of the attack, in defense of its sovereignty and in safeguarding its security and national interests.

Qatar affirmed that targeting its territory is inconsistent with the principles of good neighborliness and is unacceptable under any pretext or justification. It noted that it has consistently strived to distance itself from regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue between Iran and the international community.

However, the renewed targeting of its territory does not reflect good faith and threatens the foundation of understandings upon which bilateral relations between the two countries are built.

Qatar expressed its condemnation of the brutal Iranian aggression against the sovereignty of the State of Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Sultanate of Oman, affirming its full solidarity with them in all measures they may take to preserve their sovereignty, security, and stability.

Qatar reiterated its call for an immediate halt to all escalatory actions, a return to the negotiating table, the prioritization of reason and wisdom, and working to contain the crisis in a manner that preserves the security of the region, protects the interests of its peoples, and prevents a slide into wider confrontations. Regarding the details of this attack, the message

indicated that the Ministry of Defence of the State of Qatar announced on Saturday, February 28, 2026, its success in intercepting a large number of repeated missile waves and drone attacks originating from the Islamic Republic of Iran that targeted several areas in the State of Qatar.

It added that by the end of Saturday, 83 ballistic missiles and 12 drones had been detected coming from Iran in successive waves. The first missile was detected at 11:39am Doha time on Saturday. The threat was addressed immediately upon detection and in accordance with the pre-approved operational plan.

As a result, 81 missiles and 11 drones were intercepted before reaching their targets. Due to the intensity and multi-pronged nature of the attacks, two ballistic missiles reached Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base, and one drone targeted an early warning radar station, all without causing any casualties, it said, adding several missiles were intercepted over various civilian areas, including commercial and residential areas such as the West Bay residential area and Barwa City. A missile debris was also seen falling on a food warehouse, causing a fire that spread to five warehouses.

Through monitoring of the missile attacks that began on Saturday afternoon (Feb 28), and continued until Sunday morning, March 1, Doha time, a total of 92 ballistic missiles and 17 drones were detected. The Ministry of Interior of the State of Qatar responded to 114 reports of debris falling in various parts of the country. Eight people were injured, four of whom remain hospitalized, one of them seriously, while four others received treatment and were discharged.

On Sunday morning, eight additional injuries were reported, bringing the total to 16. Material damage to public and private property was also recorded, the message stated. The message further said that reports of additional missile attacks causing further injuries and damage continue to emerge, and that the relevant authorities are continuing to monitor these attacks and the resulting damage. It also requested that this message be circulated as an official Security Council document, it added.

MoFA advisory for Qataris abroad

Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has urged Qataris currently abroad to download its official app and register their details to ease communication in emergency situations.

The ministry said its app is available for iOS and Android through the following links: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/mofa-qatar/id872456037> https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.mofa.gov.mofa_app&pcampaignid=web_share

MoFA also advised Qataris who are un-

able to transport or in need of consular services, to reach diplomatic missions of Qatar in the countries where they are staying as well as to follow the instructions and guidelines of the local authorities.

In desperate and emergency situations, the ministry urged citizens to contact Qatar's diplomatic missions through the designated phone numbers or to call the Department of Operations at the MoFA at: 0097440111000, 0097440111140, 0097440111104. (QNA)



QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/SOH/7466/25 INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE LABORATORY ANALYSIS ON CALL-OFF BASIS	03/03/2026 to 16/03/2026	0	182,050	16/03/2026

Scope of Work:

CONTRACTOR shall conduct Occupational Health exposure assessment activities, to perform required Industrial Hygiene (IH) related laboratory analysis with provision of necessary sampling media and accessories to COMPANY on Call-Off basis. Based on analysis request made by COMPANY, CONTRACTOR shall provide necessary sampling media and accessories and deliver it to COMPANY facility. Once sample is ready for collection as confirmed by COMPANY, CONTRACTOR to collect sample and deliver to laboratory for analysis. On completion of laboratory analysis, CONTRACTOR to communicate the results and provide report to COMPANY.

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.

Ooredoo unveils Ramadan offers to connect, reward and give back

Ooredoo has officially announced its 2026 Ramadan campaign under the theme 'Experience Togetherness This Ramadan'. This year's initiative focuses on bridging the gap between spiritual reflection and digital connection, providing customers with a comprehensive range of offers designed to enhance family moments, simplify the Umrah journey, and encourage community giving.

To enrich the home environment, Ooredoo is providing Home+ customers with complimentary access to eight dedicated Islamic channels. Throughout the holy month, families can tune in to a wide range of religious programmes, lectures, and Qur'anic recitations at no additional cost, creating a meaningful viewing experience that complements

the spirit of Ramadan. For those travelling to Saudi Arabia for Umrah, Ooredoo has streamlined its roaming solutions. Under "Roam Like Home," Sahry customers can enjoy a 20% discount while using their local data and minutes in KSA. Additionally, Qatarna+ Premium and Platinum subscribers will benefit from built-in, unlimited roaming allowances, allowing them to focus entirely on their spiritual journey without connectivity concerns. Alongside this charitable initiative, Nojoom continues to add value for its loyal members during Ramadan. Silver, Gold, and Al Nokhba tiers can enjoy exclusive privileges across a curated portfolio of premium dining, retail, gifting, and wellness experiences. Sabah Rabiah al-Kuwari, Senior Director



(Marketing Communications), at Ooredoo Qatar, said: "Our 2026 offers are carefully designed to touch every aspect of the holy month, from enriching the home environment with spiritual content and easing the journey for Umrah, to rewarding our customers with data gifts like Suhoor Delight and Unlimited Data".

Bombardment unleashes terror in Tehran with no sign of protests

By **Parisa Hafezi**
Reuters

Terrified residents of Iran's capital described it yesterday as a ghost town, its streets largely emptied by a US-Israeli missile barrage apart from security checkpoints and Revolutionary Guards patrols that rove the city.

The airstrikes have killed hundreds of Iranians since Saturday while Israeli and US leaders have voiced hopes they would trigger an uprising, but Reuters found no evidence one was imminent in phone conversations with people around the country.

"There are checkpoints on every street and alley," said Fariba Gerami, 27, who works for a company in north Tehran where her husband runs a small coffee shop.

Electricity and water cuts since the bombardment began have further raised

her fears, and at night she and her friends fear thieves will burgle their apartments, she said.

The family plans to leave Iran as soon as it is safe to do so, but they worry about security on the roads out, she added.

Her account was backed up by those of two Iranian men arriving yesterday in Turkey through a border gate, who described scenes of tension and fear in the capital.

"The kids were like screaming and crying," said one Iranian man, who declined to give his name, adding that civilian structures being hit by the strikes instilled fear in the city's residents.

The second man said the destruction was widespread.

"We saw a lot of buildings destroyed, especially on the way leaving the country. There were a bunch of buildings, a bunch of cars and streets were destroyed. People are panicking to leave the country. They

don't know what to do," he said.

For those unable to leave the capital, the anxiety is immense, with strikes on Monday hitting close to a Tehran hospital that was damaged and had to be evacuated.

Adding to fears of further civilian casualties is the example of the girls' school in southern Iran that was bombed in the first hours of the war, with a death toll that authorities have put at 150.

Reuters has not been able to verify that toll.

At the girls' funeral yesterday, their small coffins draped with Iranian flags were passed from a truck across a large crowd, borne across a sea of upraised hands towards the grave site, video on state television showed.

"World, do you see? They are killing us. Hear our voice," said Firuzeh Seraj, speaking through tears from Tehran. "My 10-year-old daughter is on dialysis and now we are trapped. I'm afraid to take her

to the hospital. What if they bomb it? Why are you bombing us?"

Iran said its death toll from the attacks had reached 787, citing the Red Crescent.

It has responded to the US-Israeli attack with a blitz of drone and missile attacks on countries around the region, striking at both military and civilian targets in Israel, Jordan and Gulf monarchies.

Anger at the catastrophe unfolding in Iran was directed at the country's own leaders too.

News of Khamenei's death on Saturday prompted spontaneous celebrations in parts of Tehran, though supporters of the Islamic Republic's authorities also held mourning processions.

However, there has been no return to the major nationwide protests that convulsed Iran in early January.

In Urmia, a city near the borders of Turkey and Iraq, a woman who asked to be identified only as Shahla, said the previous

night's bombardment had been the heaviest yet.

"I was terrified. There are no shelters. No help. They are bombing everywhere. The internet cuts in and out. We are stocking up on food," she said.

Like other Iranians that Reuters reached, she said food and medicine were still available in the shops, but she was worried supplies would start to run low and people were buying up goods in case of a prolonged conflict.

One elderly woman in the Gulf coast city of Bushehr, home to Iran's one nuclear power plant, said she feared she would never again see her children who lived overseas.

"My children call me but even the Internet does not work properly. I am afraid, very afraid, that I may never see them again and that I could die in these bombings," said the 80-year-old, who gave only her first name, Fatemeh.

War on Iran enters fourth day with Trump saying it's too late for talks

AFP/Reuters
Riyadh/Dubai/Tel Aviv

US and Israeli strikes pummeled targets across Tehran yesterday, as President Donald Trump warned it was "too late" for Iran to seek talks to escape a war now in its fourth day.

Drones and missiles crashed into oil facilities and US embassies in the Gulf as the Islamic republic retaliated, and Israel pushed troops deeper into Lebanon to battle the Tehran-backed militia Hezbollah after it entered the fray (see report on Page 6).

Israel announced a "large-scale wave" of strikes targeting Iran's capital yesterday, with local media showing columns of smoke rising over the centre of town - home to many government buildings - and reporting an attack on one of the city's two airports.

"Their air defence, air force, navy, and leadership is gone. They want to talk. I said: 'Too late!'" Trump posted on social media, two days after he said he was open to talks and four days after US and Israeli strikes killed supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iran's ambassador to the UN in Geneva denied that his country had approached the US for talks.

According to Iranian media, US and Israeli strikes targeted a building in Qom belonging to the committee that is to elect a new supreme leader.

The Tasnim news agency reported that strikes had already targeted the body's main headquarters in Tehran the day before.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman said that the UN Security Council "has a duty" to act to stop the war, even as its military has remained publicly defiant in the face of the campaign.

Iran has called the war an unprovoked attack.

It has responded by firing missiles and drones at neighbouring Arab states and strangling shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas trade travels past its coast.

A spokesman for the Revolutionary Guards warned "the gates of hell will open more and more" upon the US and Israel.

A Guards general, Ebrahim Jabbari, said that if Iran's foes "hit our main centres, we will hit all economic centres in the region".

The US embassy in Riyadh warned yesterday of an imminent attack in the eastern Saudi city of Dhahran, home to much of the kingdom's oil and gas installations along the Gulf coast.

Iranian drones slammed into the embassy overnight, causing minor damage and starting a fire, after previously hitting the mission in Kuwait.

Washington responded by shutting those missions and ordering non-emergency government personnel and their families to leave



In this aerial handout picture released by the Iranian Press Centre, mourners dig graves during the funeral for children killed in a reported strike on a primary school in Iran's Hormozgan province. - AFP

Left: A woman reacts on a street in Tehran following an Israeli and US strike on a police station. - Reuters



People inspect the rubble of a collapsed building near Ferdowsi square in Tehran. - AFP



Plumes of smoke rise after strikes in Pardis, Tehran province, amid the US-Israel conflict with Iran, in this still image obtained from a social media video released yesterday. - Reuters

countries across the Middle East.

Economic targets came under fire elsewhere in the Gulf as Iran continued to launch volleys of retaliatory drones and missiles at its neighbours.

Qatar said it had downed missiles targeting Hamad International Airport in Doha, while Oman reported several drones attacking the port of Duqm, and in the UAE falling debris from an intercepted drone caused a fire at an oil storage and trading zone, authorities said.

In Tehran, residents who have not fled remained shut away in their homes for fear of the US-Israeli bombardment.

The Iranian capital is normally home to around 10mn people, but in recent days "there are so few people that you'd think no one

ever lived here", said Samireh, a 33-year-old nurse.

Authorities had previously urged people to leave the city, and police officers, armed security forces and armoured vehicles have been stationed at main junctions, carrying out random checks on vehicles.

In the more upmarket north of Tehran, the meowing of cats and birdsong replace the usual din of traffic jams.

Trendy cafes and restaurants, typically lively in the evening, were closed.

Streets were largely deserted and most vehicles still on the road were supplying grocers and small local shops that were still open.

While Israeli officials explicitly say they want to overthrow Iran's government, US officials have

said the war's aim is to destroy Iran's ability to project force beyond its borders.

Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar urged foreign capitals yesterday to cut all ties with Tehran "following the Iranian regime's attacks on all its neighbours and the massacre of its own people".

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, according to the official Xinhua news agency, warned Saar in a call that Beijing opposes the strikes, saying that the use of force "will only bring new problems and severe after-effects".

The war has already sent shockwaves through world markets, with energy prices soaring and share prices falling.

Asian giant India added its concern to China's.

"Our trade and energy supply chains also traverse this geography. Any major disruption has serious consequences for the Indian economy," foreign ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said.

After already halting liquefied natural gas (LNG) production, Qatar's state-run QatarEnergy said it would also stop some downstream production of substances including urea, polymers, methanol and aluminium after Iran attacked two gas processing plants.

The announcement prompted an immediate 2% rise in the price of aluminium on the London Metal Exchange.

The UN nuclear watchdog said Iran's Natanz enrichment plant appeared in satellite imagery to have suffered "recent damage".

Pahlavi urges unity from Iran's ethnic minorities

The son of Iran's last shah Reza Pahlavi, who has positioned himself as an alternative if the Islamic republic falls, has called for national unity from Iranian ethnic minorities as war engulfed the Middle East.

Iran's population of more than 85mn is ethnically diverse, with large Azeri, Lur, Kurdish, Arab, Baloch and Turkmen minorities.

The Islamic republic has long been accused of discriminating against ethnic minorities, with many groups supporting successive waves of anti-government protests in the country and some - particularly the Kurds and Balochis - waging insurgencies seeking self-determination.

Pahlavi in an X post looked to assure ethnic minorities that they would not be discriminated against if he were leading the country, and appeared to urge them not to use the current conflict to press for separation.

"We stand at the threshold of this regime's fall. Yet we must remain vigilant and prepared, and deny opportunistic forces - those who have long cast covetous eyes on Iran's soil - the chance to exploit this moment," he said.

"You are an inseparable part of Iran's historical and cultural fabric... I am confident that you will remain steadfast in this covenant," he added. "I firmly believe that through national unity and shared resolve, a bright future awaits you and every Iranian."

US-based Pahlavi - who has not been to Iran since before the 1979 revolution that ousted the monarchy - entered the global spotlight during nationwide protests that peaked in January, where many demonstrators chanted pro-Pahlavi slogans.

Meanwhile, the widow of the country's last shah told AFP in an interview yesterday that Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei's death is "historically significant" but will not "automatically" lead to the fall of the Iranian system.

"The passing of a man - however central he may be to the architecture of power - does not automatically mean the end of a system," said Farah Pahlavi, three days after US-Israeli strikes on the Islamic republic killed Khamenei.

"What will be decisive," said the 87-year-old, was "the ability of the Iranian people to unite around a peaceful, orderly and sovereign transition to a state governed by the rule of law", which she added her son Reza Pahlavi "is in the process of preparing".

The widow, who has lived in exile in Paris since being driven out of Iran with her husband in the 1979 revolution, urged the international community to respect the right of people in Iran to choose their own path forward.

"What I want is for the international community to clearly support the fundamental rights of Iranians: the right to choose their leaders, to express themselves freely, to live in dignity and prosperity," she said. "The support must go to the people, not to geopolitical calculations." - AFP

UN rights chief 'deeply shocked' by Middle East war's impact on civilians

AFP/Reuters
Geneva

The UN human rights chief said yesterday that he was "deeply shocked" by how the war in the Middle East was affecting civilians, with fear and panic spreading across the region.

Volker Turk called for all parties to "come to their senses" and bring the conflict to an end.

"The fear, the panic, the anxiety experienced by millions of people in the Middle East and beyond is palpable - and was entirely avoidable," his spokeswoman Ravina

Shamdasani told a press conference in Geneva.

"The situation is worsening and widening by the hour, playing out our worst fears," she added.

Turk "is deeply shocked by the impacts of the widespread hostilities on civilians and civilian infrastructure since the conflict erupted on Saturday with Israel and the United States of America's attacks on Iran, Iran's response against states across the region, as well as Hezbollah's subsequent entry into the conflict", she said.

Shamdasani said the laws of war were clear: civilians and civilian objects are

protected, and all states and armed groups must abide by the law.

Turk called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint, prevent further escalation, and take all feasible measures to protect civilians and critical infrastructure.

"Returning to the negotiating table is the one and only way to bring an end to the killing, destruction and despair," Shamdasani said. "The high commissioner implores all parties to come to their senses, and to end this violence."

The UN human rights office has also urged what it called the forces behind a deadly attack on a girls' school in Iran to

investigate and share insights into the incident, without saying who it believed was responsible.

"The High Commissioner calls for a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation into the circumstances of the attack. The onus is on the forces that carried out the attack to investigate it," Shamdasani said.

"This is absolutely horrific," she said, adding that images circulating on social media captured "the essence of the destruction, despair and senselessness and cruelty of this conflict".

The school in southern Iran was hit on Saturday, the first day of US and Israeli at-

tacks against the country.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Monday that US forces "would not deliberately target a school".

Israel has said it is investigating the incident.

Iran's ambassador to the UN in Geneva Ali Bahreini had previously raised the issue with Turk in a letter dated March 1, calling the attack "unjustifiable" and "criminal".

He said the attack had killed 150 students.

Turk's office does not have enough information to make a determination as to whether the strike constituted a war crime, Shamdasani said.



Turkiye 'engaging with all sides to end Iran war': minister

AFP/Reuters
Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday that Türkiye was making "intense" diplomatic efforts to end the conflict rolling the Middle East, sparked by the Israeli-US strikes on Iran.

"Attacks on Iran, and missile and kamikaze drone attacks (by Iran) on neighbouring countries in the Gulf have fuelled instability," he said in a televised address. "Through peace-oriented diplomacy, we are making intense efforts to resolve issues at the negotiating table."

Earlier, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan met Washington's Syria envoy Tom Barrack, ministry sources said.

He also spoke with his UK counterpart Yvette Cooper to discuss "the current security environment in the region", evaluating "in detail" the "diplomatic efforts that could be undertaken to end the hostilities and establish stability".

He also discussed regional developments with Qatar's prime minister, HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, with his Greek counterpart Giorgos Gerapetritis and with Nechirvan Barzani, president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region.

Fidan said that Ankara was also in talks with Oman on the matter as the Gulf nation works for the same goal.

Turkiye, a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) member and neighbour of Iran, had for weeks urged Washington and Tehran to reach an agreement during their rounds of negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme and missile capabilities, warn-



Fidan: We have been talking to the Europeans for a few days... If you want peace, let's work together.

ing that the region could not handle any more destabilisation.

Fidan told members of Turkish media during an Iftar dinner yesterday that Türkiye was "sensitively carrying out necessary initiatives with all our counterparts" to achieve peace in the region, and added it was critical to preserve the stability of Iran and the region.

"There isn't a single-layered negotiation, there is a multi-layered negotiation," Fidan said, according to a transcript of his comments shared yesterday.

"We have been talking to the Europeans for a few days... If you want peace, let's work together. We are urging them to take action. The Gulf nations are now facing a serious situation," he said.

Fidan warned against the conflict engulfing the whole region and affecting energy supplies.

He added that the closure of the Hormuz Strait, where one-fifth of global oil trade skirts Iran's coast, could "push the United States to obtain a quick result".

He said Iran was trying to "create costs" for the US and its partners by attacking Gulf states and energy infrastructure, but added that he didn't believe Tehran could obtain the desired result that way.

"By bombing these places, Iran will say they should pressure the United States and end the war, but that doesn't seem like it will happen. I don't know how much Iran has left," he said, adding that Tehran could instead "bother" Israel with missile strikes.

War could spur Iran, Arab nations to seek nukes, says Russia

Reuters
Moscow

Russia warned yesterday that the war launched by the US and Israel against Iran could result in the very outcome they were seeking to prevent, by spurring both Iran and its Arab neighbours to seek to acquire nuclear weapons.

US President Donald Trump cited Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons - something Tehran denies - as one of the reasons why the United States and Israel launched attacks on Saturday that killed supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, igniting a war that has spread across the Middle East.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the logical consequence would be that "forces will emerge in Iran... in favour of doing exactly what the Americans want to avoid - acquiring a nuclear bomb. Because the US doesn't attack those who have nuclear bombs".

Lavrov told a press conference that Arab countries could also join the race to build a bomb.

The risk was now growing that "the nuclear proliferation problem will begin to spiral out of control", he said.

"The seemingly paradoxical declared noble goal of starting a war to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons could stimulate completely opposite trends," Lavrov warned.

He said that Moscow had still seen no evidence that Iran was developing nuclear weapons.

"We still see no evidence that



Lavrov: The US doesn't attack those who have nuclear bombs.

Iran was developing nuclear weapons, which was the main, if not the only, justification for the war," Lavrov said.

Israel is widely seen as the region's only nuclear-armed state, which it neither confirms nor denies.

Russia has close ties with Iran, which it sees as crucial to maintaining its influence in the Middle East, especially since their mutual ally, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, was toppled in December 2024.

President Vladimir Putin has called Khamenei's killing a cynical murder.

Moscow has urged an immediate cessation of hostilities.

The Kremlin said yesterday that Putin, who spoke with Gulf Arab leaders on Monday, would convey to Iran their concerns about its military strikes on them since the war started.

"Putin will certainly make every effort to contribute to at least a slight easing of tensions," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

'Prolonged drought risks famine for millions in Somalia'

Millions of people in Somalia are at risk of famine due to prolonged drought, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) warned yesterday.

After two consecutive failed rainy seasons, there is a high risk of a return to the "catastrophic levels of hunger seen in 2022", the ICRC said in a statement.

Unless there is rain urgently, only a massive increase in humanitarian aid will prevent "millions of people" from slipping further "into emergency levels of hunger", it said.

The number of people in Somalia classed as being in a "crisis or worse" situation nearly doubled between early 2025 and February-March 2026 to reach 6.5m people, according to an assessment published last week by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.

The United Nations agency, based in Rome, measures hunger and malnutrition around the world.

"At the same time, humanitarian funding for Somalia has sharply decreased, forcing many organisations to close programmes, limiting food and water assistance, as well as healthcare and livelihood support, even as needs are rising sharply," the ICRC said.

On February 20, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) warned that it would have to cease its humanitarian aid in the Horn of Africa country by April if it did not receive new funds.

The ICRC said that animal herding, on which more than 60% of Somalis depend for their livelihood, had been weakened by repeated climate shocks and was "now on the verge of collapse".

Herds of goats and camels have been decimated, "leaving families without any source of income or food and forcing thousands of people to seek refuge in makeshift camps", it said.

Decades of fighting in Somalia have exacerbated the situation.

Last year, more than 500,000 people were forced from their homes by the combined effects of conflict and drought, the UN agency said.

"The fighting has caused displacement. The drought has caused displacement... the situation will become desperate if the rains don't come soon," said Mohamed Sheikh, who oversees ICRC operations in the Galmudug region. - AFP

West African states to create new force to fight militants

West African states decided over the weekend to create a new 2,000-strong force to combat the growing religious militant threat in the region, diplomatic and military sources told AFP yesterday.

The idea of an anti-militant force has been discussed for years by the 12 member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The Sahel, a region that cuts across Africa separating the continent's north from its sub-Saharan part, has for years been plagued by religious militant insurgencies led by groups linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

The groups have been particularly active in three former French colonies - Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger - that quit the ECOWAS group in recent years after juntas took power in the countries.

The three countries will not participate in the new force, officials said.

Following a meeting of ECOWAS military chiefs in Freetown on February 28 and March 1, details of the new force to "combat terrorism" were determined, a senior Nigerian military official told AFP.

Several participating countries announced the number of soldiers they would contribute, he said.

The initial goal is to have around 2,000 troops ready to fight "terrorism and insecurity" across west Africa, he added.

The troops of the new force will remain stationed in their countries of origin, with Sierra Leone serving as a logistical base for the group, according to an official Sierra Leonean source.

Discussions on how to finance the force are still ongoing, a diplomatic source told AFP.

ECOWAS has not yet issued an official statement. - AFP

Iran war an endurance race between missiles and interceptors

AFP
Paris

The war in the Middle East has so far been defined by two images: Iranian drones and missiles plunging to the ground and exploding, and interceptors streaking into the skies to stop them.

In the first two days of the conflict, Iran launched nearly 400 missiles and around 1,000 drones towards the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan, said Mintel World, which specialises in open-source intelligence.

That figure does not include Iran's main target, Israel.

"It's really who has a deeper magazine," said Scott Benedict, a former marine and expert at the US-based Middle East Institute. "It's like two archers launching arrows at each other and somebody is going to run out of arrows before the other person runs out of arrows."

Top US military officer General Dan Caine told a press briefing that its integrated air and missile defence network was working "exactly as it's intended", inter-

cepting hundreds of ballistic missiles.

Dismissing reports that the United States could run out of interceptors, President Donald Trump claimed the military has "a virtually unlimited supply".

"Wars can be fought 'forever', and very successfully, using just these supplies," he posted on social media.

However, how long those systems can really keep operating is an open question.

At the end of last June's 12-day war, experts estimated that Iran had between a few hundred and nearly 2,000 missiles capable of striking Israel.

This was separate from its stockpile of shorter-range missiles still capable of reaching Gulf countries. Iran has also used drones which, while less capable, are much cheaper to manufacture. An Israeli security source on Saturday said Iran's ballistic missile production had been "increasing rapidly".

To fire its missiles, Iran has to use launch vehicles, most of which were destroyed in June, while those that survived are now being targeted by the United States and Israel.



This picture taken on Sunday shows explosions from the interception of an Iranian missile seen in the sky over Dubai. - AFP

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said the war was a case of "shooting the archer instead of the arrows".

Iran's latest missile barrages appear to be smaller than those launched in June and in October 2024, when Iran first attacked Israel.

"The low density of the Iranian salvos raises questions about Tehran's offensive capabilities," said Etienne Marcuz, a researcher at the France-based Foundation for

Strategic Research. "Are they preserving their stockpile to prolong the conflict and wear down their adversaries, or do they no longer have the capacity to launch coordinated strikes?"

Despite the smaller salvos, he said a "non-negligible number of missiles are still getting through, which might show that the defences are no longer as watertight and the Israelis know, they too will have to hold out over time" by economising their interceptors.

Israeli troops seize positions in Lebanon to create 'buffer'



Rescuers at the site of an Israeli airstrike in Sidon. - AFP

Israel has ordered the military to take control of more positions inside Lebanon to create a buffer zone, as the Lebanese army pulled back some of its forces after Hezbollah attacked Israeli bases in support of its backer, Iran.

"Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and I have authorised the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to advance and take control of additional strategic positions in Lebanon in order to prevent attacks on Israeli border communities," Defence Minister Israel Katz said in a statement.

Military spokesman Brigadier-General Effie Defrin, in a separate statement, said that troops were creating a buffer zone inside Lebanon.

"In practice, Northern Command has moved forward, taken control of the dominating terrain, and is creating a buffer, as we promised, between our residents and any threat," he said.

In response, the Lebanese army has redeployed soldiers from several recently established border positions following the Israeli army's "escalation", a Lebanese military source told AFP.

The Lebanese troops "numbering in total 8-9 soldiers at each point, were redeployed to their bases because of the danger to their safety", the Lebanese military said.

Lebanon was drawn into the regional war a day earlier after an initial rocket attack on Israel by Hezbollah, which said it wanted to "avenge" the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during the US-Israeli strikes.

Israel promptly responded with

large-scale strikes on Lebanon, where the government on Monday declared an immediate ban on Hezbollah's military activities.

The Israeli military said yesterday it had already struck more than 160 Hezbollah targets "throughout south Lebanon", including members of the Radwan Force, an elite fighting unit of Hezbollah.

It also killed Hezbollah's intelligence chief, Hussein Muakalled, it said.

A Lebanese army source told AFP that Israeli forces advanced into a border area, expressing concern over "Israel's attempt to establish a broad security belt in south Lebanon".

AFP reported yesterday a series of air strikes hitting Beirut's southern suburbs, an area where Hezbollah holds sway, without any prior warning.

The Israeli army announced it had targeted "several Hezbollah terrorists".

The military has also hit Hezbollah command centres, weapons storage facilities, and satellite communication components in Beirut, it said.

Hezbollah said it targeted three Israeli military bases yesterday in response to the Israeli strikes on the group's strongholds.

After alert sirens wailed in northern Israel during a missile and rocket fire from Lebanon, an AFP journalist reported a rocket had struck a house in the village of Yuval, on the Lebanese border.

One person was lightly injured by glass shrapnel as a result, the first responders agency, Magen David Adom, said.

Although Israel has maintained

that it is not planning a full-scale ground invasion of Lebanon, the military has stated that "all options are on the table" to halt incoming rocket fire from Hezbollah.

Yesterday Katz declared that troops had been ordered to seize additional locations inside Lebanon, though the military described these steps as "tactical measures" rather than a ground invasion.

Israeli forces had previously entered Lebanon in September 2024 after nearly a year of cross-border exchanges initiated by Hezbollah in support of its Palestinian ally Hamas following the outbreak of the war in Gaza.

Tens of thousands of residents on both sides of the border were evacuated as fighting between the two intensified.

The Israeli military has since said it did not plan to evacuate northern communities again, noting that it has reinforced troop deployments along the Lebanese border and strengthened air defences in the area.

Under a November 2024 truce, only UN peacekeepers and the Lebanese army may bear arms south of the Litani river, which runs around 30km (20 miles) from the Israeli border.

Israel was supposed to withdraw all of its forces from Lebanon under the ceasefire but has kept troops in five border areas it deems strategic, citing Hezbollah's refusal to surrender its own arms.

Despite the ceasefire, Israel has conducted regular air strikes on Hezbollah positions in Lebanon even before the current hostilities erupted.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, MOHAMMED IMRAN HADIDUHLAH

holder of

Indian Passport No. R8309270
QID No. 28035600132

hereby change my name

from

MOHAMMED IMRAN HADIDUHLAH

to

MOHAMMED IMRAN HABIBULLAH

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

X suspends revenue sharing for undisclosed AI war videos

AFP
Washington

Social media platform X announced yesterday it would suspend its revenue sharing programme for 90 days if they post AI-generated videos of armed conflicts without disclosing they were artificially made, the company said.

The policy change, announced by an executive of the Elon Musk-owned platform, targets what the company described as a threat to information authenticity amid the ongoing war pitting the US and Israel against Iran.

"During times of war, it is critical that people have access to authentic information on the ground," X's head of product Ni-



kita Bier said, adding that current AI technologies make it "trivial to create content that can mislead people."

X said on Monday it would "continue to refine" its policies and product to ensure the platform "can be trusted during these critical moments."

The new AI disclosure policy represents a notable pivot for a

platform whose approach to content moderation has been heavily criticised since Musk completed his \$44bn acquisition of Twitter – subsequently rebranded as X – in October 2022.

Since Musk's takeover, X has largely sought to remove its policies against misinformation deeming them censorship.

Under the new rules, repeat offenders face permanent suspension from the Creator Revenue Sharing program, which pays eligible users a share of advertising revenue generated by their posts.

Violations will be flagged through Community Notes – the platform's crowd-sourced fact-checking system – as well as through metadata and other technical signals embedded in AI-generated content.

US judge says Trump effort to end New York congestion pricing unlawful

Reuters
Washington

A US judge yesterday said the US Transportation Department effort to force an end to Manhattan's congestion pricing programme was illegal, a blow to President Donald Trump's attempts to eliminate the charge.

US District Judge Lewis Liman in May issued a temporary restraining order preventing the federal government from withholding funding for New York projects over the programme. Yesterday, he issued a judgment that the Trump administration's effort in February 2025 to terminate the programme was unlawful.

The first-of-its-kind programme in the United States – in place since January 2025 – is charging most passenger vehicles a toll of \$9 during peak periods to enter Manhattan south of 60th Street, in a bid to cut congestion and raise funds to improve mass transit.

USDOT did not immediately comment. Liman also found unlawful Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy's threat in April to withhold funding for New York transportation projects if New York did not end the congestion pricing programme.

"It is difficult to imagine more arbitrary and capricious decision-making than that at issue here," Liman said in his 149-page opinion.

Trump has repeatedly pushed to end the fee. The programme in its first year resulted in 27 million fewer vehicles entering the congestion zone, cutting traffic times by as much as 15 minutes each way and raising \$550 million that underpins \$15 billion in debt financing for critical mass transit capital improvements, New York Governor Kathy Hochul said.

USDOT under former Democratic president Joe Biden had approved the congestion programme in November 2024, which is monitored via electronic license plate readers. US approval is needed because it involves tolls on federal highways.

The programme follows similar ones in London and Singapore. Opponents including Duffy say it takes money from working people and leaves drivers without a free highway option.

German chancellor meets Trump for talks eclipsed by Iran war

Germany helping with Iran strikes, says Trump

AFP, Reuters
Washington

Donald Trump hosted German Chancellor Friedrich Merz yesterday for the US president's first meeting with a foreign leader since joining Israel in strikes on Iran that have dragged the Middle East into war.

The long-scheduled White House meeting was supposed to focus on the war in Ukraine and rocky EU-US trade relations, part of a wider effort to salvage frayed transatlantic ties.

Trump, speaking in the Oval Office alongside Merz, told reporters that Germany had been "helping out" by allowing US forces to access certain bases, and drew a sharp contrast to the actions of two other European countries: Britain and Spain.

Trump said Germany was let-

ting US forces land in "certain areas" but that the US was not asking Germany to provide troops. "They're letting us land in certain areas, and we appreciate it, and they're just making it comfortable. We're not asking them to put boots on the ground."

The US president said he had a good relationship with Germany and Merz in particular, calling him an "excellent leader". That marked a big change from Merz's fellow Christian Democrat and former Chancellor Angela Merkel, Trump said, adding that he had differences with Merkel over immigration and energy.

Merz told Trump he appreciated being able to meet with him during what he described as "challenging times" and said that Ukraine remained a top priority for Europe.

"We have to talk about Ukraine. There are too many bad guys in this world, actually," Merz told Trump at the start of their meeting. "This is an issue we have to talk about because we all want to see this war

coming to an end as soon as possible. But Ukraine has to preserve its territory and their security interests."

Trump assured Merz that negotiating a deal to end the war between Russia and Ukraine remained "very high" on his priority list.

But Trump's signal that air strikes against Iran could go on for weeks has upended the global agenda, with Tehran striking back against US bases and allies in the region.

Merz arrived at the White House by a side entrance, with none of the flag-bearing fanfare often accorded to foreign leaders outside the West Wing.

Yet he declined to "lecture" the US and Israel on the legality of the Iran strikes aimed at ending Tehran's nuclear and missile programmes.

Germany, France and Britain have also said they will only assist their allies in the Gulf with "defensive action" against Iran.



US President Donald Trump meets with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday. (AFP)

That drew condemnation from US officials of a "soft" response to "Operation Epic Fury" – potentially putting Merz in the firing line for Trump's ire.

Trump assured Merz that negotiating a deal to end the war between Russia and Ukraine remained "very high" on his priority list

France's President Emmanuel Macron said later that eight European countries had agreed to join his plan to use France's nuclear stockpile to bolster security on the continent – with Germany a "key partner in this effort."

Much divides Merz, 70, with multilateral instincts, and Trump, 79, a property tycoon and former reality TV star.

But Merz has managed to maintain cordial ties with Trump and escape his wrath or ridicule.

He has done so in part by meeting a key Trump demand for stepped up defence spending among European Nato members, with huge increases in German investments.

But Merz has at times pushed back against the mercurial US president, especially over Ukraine, and often insists that Europe must become more sovereign in times of geopolitical upheaval.

At February's Munich Security

Conference, Merz noted the "deep rift" between the traditional allies and urged America to "repair and revive transatlantic trust together".

During their first White House meeting last June, Merz had also challenged Trump to increase pressure on Moscow to end the "terrible" Ukraine war.

Trump at the time called Merz "a very good man to deal with" and wryly said he could be "difficult" – a comment that was widely read as approving rather than critical.

Merz also played up Trump's German family roots, presenting him with his grandfather's German birth certificate and inviting him to visit his ancestral homeland.

Amnesty Commission meeting in Caracas



The President of the Parliamentary Amnesty Commission Jorge Arreaza (centre) speaks during a meeting of the Amnesty Commission with members of the justice system at the National Assembly headquarters in Caracas yesterday. (AFP)

Chinese cable project opposed by US sparks row in Chile

AFP
Santiago

US concerns over a proposed Chinese fibre optic cable linking Asia with South America under the sea led to a spat yesterday between Chile's outgoing left-wing president and his Washington-backed successor.

Hard-right politician Jose Antonio Kast is set to be inaugurated as president of Chile on March 11 after defeating Jeannette Jara, a communist, in December's presidential run-off.

Yesterday, he met with the incumbent Gabriel Boric to co-ordinate the transfer of power.

But Kast terminated the meeting abruptly after accusing Boric of withholding information about the submarine cable project.

The China Mobile multinational wireless provider has proposed to lay a cable between Hong Kong and the Chilean port of Valparaiso in a bid to expand Pacific connectivity and data capacity.

China's connectivity currently relies almost entirely on cables running through archrival, the US. The US government argues that the project undermines regional security, which Chile denies. Last month, Washington revoked the visas of three Chilean officials, including Boric's minister of transport and telecommunications – a rare rebuke by the US of one of its closest South Ameri-



Chile's President-elect Jose Antonio Kast speaks to the media after a meeting with President Gabriel Boric in Santiago yesterday. (AFP)

can allies. President Donald Trump is locked in a fierce battle for influence with China in Latin America, which his administration refers to as part of "our hemisphere".

Boric said that his meeting with Kast ended in acrimony after Kast demanded Boric retract his claim that he had informed his successor about the cable project. Boric claims he told Kast on February 18 that he had received threats from the US regarding the project, which has yet to be approved by Chilean authorities.

Kast said he suspended cooperation with Boric on the transition because he did not trust the information provided by the outgoing government.

Like Trump, Kast won the election on a promise of mass migrant deportations.

2017 implosion of Argentine submarine was 'foreseeable'

AFP
Rio Gallegos,

The submarine implosion that killed 44 Argentine sailors in November 2017, the country's worst naval disaster since the Falklands War, was "foreseeable", prosecutors argued as the trial over the disaster got underway yesterday.

The sinking of the ARA San Juan, in circumstances that remain unclear, was "a foreseeable outcome given the condition of the vessel, which made the shipwreck possible," the prosecution said in the indictment against four former Navy officers, who went on trial in the Patagonian city of Rio Gallegos.

The ARA San Juan went missing

a week after it set off from Ushuaia on Argentina's southern tip and was returning to its home port at the Mar del Plata naval base.

The vessel's crushed wreckage still lies deep on the sea bed in a remote area of the South Atlantic off Santa Cruz province, where the trial is taking place. The submarine vanished on November 15 after reporting that seawater had entered the ventilation system, causing a battery on the diesel-electric vessel to short-circuit and start a fire.

Four former Navy officers – former Training Command chief Luis Lopez Mazzeo, former Submarine Force commander Claudio Villamide, the Submarine Command's former chief of staff Hector Alonso and former head of operations Hugo Correa – have been charged with

dereliction of duty and aggravated negligent destruction.

They face between one and five years in prison if convicted.

None of the families of the victims – 43 men and one woman – are expected to attend the trial in remote Rio Gallegos. Lawyer Valeria Carreras, who represents 34 victims' families, said her clients, most of whom live in Mar del Plata, "can't even afford to make photocopies, never mind plane tickets and lodgings."

"They have felt like nobodies for the past eight years," she said.

Their request for the trial to be held in Mar del Plata was rejected.

Carreras accused the Navy of harboring a "culture of silence" over what she called "an avoidable tragedy."

In 2021, a court-martial dismissed Villamide for negligence and sentenced other officers to up to 45 days in jail for concealing information over the disaster.

The hypothesis is that the submarine suffered a valve failure that allowed water to enter the battery compartment, triggering a fire and then an explosion.

But testing this theory would involve salvaging the submarine's wreckage from a depth of over 900m (2,950 feet) – a multimillion-dollar operation, according to the plaintiffs.

"It's very difficult to convict someone of a crime when you don't really know what happened," lawyer Luis Tagliapietra, whose 27-year-old son Alejandro died in the disaster, complained.



A cenotaph bearing the names of the 44 members of the Argentine Navy who died during the sinking of the ARA San Juan submarine. (AFP)

The case has ensnared top officials, fuelling suspicions of a cover-up. Former president Mauricio Macri was accused of ordering il-

legal surveillance of the victims' families between 2017 and 2019.

The Supreme Court last year threw out the case against him.



Stranded in resort island: Mideast war traps thousands in Bali

AFP
Denpasar

Passengers stranded on the Indonesian resort island of Bali clamoured for flight news yesterday as the outbreak of war in the Middle East grounded planes and turned a tropical holiday dream into an ordeal for many. Hundreds were crowded at Ngurah Rai International Airport, many dressed in shorts, flip-flops and summer dresses, their expressions dour.

Many sat on the floor, exhausted, and one man repeatedly

hit a wall in frustration.

"I just kind of want to see my family.... right now it's a bit stressful," British tourist Adam Woo, transiting through Bali after holidaying on the neighbouring island of Lombok, told AFP.

The 23-year-old student said he saw the missiles start flying on the news "and I was a bit worried about my flight" — especially after Dubai International Airport was hit in Iran's response to a US-Israeli attack.

"Obviously, everyone around the world at the moment is kind of stuck," said Woo.

"All the travel agencies are



Passengers wait amid flights disruptions as a result of the Israeli-US strikes on Iran, at Ngurah Rai International Airport, Bali, on Monday. (AFP)

swamped with people calling in. So, it's literally impossible to even get on the phone with someone."

He said he was looking for an alternative flight via China.

Around Woo, many at the airport were lugging around heavy luggage with slumped shoulders, frustration etched on many a face.

Many queued on foot and on chairs outside information centres hoping for news on replacement flights, receiving occasional briefings with little news.

The airport's immigration office said in a statement at least 4,400 people had flights to Doha, Dubai and Abu Dhabi cancelled

between Saturday and Monday.

With would-be passengers at risk of overstaying their visas, the Bali immigration office introduced a same-day emergency stay permit free of charge for affected foreigners.

Thirty-five have applied so far, according to immigration head Felucia Sengky Ratna.

Airports company Angkasa Pura said 15 flights from Bali to Doha and Abu Dhabi, and vice versa, have been cancelled between Saturday and Monday.

National carrier Garuda Indonesia has grounded all flights to Doha until further notice.

Beijing votes out three generals from political advisory organisation

AFP
Beijing

China's top political advisory body voted to remove three generals, state media said, a week after nine military officials were ousted from its legislature.

Beijing has escalated a sweeping purge of military officials in the days before thousands of delegates from across the country meet for the annual Two Sessions political conclave that starts today.

Simultaneous gatherings of China's top legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC), and a separate political advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), will be held over the course of a week.

The CPPCC voted at a Standing Committee meeting to remove retired military generals Han Weiguo, Liu Lei and Gao Jin, Xinhua reported on Monday.

While they can theoretically appeal the ruling, such decisions are usually final.

The CPPCC also voted to remove two other members. No reason was specified.

Ten other members were officially ousted following an earlier vote to remove them.

The vote comes after the NPC removed 19 of its delegates on Thursday, including nine military officials.

Last week's removals also included the minister of emergency management, Wang Xiangxi, and the head of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s military court, Liu Shaoyun.

President Xi Jinping has launched a massive drive to root out graft at all levels of the Chinese Communist Party and state since coming to power more than a decade ago, with the campaign mainly targeting the military in recent years.

Xi hailed the military's "fight against corruption" last month in a rare acknowledgement of graft, weeks after Beijing launched a probe of its top general.

Beijing's defence ministry said in January it was investigating Zhang Youxia, a vice-chairman of the powerful Central Military

Commission (CMC), as well as Liu Zhenli, chief of staff of the CMC's joint staff department, which oversees combat planning.

"The detention of Zhang Youxia was the capstone arrest of the greatest series of purges in the history of China's PLA," experts from the Center for Strategic and International Studies wrote in a note.

Only one general remains on the CMC, which usually has six officers of that rank.

In the near term, given the significant vacancies in the top ranks of China's PLA, "it would be incredibly difficult for China to launch large military campaigns against Taiwan," the experts said.

China's Communist Party has never ruled Taiwan, but Beijing claims the island of 23 mn people is part of its territory and has not ruled out the use of force to annex it.

China's defence budget "outpaces the wider" Asia-Pacific region, accounting for some 44 % of regional military spending, the International Institute for Strategic Studies said in its annual report.

Middle East military HQ hit: Australia

Australia said yesterday its military headquarters in the Middle East was hit by an Iranian drone attack over the weekend and that all staff were safe.

Speaking on morning TV, Defence Minister Richard Marles said he could confirm reports the Al Minhad Air Base — just 24km (15 miles) south of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates — had been hit over the weekend.

"There was some drones which did attack that base on the first night," Marles, also deputy prime minister, said.

"We have a number of Australians who operate from a headquarters that we've had at Al Minhad now for many, many years," he said.

"They are all safe and accounted for."

Waves of retaliatory Iranian missile attacks targeted the UAE at the weekend damaging Dubai airport, the world's busiest for international traffic, and Jebel Ali seaport — which hosts US warships and is capable of handling aircraft carriers.

Australia has said it has 115,000 nationals in the Middle East who are unable to fly out because of airspace closures caused by the conflict. Al Minhad Air Base has hosted Australian forces since 2003 and serves as the primary hub for the country's operations in the Middle East.

Up to 80 Australians are on-base at any given time, according to the Australian military. (AFP)

Canadian PM in Australia to talk minerals, defence



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney and his wife Diana Fox Carney (top) are welcomed by officials upon their arrival at Sydney Airport yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Sydney

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney landed yesterday in Australia, kicking off a trip aimed at bringing in investment and deepening ties with a fellow "middle power" partner.

Carney landed around midday (0100 GMT) in Sydney, where he will address today a meeting of the Lowy Institute think-tank.

He is then expected to meet Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and address the nation's parliament in the capital of Canberra.

The trip is part of a multi-country tour of the Asia-Pacific aimed at reducing reliance on the US — a hedge against what Carney has

described as a fading US-led global order.

His arrival in Australia comes just days after a US-Israeli strike on Iran killed the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and plunged the Middle East into war.

Both Canada and Australia have backed those strikes.

Albanese's office has framed Carney as a like-minded leader and said his trip will focus on economic security and critical minerals — of which Australia has vast reserves — as well as defence.

"As our countries face new challenges and opportunities, we must deepen our cooperation with partners to promote our national interests," the Australian prime minister said last week.

South Korea president visits Manila, pledges closer ties



South Korean First Lady Kim Hea Kyung, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Philippine First Lady Liza Araneta Marcos pose for a group photo at the presidential palace in Manila, Philippines, yesterday. (Reuters)

Global talks on plastic pollution treaty in Japan were 'constructive'

AFP
Tokyo

Talks in Japan aimed at salvaging efforts towards a landmark global treaty on plastic pollution were "constructive", a source involved in the negotiations told AFP yesterday, with another meeting scheduled for May.

Supposedly final talks in South Korea in 2024 towards an agreement failed, and a renewed effort in Geneva last August likewise collapsed in overtime.

Delegates from dozens of countries held three days of "informal" discussions in Japan ending Tuesday, which were not expected to result in any official announcement.

However, a source involved in the talks said they had gone better than feared.

"Given the context of the more or less collapse of the negotiations in August, I think this is a restart of the conversa-

tion," the source said.

The talks were "constructive" and "could provide... a pathway towards agreement", they added. "It could have been a lot worse."

The negotiators will meet in Dakar for another meeting in May, the source said.

Japan's lead negotiator Satoshi Yoshida also told AFP the negotiators "had good discussions" and more meetings would be held in the coming months.

More than 400mn tonnes of plastic are produced globally each year, with half for single-use items.

A large bloc of states wants bold action such as curbing plastic production, while a smaller clutch of oil-producing states wants to focus more narrowly on waste management.

Countries that were present in Tokyo include big oil producers like Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United States as well as island states Antigua and Barbuda and Palau, plus China, India and the European Union.

'Blood Moon' in Thailand



A total lunar eclipse as Makha Bucha Day, is marked at Wat Khao Wong Phrachan in Lopburi province, Thailand, yesterday. (Reuters)

Helicopter crash kills two in Philippines

AFP
Manila

A Malaysian national and a Filipino were killed yesterday when a helicopter crashed in a vacant lot about two hours southeast of Manila.

The helicopter was carrying five people, including two Malaysians, when it went down in a grassy area of a residential district in Pililla, a small town in Rizal province, at around 7:27am officials said.

Rizal provincial police officer Ramjae Pangga told AFP that two passengers, a Malaysian and a Filipino, were killed in the crash.

The pilot, meanwhile, had been critically injured, said Pililla town mayor John Masinsin.

"The three survivors are... still in shock, especially the pilot," he told AFP.

"They are now en route to a tertiary hospital in (Metro Manila), upon the request of their families," he said, praising the pilot for managing to put the aircraft down in the residential area without hurting anyone.

Pangga added the emergency landing had been forced "because their engine was about to shut down".

An investigation by the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines is underway.

Strong quake hits off Indonesia's Sumatra

AFP
Banda Aceh

A magnitude 6.1 earthquake struck off the Indonesian island of Sumatra yesterday, according to the US Geological Survey, rattling residents but causing no serious damage.

The quake originated offshore from Sumatra's northeastern tip, authorities said, prompting people to flee outdoors in a region that frequently experiences devastating tremors.

"I was at home when it happened... the shaking was really strong," 50-year-old Ahmadi, who, like many Indonesians, uses only one name, told AFP by telephone from the small coastal town of Sinabang in the northernmost Aceh province.

"I panicked. We fled the house, but because the jolt was

pretty short, things went back to normal," he added, adding he could see "families running around here on the street".

Rahmat Triyono, head of Indonesia's BMKG earthquake and tsunami centre, said people on Simeulue island and east-coast areas of Aceh would have experienced a strong tremor, with windows and doors rattling, walls creaking and possibly some broken glassware.

But he said there was no tsunami risk.

Weaker shaking was also felt in Sumatra's northeast.

The vast archipelago nation experiences frequent earthquakes due to its location in the Pacific "Ring of Fire" — an arc of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

UK PM Starmer says sending warship, helicopters to Cyprus

AFP
London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday the UK was dispatching "helicopters with counter drone capabilities" and a warship, HMS Dragon, to Cyprus as Britain continues "defensive operations" in the region.

His announcement comes after Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) Akrotiri base was struck early Monday by an Iranian-made drone, which hit the runway. Another two were intercepted.

"The UK is fully committed to the security of Cyprus and British military personnel based there," Starmer wrote on X.

"We're continuing our defensive operations and I've just spoken with the President of Cyprus to let him know that we are sending helicopters with counter drone ca-



An aircraft prepares to land in RAF Akrotiri, a British sovereign base in Cyprus that was hit by a drone early Monday, causing limited damage, yesterday.

pabilities and HMS Dragon is to be deployed to the region.

"We will always act in the interest of the UK and our allies," he added.

HMS Dragon is one of the Royal Navy's six Type 45 air defence destroyers. It is fitted with a Sea Vi-

per missile system able to launch eight missiles in under 10 seconds and guide up to 16 missiles simultaneously, Britain's defence ministry said in a press release.

The ministry added that the helicopters are Wildcat helicopters

equipped with Martlet missiles that can take down drones.

Britain's armed forces have helped shoot down multiple drones across the region in the past 24 hours, according to the defence ministry, including over Jordan and Qatar.

Starmer initially refused to have any role in the US-Israeli war with Iran but later agreed to a US request to use two British military bases for a "specific and limited defensive purpose".

Those bases are in Gloucestershire in western England and the UK-US Diego Garcia base in the Indian Ocean.

Starmer has insisted that the Akrotiri base is not being used by US bombers.

Monday's drone strike there caused minimal damage and no casualties, according to British officials. The families of service personnel have been moved away from the base as a precaution.

UK rapper jailed for killing student in hit-and-run

AFP
London

British rapper "Ghett" was jailed yesterday by a London court for 12 years for killing a student while speeding and over the drink-drive limit.

The award-winning grime artist, whose real name is Justin Clarke-Samuel, failed to stop after his BMW hit Nepalese national Yubin Tamang, 20, in northeast London last October.

The 41-year-old defendant admitted causing death by dangerous driving.

At his sentencing at London's Old Bailey court, judge Mark Lucraft handed down the 12-year prison term and disqualified him from driving for 17 years.

He told Clarke-Samuel that CCTV footage showed a "quite appalling litany of incidents" leading up to the fatal collision which was "simply shocking".

The judge noted the father-of-two's "genuine remorse" and letters of support including from his partner setting out how he had used his career in music to

make a positive impact on his community.

He was said to be one-and-a-half times over the legal drink-drive limit before the crash.

He went through six red traffic lights, repeatedly veered onto the wrong side of the road and was driving at more than twice the speed limit in a 30-mph (48 kilometres per hour) zone before his car hit Tamang as he was crossing the road, the court was told. The defendant made no call to emergency services and Tamang died in hospital from his injuries two days later.

Clarke-Samuel had 12 previous convictions for 27 crimes from the age of 16 including robbery, aggravated vehicle taking and driving offences.

Sharmila Tamang, the victim's mother, wept as she read out a statement about her only child in court.

"My son had come for his studies to the UK saying the UK had the best degree in the world," she said.

"But on his way back from his work this happened and he lost his life."

Indian airlines resume limited flights to Gulf destinations

AFP
New Delhi

Indian airlines said yesterday that they were resuming limited commercial services to the Middle East in a bid to collect thousands of passengers stranded by war.

Millions of South Asian citizens live and work across the Middle East. IndiGo said it would operate four return flights to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia as part of efforts to "progressively normalise" operations between the countries.

Air India Express said it resumed flights to and from the Omani capital Muscat from yesterday.

But services to and from Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates remain suspended, the airlines said in a statement.

Budget carrier Akasa Air said it would operate select flights to Jeddah.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken to multiple Middle East leaders, including the leaders of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, in



Nirav Modi, who was stranded in Dubai amid the US-Israel conflict with Iran, along with his twins watches as his wife holds her child at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai, India, yesterday.

which he thanked them for "taking care of the Indian community", in posts on social media.

Several South Asian citizens have been killed in the strikes, including at least one Nepali in Abu Dhabi and two Bangladeshis in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Indian media reported one citizen killed on a vessel off Oman.

Modi said Monday he had also spoken to his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu, in which he "conveyed India's concerns over recent developments and emphasised the safety of civilians as a priority".

India says developments in Gulf region cause 'great anxiety'

Reuters
New Delhi

The US-Israeli war on Iran and the crisis it has triggered in the Gulf region have evoked great anxiety for India, New Delhi said yesterday, as it reiterated its call for dialogue and diplomacy to secure an "early end to the conflict". The US and Israel's war against Iran entered its fourth day yesterday, as explosions tore through Tehran and Beirut and global financial markets slid at the prospect of a prolonged disruption to global energy supplies.

India has high stakes in the Gulf region as an estimated 10mn

Indians live and work there. It is also critical to New Delhi's trade, energy and supply chains.

Some Indian nationals have already been killed or are missing after the attacks, the official spokesperson of India's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The Indian embassy in Oman had confirmed the death of an Indian national on board the Marshall Islands-flagged product tanker MKD VYOM, that was hit by a projectile on Sunday.

"As a proximate neighbour with critical stakes in the security and stability of the region, these developments evoke great anxiety," the statement said.

India is walking a tightrope in

the conflict, boasting historical cultural ties with Iran, strong strategic relations with Israel and close friendships with Arab countries.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken to leaders of Arab countries and strongly condemned Iran's attacks on them.

He has also spoken to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and stressed the need for an early cessation of hostilities. India could be among the most vulnerable if higher oil prices are sustained, analysts say.

India's oil minister assured yesterday that the country has sufficient energy reserves to deal with the crisis.

Malaysia PM tells parliament of plot to destabilise government

Reuters
Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's prime minister said a suspect in an alleged plot to topple the government had engaged an international public relations firm to launch a co-ordinated attack aimed at undermining national institutions before the next election.

Police said last week they were investigating an alleged conspiracy to "sabotage national stability", under laws against undermining parliamentary democracy.

In an address to parliament yesterday, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim provided further details of the alleged plot, saying the suspect had engaged the PR firm as part of a response to being the subject of a large-scale graft investigation by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

Neither Anwar, nor the police, have identified the individual sus-

pect or the PR firm.

Anwar said the PR strategy, which began in August 2024 and included engaging media agencies, banks, and lawmakers, was to run until the next general election, due by early 2028.

"Their strategy... was to contact all foreign media with a strategy of undermining the government's efforts, especially the MACC's," Anwar told parliament, citing documents obtained by authorities.

"And then to use their power and contacts in foreign countries to shape a narrative questioning the authority of the Malaysian government and organise a movement through the Malaysian parliament. That is what worries us."

Anwar said documents identified media firm Bloomberg as one of the agencies targeted by the alleged conspiracy.

A Bloomberg spokesperson did not immediately respond to an e-mailed request for comment on

Anwar's remarks. A special government committee is conducting a separate investigation into allegations in a Bloomberg report last month that head of MACC, Azam Baki, may have breached shareholding laws.

Azam has said he is willing to be investigated as he had "nothing to hide" and all his financial declarations have been made according to public service laws. Lawmakers, including a key party in Anwar's ruling coalition, have called for a royal inquiry into another Bloomberg article alleging broader misconduct at the anti-graft agency.

The MACC has said the allegations were "baseless", and that they were an attempt to discredit its investigations and enforcement actions within the corporate sector.

Yesterday, Anwar said a royal inquiry into the matter was "premature" as the special committee was expected to complete its probe this week.

Myanmar curbs car use to save fuel due to Mideast war

Myanmar's junta announced yesterday that half of private vehicles would be ordered off the roads each day from later this week, to preserve oil stocks depleted by conflict in the Middle East. Beginning on Saturday, cars with licence plates starting with even numbers will only be permitted to drive on even-numbered calendar days, leaving the odd-numbered days for vehicles with odd-numbered plates, a junta statement said.

The joint US-Israel attacks on Iran over the weekend and wider war across the Middle East have

hampered oil supplies from the resource-rich region and sent global prices rocketing. Myanmar imports 90% of its fuel oil, the junta said in 2024.

"Due to current global political conditions and military conflicts in the Middle East, there are ongoing blockades and disruptions along the maritime trade routes used by oil tankers," the junta statement said.

Drivers must heed the rules "to ensure the systematic distribution and security of fuel", it added. Electric vehicles, buses, taxis, cargo vehicles, emergency services and

garbage trucks will be exempt. It was not immediately clear how the rules will be policed or how long they will remain in force, but the junta said any violation would "result in legal action". It also warned that "fuel business owners and the general public are strictly prohibited from hoarding fuel or reselling it at inflated prices". Myanmar has been ruled by the military since it staged a 2021 coup, sparking a civil war which has seen opposition factions wrest swathes of the country away from the control of the armed forces. (AFP)

Lantern Festival



A man stands at a park during the Lantern Festival in Beijing yesterday.

Ireland to deploy military attaches in embassies for first time

AFP
Dublin

Ireland said yesterday that it will send senior military officers to key foreign embassies for the first time, the latest step by the EU member to beef up its modest defence structures.

A "Defence Attache Network" will be established in Irish embassies in Paris, London and Washington, aimed at enhancing links with key strategic partners, Defence Minister Helen McEntee said in a statement.

"This decision comes in the context of a deteriorating, and increasingly contested, European and international security environment," said McEntee, who is also Ireland's foreign minister.

The move is the latest in a ramping up of the island na-

tion's defence capabilities.

Militarily neutral, Ireland has a small army and possesses neither a combat air force nor a significant naval fleet.

The new network would "bridge the gap between military and diplomatic channels" said a government statement.

Personnel would be able to supply "feedback on defence and security matters," it added.

Last week McEntee unveiled Ireland's first ever maritime security strategy, to address "critical gaps" in maritime domain "awareness".

The plan included radar and sonar projects to protect subsea cable infrastructure, planned new naval bases, and enhanced international co-operation.

Ireland's vast maritime domain spans an area roughly ten times larger than its landmass, and is one of the largest sea areas under national juris-

diction in the EU bloc.

Ireland will forge links with the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), a UK-led alliance of 10 member countries — all Nato members — focused on maritime security.

The strategy document said organised crime groups and the Russian shadow fleet of vessels used by Moscow to transport sanctioned oil threaten Ireland's maritime territory for strategic and financial advantage.

In recent months Dublin has announced plans to invest in multi-billion euro new military equipment, with France identified as a "preferred" strategic supply partner.

McEntee also said last week that Ireland is assessing whether to let British and French vessels patrol Irish-controlled waters during Ireland's upcoming hosting of the rotating EU presidency.

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'AI scare trade' grips markets amid spending, disruption concerns

When ChatGPT was launched in November 2022, any stocks linked to the AI theme surged – from chipmakers and software firms to raw-materials suppliers and even companies most exposed to AI disruption. Over the past three years, investors have sought exposure to all things about artificial intelligence, including high-flying tech stocks behind some of the leading AI technology.

But over the past year or so, Wall Street has gone through waves of AI-related selloffs, sparked by fears about everything from more cost-efficient competition in China to the likelihood of a looming AI bubble. Recently, though, the market's focus has shifted, as predictions that AI will be so successful that it might supplant the need for many types of businesses and workers has driven some stocks down sharply.

Wall Street is calling it the "AI scare trade." The moniker first popped up among market participants unnerved by rolling selloffs in industries such as trucking that previously hadn't been considered related to AI. For the first time since the stocks rally started in 2023, investors' views on AI have shifted: Long viewed as a potential productivity booster, some now see the technology as a threat to entire industries.

The change in perspective threatens to shift the direction of the market after three straight years of gains.

Long viewed as a potential productivity booster, some investors now see AI as a threat to entire industries

Wall Street traders have been so spooked by the disruptive potential of AI that all it took to spark a drop in the S&P 500 Index at the end of February was a gloomy research memo. The scare trade in AI is essentially two fears wrapped up into one action – sell all things AI-linked – in a market that until recently had been trading at bubble-like valuations.

The first fear is that firms like Microsoft and Amazon.com, whose stock prices dropped after reporting earlier this year, are spending too much money on data centres and building out AI infrastructure. The second is that AI will severely disrupt entire industries because AI agents will be able to replace white collar workers, shrinking the workforce and, by extension, consumer spending.

That fear has rolled from one industry group to another in recent weeks, sparking massive selloffs in sectors such as software development, even as the overall stock market has remained flat so far this year. At the end of last year, 83% of companies in the S&P 500 listed AI as a "material risk" to their business, up from 72% in the third quarter of 2025 and just 12% in 2023, according to data compiled by the Conference Board and shared with Bloomberg.

To some extent, the current uncertainty on Wall Street reflects the mixed messages coming from Silicon Valley and the wider business community. For years, tech leaders have signalled AI is progressing rapidly and framed it as a transformational technology that will reshape large portions of the global economy. Mind-boggling global AI spending spree is projected to cross \$2.5tn in 2026, a 44% increase year-over-year. But as of now, the global AI trade is starting to fracture as soaring capex, rising debt loads and doubts over who will profit from the technology force investors to draw sharper lines. In the near term, however, AI's impact is murkier. Multiple studies last year found employees were using AI to produce "workshop," undercutting productivity rather than boosting it. Leading AI labs are also still working to help businesses understand how best to use their tools. What's certain is that AI is here to stay, and the companies that stand to benefit are those providing the foundation of the infrastructure – utilities, chipmakers, and manufacturers of grids and pipelines.

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European capitals push back as Ukraine seeks fast-track EU membership

By Lili Bayer, Andrew Gray and Daniel Flynn
Reuters

Ukraine's push for a fast track into the European Union as part of any peace deal has hit stiff resistance from EU governments, who do not want to open the Pandora's box of problems that they fear a quick accession would unleash. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy wants a 2027 date to join the EU as part of a settlement to end Russia's war, hoping this would anchor his country in Europe's main political club and offer a path to greater prosperity, security and stability.

A clear route into the EU could be vital for Zelenskiy in selling any peace settlement to Ukrainians, particularly if - as is widely expected - Ukraine does not regain control of all of its territory or join the Nato military alliance, analysts say.

But EU governments -- including heavyweights France and Germany -- have privately voiced scepticism about a mooted reform of the accession process that would shorten Ukraine's path to membership, diplomats say. Reuters spoke with eight European diplomats and officials, and many pointed to unease among EU capitals about the idea.

Among their concerns is that Ukraine and others would not press on with reforms, such as cracking down on corruption, if it has already been granted EU membership. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister and lead EU negotiator Taras Kachka told Reuters that Kyiv was ready to address EU members' concerns. He proposed safeguards such as a monitoring system to check Kyiv was sticking to democratic standards and a transition period before it received EU farm subsidies.

But he said a political commitment to a membership date would be important. "This is necessary for the peace process, for the establishing of long-lasting and just peace in Europe," he said.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP PROCESS IS LONG AND COMPLEX

The current process for joining the bloc is usually long and bureaucratic, even in straightforward cases, involving years of detailed negotiations and legal reforms to meet EU democratic and economic standards.

Every step of the accession process, which is divided into chapters and clusters of policy issues, also requires approval from all EU members. Hungary has blocked Ukraine's path early in the process.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, head of the bloc's executive, has floated a revamp of the process

- Kyiv wants to join EU in 2027 as part of peace plan
- Date seen as unrealistic but EU officials aim to speed up process
- EU members wary, gradual integration seen as more likely
- Ukrainian deputy PM says Kyiv is ready to address EU concerns



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen attend a press conference with European Council President Antonio Costa (not pictured) in Kyiv. (Reuters)



Ukrainian and European flags fly, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in central Kyiv. (Reuters)



People walk by the monument to Saint Volodymyr covered in scaffolding in Kyiv amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

behind closed doors, diplomats say. Instead of carrying out all the required reforms first, a country could join the EU after meeting some minimum requirements - but with limited access to EU funds and decision-making until they meet all the membership benchmarks.

That could make it easier for Ukraine and others such as Moldova, Montenegro and Albania to join quickly - although Zelenskiy's target of January 1, 2027, would still be unrealistic, not least as all 27 current EU members have to ratify any accession.

EU GOVERNMENTS UNCONVINCED BY COMMISSION OVERTURES

Kachka suggested Ukraine could at least sign an accession treaty with the EU next year, even if ratification and other steps might take longer to implement. But analysts and diplomats see little appetite for such bold moves, including von

der Leyen's mooted revamp, known as "reverse enlargement" as it turns the process on its head by letting a country join before it has met all the current criteria.

"The growing support for populist and anti-enlargement parties in several capitals makes governments cautious about being seen to accelerate a process they have not yet built public consent for," said Anastasia Pociumban, a research fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations. "The concept of reverse enlargement is dead," said one EU diplomat. "There is also no support for giving a concrete accession date."

A Western European official said: "Ukraine is just not ready and has rampant corruption." Von der Leyen tried to temper expectations in Ukraine last week. She told Zelenskiy publicly that "dates by themselves are not possible" even as she praised the country's reforms in the midst of war.

COMMISSION EXPECTED TO CONTINUE PUSHING FOR KYIV

Nevertheless, the Commission is expected to continue to push for ways to get Kyiv into the EU in the next few years, arguing that membership would strengthen the bloc militarily amid fears Moscow may attack an EU member next. Some say a model of gradual integration, whereby aspiring members take part in more and more EU programmes and meetings before joining the club, may be more feasible. "I think a full accession within the next few years remains unlikely," Corina Stratulat, associate director at the European Policy Centre, said of Ukraine's prospects.

"What seems more likely to happen instead is accelerated integration - single market access, energy, digital, transport - phased participation in EU programmes and policies."

Pakistanis at remote border describe scramble to leave Iran

AFP
Taftan

Pakistani nationals hauled suitcases across the border from neighbouring Iran, describing missiles being launched and travel chaos as they scrambled to leave the country that the US and Israel hit with strikes over the weekend.

AFP journalists saw a steady trickle of people passing through large metal gates at the remote border crossing between Iran's Mirjaveh and Taftan in Pakistan's western Balochistan province.

Powerful explosions have rocked Iran's capital Tehran since Saturday, with embassies from countries around the world telling their citizens to leave.

"All our Pakistani brothers who were in Tehran and other cities had started to leave and were arriving at the terminal, which caused a lot of crowd pressure," 38-year-old trader Ameer Muhammad told AFP on Monday.

"Due to the crowds, there were major transport problems."

Foreign minister Ishaq Dar said in a news conference yesterday that Pakistan has three consulates



Pakistanis walk across the Taftan border as they return from Iran, in Balochistan province yesterday amid ongoing US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

working in Iran to offer support to the 35,000 citizens in the country.

Almost 800 had returned to Pakistan in recent days, he told journalists in Islamabad.

The isolated Taftan border lies around 500 kilometres (310 miles) from Balochistan's capital and largest city, Quetta.

AFP journalists saw the Iranian

flag flying at half-mast as soldiers stood guard.

Most people wheeled bulky luggage over the frontier's foot crossing, while freight lorries formed a long line.

Irshad Ahmed, a 49-year-old traveller, told AFP he was staying at a hostel in Tehran when he saw missiles being fired nearby.

"There was an army base near the hostel, and we saw many missiles being fired," he said.

"After that, we went to the Pakistani embassy so that they could evacuate us from there. They brought us here safely."

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a US-Israeli operation was a "violation" of international law.

"It is an age old convention that the Heads of State/Government should not be targeted," Sharif wrote on X.

The "people of Pakistan join the people of Iran in their hour of grief and sorrow and extend the most sincere condolences on the martyrdom" of Khamenei, he added.

A teacher at Tehran's Pakistani embassy, who gave his name as Saqib, told AFP: "Before we left, the situation was normal. The situation was not that bad."

The 38-year-old said the strikes on Tehran on Saturday "pushed us to leave the city".

"The situation became bad on Saturday night, when attacks caused precious lives to be lost," he said.

Pakistan Afghanistan border clashes intensify

Reuters
Kabul/Islamabad

Pakistani and Afghan troops clashed at multiple points along their expansive border yesterday as the UN mission for Afghanistan warned that 42 civilians in the country had been killed so far in the six-day conflict.

The South Asian allies-turned-foes have engaged in their worst fighting in years following Pakistani air strikes on major Afghan cities last week, raising fears of another protracted conflict in a region also contending with US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

Islamabad has launched air-to-ground missiles at Taliban military sites over the last week, and even directly targeted the Taliban government in unprecedented, sustained strikes over allegations it harbours militants executing attacks on Pakistan from its soil. The Taliban has denied aiding militant groups.

Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said yesterday that successful air strikes were conducted on the Bagram air base north of Kabul, which served as a key American command centre through the 20-year Afghan war.

"We had intelligence that

there was ammunition and critical equipment being used by terrorists to fight the Pakistan army along the border as well as by Afghan Taliban troops," Tarar told Reuters in the first official Pakistani acknowledgement of the strikes.

Afghan police had said on Sunday that the attack on Bagram was repelled by anti-aircraft guns.

A senior Pakistani security source said the air strikes would continue until Afghanistan took concrete steps to deal with militants using its territory.

If such steps were not taken, Pakistan could target the Taliban's top leadership, the source said.

Reports of fighting along the 2,600-km (1,615-mile) border have ebbed and flowed over the six-day conflict.

Yesterday, Afghanistan's defence ministry said Taliban forces had captured a Pakistani military post in the Kandahar region while Pakistan's information ministry reported fighting at more than two dozen locations.

Pakistani security sources said they had destroyed a weapons storage facility in Jalalabad and a military base in Nangarhar province. Both countries said they have inflicted heavy losses on the other side without providing evidence.

France sending aircraft carrier to Mediterranean, says Macron

AFP
Nicosia

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday said France was sending an aircraft carrier to the Mediterranean in response to the widening conflict in the Middle East following US-Israeli air strikes on Iran.

"I have ordered the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, its air assets, and its escort of frigates to set course for the Mediterranean," he said in a televised speech.

France will deploy anti-missile and anti-drone systems to Cyprus, the Mediterranean island's government said yesterday, following a drone attack on a British base.

After four Greek F-16 fighter jets arrived on the island and two Greek frigates set sail for Cypriot waters, government spokesman Konstantinos Letymbiotis said Cyprus had secured additional backing from key EU partners.

"France's assistance has been finalised and concerns a frigate equipped with anti-ballistic and anti-drone systems," he said.

Contacted by AFP, the French army declined to comment.

Letymbiotis added that "Germany's initial response is positive and we await its official, final confirmation".

A British Royal Air Force (RAF) base in Cyprus was attacked early Monday by Iranian-made drones, one of which hit the run-

way, according to officials.

On Sunday, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced that he had agreed to a US request to use British military bases for a "specific and limited defensive purpose".

But in comments to parliament on Monday, he said this would not include bases on the Mediterranean island.

Nicosia has said it would seek guarantees that British bases in Cyprus would only be used for humanitarian purposes.

Cyprus "neither participated nor will participate in any military operation", Letymbiotis said, adding that Nicosia's role remained "strictly humanitarian".

Belgium sets €10mn bond for seized Russian 'shadow fleet' tanker

AFP
Brussels

A suspected Russian "shadow fleet" oil tanker seized by Belgium is being held on a 10-million-euro (\$12mn) bond, after inspections revealed infractions, Brussels said yesterday.

The *Ethera*, which Belgium says is part of a flotilla of ageing vessels Moscow uses to avoid Western sanctions, was seized by Belgian special forces in the North Sea on Sunday.

Investigations carried out after it was brought to the port of Zeebrugge confirmed it had been sailing under a false Guinean flag, the Belgian government said.

In total inspectors found 45 infractions, including technical defects, leading to the ship being impounded, it added.

The tanker's Russian captain and its 20-strong crew were ordered to remain on board.

"The ship will only leave the port once it is compliant and the deposit has been paid," said Belgium's mobility minister Jean-Luc Crucke.

Most of the crew was of Indian origin, with three Georgians and one Indonesian national among the seven officers on board, the government said.



The seized 'Ethera' vessel is docked at the naval base in Zeebrugge, Belgium.

Russia has used its so-called "shadow fleet" of tankers of opaque ownership to get around restrictions on its lucrative crude exports imposed over its 2022 all-out invasion of Ukraine.

The Belgian defence ministry said the seized vessel was on the European Union's sanctions list. The EU has blacklisted hundreds of vessels in a bid to sap Moscow's war chest.

"Our government is taking decisive action against ships from the shadow fleet," said Belgian defence minister Theo Francken.

"With this operation, we are enforcing European sanctions, protecting the North Sea, and limiting the financing of the Rus-

sian war against Ukraine."

In February, it was revealed that two employees of a Russian private security company were aboard another suspected Russian "shadow fleet" tanker seized by France in September.

The two men were employed by Moran Security Group, a Russian private security company, and were tasked with monitoring the crew and gathering intelligence, a source with knowledge of the matter told AFP.

French forces boarded another suspected Russian tanker, the *Grinch*, in January. But the ship was later let go after its owner paid a multi-million-euro fine.

German govt, tour operators rush to rescue stranded tourists

AFP
Frankfurt

The German government and tour operators rushed yesterday to fly back thousands of tourists stranded in the war-torn Gulf region, many stuck on cruise ships.

Travellers from around the world have had their plans disrupted amid Iran's strikes on Gulf states following US-Israeli attacks.

The conflict has grounded most regular flights and shut shipping lanes, causing the biggest disruption to global travel since the Covid pandemic.

Some 30,000 Germans are estimated to be affected by the travel chaos - among them 7,000 passengers and crew stuck aboard two TUI cruise ships anchored off the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl told Welt TV a flight will leave Oman today to bring home "the elderly, the sick, the infirm, pregnant women and children" from the region.

Lufthansa confirmed it would operate the government-chartered flight from Muscat.

Tour operator TUI said it was asking regional airlines to fly home tourists booked on its holidays.

One cruise passenger, Bianka Noeske, 55, told AFP it was "bizarre and increasingly real" to see incoming drones being intercepted in the night sky above Abu Dhabi.



An Emirates plane with German tourists evacuated from the Middle East arrives from Dubai, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, at the airport in Frankfurt, Germany, yesterday.

Since the outbreak of the war on Saturday, she has been stuck on TUI's cruise ship *Mein Schiff 4* with her husband and their three children.

"The shipping company immediately called us back onto the ship," said the human resources manager.

"On board, we try to maintain a normal life," she said, adding that she feels safe, "even if at night the atmosphere is tense".

TUI has said it was organising flights with carriers including Etihad, Emirates and Qatar Airways.

"Repatriation is our responsibility, which we take very seriously," TUI boss Sebastian Ebel told public broadcaster ZDF.

Another German tour operator, Dertour, said some of its customers had been flown to Frankfurt from Dubai yesterday and another flight from Abu Dhabi was due to land in the evening.

More flights would be arranged as long as "the safety of passengers and crews can be guaranteed", the operator said.

Wadepuhl voiced confidence that in the next few days "the vast majority of German tourists will finally be able to return to Germany".

Swiss cruise operator MSC Cruises also said it was working with airlines, embassies and foreign ministries to ensure the return of customers stuck in Dubai.

Russia urges Iran to protect civilians across Middle East

AFP
Moscow

Russian top diplomat Sergei Lavrov yesterday urged ally Iran to ensure safety of civilians across the Middle East during a call with Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi, Moscow's Foreign Ministry said.

The call came after President Vladimir Putin agreed to relay to Tehran the security concerns of several Gulf states, which have come under Iranian retaliatory fire in recent days.

Facing isolation from the West after sending troops to Ukraine, Putin has looked to strengthen partnerships in the Middle East, keeping close relations both with Iran and the Gulf monarchies.

During the phone call with Araghchi, Lavrov stressed the need to "ensure the safety of the civilian population and civil infrastructure in all countries of the region", according to the Russian readout.

The minister also "confirmed a fundamental position in favour of de-escalating the situation and rejecting the use of force".

The US and Israeli attacks on

Iran which began on Saturday, followed by Iranian counterattacks on Gulf states and Israel, have prompted several countries to shut their airspace.

The shutdowns have caused thousands of flight cancellations across Gulf nations - popular holiday destinations for Russian tourists - in what has become the biggest disruption to global travel since the Covid pandemic.

Russia's association of tour operators estimates that around 50,000 Russian tourists may now be stranded in the United Arab Emirates.

Four dead and two missing in Spain after coastal path collapses

A wooden coastal walkway connecting two cliffs outside the northern Spanish city of Santander collapsed yesterday killing four young people and leaving two missing, authorities said. Spain's maritime rescue service said on X that the victims fell into the sea at the rocky beach of El Bocal, with four bodies recovered, two missing and one person rescued.

"They had walked on a wooden footbridge that

linked two small cliffs and that footbridge collapsed," Santander's mayor Gema Igual told reporters at the scene.

"A group of seven youngsters who had come to enjoy nature found themselves in this accident," she said, confirming the number of dead and missing.

The seventh person was in hospital with "apparent hypothermia", Igual added. (AFP)

A Georgian national suspected of spying at a naval base used by US forces on the island of Crete was jailed for two years yesterday, Greek news agency ANA reported.

The Greek court convicted the 36-year-old of illegal entering Greece under a fast-track procedure that allows the authorities to continue investigating the more serious offence.

The man, who was arrested on Monday evening at Athens

airport according to public broadcaster ERT, had told the court that he was just a truck driver and had not spied on the Souda naval base.

Investigators found images of the base on his mobile phone and they are probing whether he also recorded movements of the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's biggest aircraft carrier, which passed through Souda at the end of February.

The man, a Georgian of Azerbaijani origin, arrived in

Greece on 3 February and went straight to Chania, where he rented a room overlooking Souda Bay, ANA said.

In June, an Azerbaijani national was arrested in Crete and placed in pre-trial detention on suspicion of espionage after being found with photos of the Souda base.

The Souda naval base is home to roughly 1,000 people, including military personnel, US civilian employees, local employees and contractors. (AFP)



New WCM-Q course addresses evolving healthcare landscape

The Institute for Population Health (IPH) at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) recently launched a certificate course to support healthcare professionals in adapting to the evolving health and well-being landscape. Titled 'Smart Health for a Changing World: Trends and Tools', the three-day course was inaugurated by Dr Javaid Sheikh, dean of WCM-Q, in the presence of more than 20 registered attendees from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and WCM-Q faculty.

The course provides integrated knowledge that connects traditional healthcare and public health principles with emerging technologies and global health trends. It explores the evolving healthcare landscape through foundational principles of health and disease, disease burden, evidence-based practice, innovations and emerging trends such as lifestyle medicine, artificial intelligence and planetary health.

The programme was delivered through seminars, didactic lectures, interactive discussions and online learning to encourage a proactive, learner-centred approach and critical thinking. Course directors and speakers from WCM-Q included Dr Ravinder Mamtani, professor of population health sciences and vice dean for population health



and lifestyle medicine, and professor of medicine at the Center for Global Health; and Dr Sohaila Cheema, associate professor of clinical population health sciences and assistant dean for the IPH.

They were joined by additional faculty members from WCM-Q, including Dr Alaa Abd-Alrazaq, assistant professor; Dr Amit Abraham, assistant professor of clinical population health sciences and assistant director of the IPH; Dr Arfan Ahmed, assistant professor of research in population health sciences at the AI Center for Precision Health; Dr Karima Chaabna, assistant professor of clinical population health sciences and manager of population health research at the IPH; Dr Maha Elnashar, lecturer in population health sciences and director of the Center for Cultural Competence in Healthcare at the IPH; Dr Raji Anand, senior administrative manager at the IPH;

and Dr Sonia Chaabane, instructor in population health sciences and senior specialist in population health research at the IPH.

Dr Mamtani said: "As health systems face increasing complexity, from emerging diseases to technological disruption, there is a critical need for upskilling healthcare professionals in areas that bridge traditional public health and healthcare principles with modern innovations. This helps ensure health professionals are equipped to adapt to the rapidly evolving healthcare environment."

"The course fosters a holistic and forward-thinking mindset essential for practice in today's dynamic health environment. It enables participants to recognise the full array of factors that affect the health of communities and learn how better health outcomes can be achieved," Dr Cheema added.

City caught in light drizzle



Rain covered the streets of Doha on Tuesday night, turning traffic lights into soft lines of colour and brake lights into bright red dots. Cars moved slowly through the drizzle, while two men walked side by side on the sidewalk under warm streetlights. Raindrops blurred shop signs and traffic signals, and the wet road reflected every light. Despite the ongoing regional tension, the city kept its calm. Engines hummed, wipers swept back and forth, and people carried on with their routines. There was traffic, but also patience. The rain seemed to quiet the noise, as if the city was taking a steady breath. In the glow of the lamps and the steady fall of rain, Doha felt watchful yet composed, moving forward, careful but unshaken.

PICTURE: Thajudheen

Aspetar launches scientific guideline to keep athletes at peak performance

Aspetar, Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, has launched a series of comprehensive scientific guidelines to assist athletes throughout the holy month of Ramadan – a period that coincides this year with the postponement or cancellation of several sports events in the region.

According to Aspetar, this unique phase offers an opportunity to reset training programmes and enhance both physical and mental readiness, based on the latest scientific research findings. Dr Omar al-Sairafi, sports medicine specialist at Aspetar, said: "Every day, we see athletes at our clinics reporting symptoms linked to overuse and fatigue. While proper management generally requires adjusting physical exertion and temporarily reducing workload, this is often not feasible due to crowded competition schedules. Therefore, professional athletes should view these unforeseen breaks as rare opportunities for recovery – a chance to reduce physical strain while maintaining top levels of fitness and readiness."

Dr Montassar Tabben, sports science researcher at Aspetar, explained that maintaining readiness relies on an "Smart management" of training loads aligned with changes in sleep, nutrition, and hydration patterns. Many athletes prefer to perform high-intensity training sessions after Iftar, when energy and hydration levels are restored, whereas lighter skill, flexibility, or recovery sessions are best scheduled closer to fasting hours to minimize fatigue and dehydration risks.

Aspetar experts advise distributing meals and fluids gradually between iftar and suhoor, prioritising balanced meals rich in complex carbohydrates for energy, adequate protein to promote muscle recovery, and fruits and vegetables to replenish micronutrients. A progressive hydration plan, rather than consuming large volumes at once, is also recommended – in-



cluding fluids with electrolytes when appropriate.

Aspetar emphasises that recovery and rest are key factors for performance, noting that the greatest challenge during Ramadan is often not fasting itself but disrupted sleep quality. Regular short naps, limiting screen exposure in the evening, and maintaining consistent wake-up times can help offset the effects of sleep loss. Recovery routines such as cool-down exercises, stretching, muscle massage, and monitoring signs of fatigue (like sleep quality, muscle soreness, or general tiredness) are strongly encouraged.

With ongoing changes in the regional sports calendar, psychological stability has become a decisive factor in athletic performance. Over 3,000 athletes from more than 50 countries participated in the world's largest study on training, nutrition, and mental health during Ramadan, conducted by an international research team in collaboration with Aspetar. Dr Karim Khaladi, clinical and sport psychologist at Aspetar, commented: "Psychological support and managing expectations enhance athletes' confidence and consistency in training. From a practical

standpoint, postponed competitions can offer valuable time for mental preparation and the development of stress management skills – areas that we emphasize within Aspetar's psychological support programmes."

Regional experience has shown that teams across the Middle East demonstrate exceptional adaptability to Ramadan conditions and fluctuating competition schedules. Hybrid training models – combining light daytime sessions with high-intensity evening workouts – along with proper nutrition and hydration, have proven highly effective.

Performance data from the Qatar Stars League indicates that players can train and compete during Ramadan without significant declines in performance. Minor decreases in running distances fall within the normal range of match-to-match variation, confirming that athletes in predominantly Muslim environments can effectively adapt to fasting.

These findings reinforce Aspetar's belief that athletes in the region can transform competition breaks into opportunities for advancement – improving fitness levels, enhancing readiness, and developing long-term performance strategies.

A tale from a bygone era: Embroidered cloth bags and an early social lesson

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

On the 14th night of Ramadan, the voices of children fill the streets of Qatar, chanting Garangao songs. Carrying embroidered cloth bags, they knock on doors asking for sweets and nuts. The scene seems simple, but at its core, it's an early social lesson.

In the past, homes would prepare whatever they had: nuts, dates, and sometimes sugar cubes. Children would visit every house in the neighbourhood, without distinction between rich and poor; everyone participated, and everyone rejoiced. The occasion reinforced the idea of belonging; you are not an isolated individual, but part of a neighbourhood that knows you by name. The children's chants are a collective expression of joy.

Studies on Qatari folklore indicate that such occasions strengthen social bonds and create an early shared memory among members of the community. The child who knocks on their neighbour's door today will grow up familiar with their place.

Today, the scene has changed in its details. The bags now feature modern designs, the sweets are imported and carefully packaged, and some residential complexes centrally organise the event. Occasionally, larger events are held under the auspices of institutions, where gifts are distributed on a wider scale. However, the essence



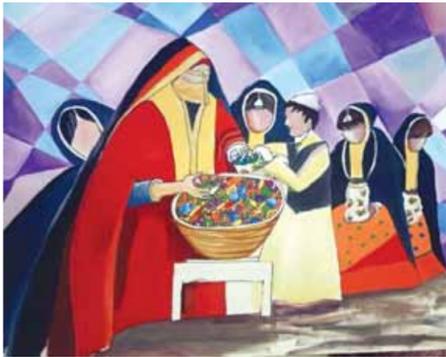
Children sharing nuts and sweets

remains constant: children go out together, doors open, and smiles are exchanged.

Garangao, an event revived by schools and cultural centres, preserves popular memory. Herein lies the clear expansion: what was once a simple, spontaneous tradition has become part of a cultural identity that is carefully preserved and passed down to future generations. The beauty lies in the fact that today's child, even amidst skyscrapers and wide boulevards, still feels on that night that they belong to a circle larger than their home. The bag of sweets is not the real prize; the real pleasure is the feeling that the community opens its doors to them.

A Qatari painting: Garangao in Gulf memory

In this painting by Qatari artist Mariam al-Mulla, we are presented with a visual treatment of a deeply rooted social custom in Gulf memory: Garangao, a moment of collective joy and a living cultural tradition. The work depicts a woman in luxurious traditional dress at the centre of the scene, distributing bags of Garangao treats to children. She is the focal point, the embodiment of giving, and the keeper of popular memory. The children stand in line, awaiting their share, in a scene that encapsulates the meaning of participation and collective joy. The painting belongs to a distinctly decorative expressionist style, relying on simplifying features and eliminating fine facial details, thus transforming the figures into cultural symbols rather than individual portraits or defined shapes with clear lines and pure colour fields, devoid of realistic gradation.



Garangao with a healthy twist: Blending heritage, joy and responsibility

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Garangao night stands among the most cherished Ramadan traditions in Qatar. On this festive evening, children don their traditional attire, roam from house to house singing folk songs, and gather nuts and sweets in colourful bags, filling neighbourhoods with laughter and warmth. Yet behind the joy lies a health consideration that cannot be ignored, especially for children living with diabetes.

In an exclusive interview, renowned therapeutic and community nutrition consultant Moudhi al-Hajri emphasised that celebration and health are not mutually exclusive. "Diabetes doesn't mean deprivation; rather, it means smart management of the diet and close monitoring. Children with diabetes can enjoy Garangao just like everyone else, provided they pay attention to the type and number of sugars they consume, adhere to their treatment plan, and monitor their blood sugar levels."

According to al-Hajri, Garangao requires special attention. Traditional Ga-

rangao bags often contain large quantities of high-sugar sweets, which may trigger sudden spikes in blood glucose levels if consumed without regulation. The solution, she suggests, is not to eliminate the joy, but to redefine it.

Rethinking the Garangao Bag

Al-Hajri advocates transforming Garangao into a balanced experience that preserves the spirit of celebration while promoting healthier habits. She recommends several practical steps: First, replace sweets with healthier options. Second: Practice portion control. Children should avoid consuming all sweets at once. Instead, treats can be distributed over several days, with careful carbohydrate counting, particularly for those using insulin. Third: Coordinate with family. Sweets are best consumed after iftar, with blood sugar levels closely monitored and portion sizes adjusted according to medical advice. Fourth: Add non-food alternatives.

A "Healthy Garangao" bag can include small toys, stickers, colouring supplies, symbolic gifts, and even uplifting phrases such as: "Healthy Garangao, let's celebrate without harm."



Consultant Moudhi al-Hajri.

Beyond the family unit, al-Hajri underscores the community's role in supporting children with diabetes. Awareness should replace pity, and understanding should take precedence over isolation. "Children with diabetes should also be educated in a positive way that boosts their self-confidence, telling them that

their bodies are special and need special care to stay strong."

She adds, "When we promote the concept of 'Healthy Garangao,' we are not only protecting children with diabetes, but also establishing a balanced nutritional culture for all children and linking heritage with health responsibility". After all, the essence of Garangao lies not in sugar consumption, but in shared laughter, family gatherings, and the echo of traditional songs.

The coincidence of a child's first day of fasting with Garangao night presents a unique educational opportunity, blending religious values, family pride, and cultural heritage into one meaningful celebration.

Al-Hajri explains: "Celebrating children's fasting on Garangao night reinforces family bonds and rekindles the spirit of the religious occasion. It also instils in children authentic Islamic values such as patience, perseverance, and discipline."

For many families, a child's first fast becomes more than an act of worship; it becomes a milestone. Pride, encouragement, and symbolic rewards can turn the experience into a cherished memory

that strengthens both faith and family ties.

Ramadan, al-Hajri notes, is an annual opportunity to cultivate these values. "The month of Ramadan presents an ideal annual opportunity to reinforce these values, as it can be used to accustom children to fasting, prayer, and reading the Qur'an, while cultivating good morals, respect for time, and organisation. It is preferable to encourage children in a gentle and motivating manner, explaining the significance of fasting and its spiritual and health benefits, so they embrace it with love and conviction."

At the same time, balance remains essential. "Conversely, children should not be prevented from fasting out of excessive concern for their health. Instead, they can be trained gradually in a way that suits their age and abilities, while ensuring their nutrition and rest are monitored". Ultimately, transforming Garangao into a celebration of both health and spiritual growth offers more than a festive evening. It builds a generation connected to its faith, conscious of its well-being, and proud of its heritage, creating Ramadan memories that are as safe as they are joyful.