



Qatar Insurance
Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

9%
QAR 9.9B

Net Profit Before the Impact of Pillar Two Taxes

19%
QAR 874M

Net Profit Profit attributable to QIC shareholders

9%
QAR 791M

Earnings Per Share:

10%
QAR 0.188

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Uzbek president backs Qatar in call with Amir

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call yesterday from Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. He discussed the situation in Qatar and affirmed his country's full solidarity and support for all efforts aimed at enhancing its security and stability. The president also expressed Uzbekistan's condemnation of the Iranian aggression, stressing that such attacks contravene the principles of good neighbourliness, international law, and the Charter of the United Nations. He expressed his appreciation to His Highness the Amir for his concern for Uzbek citizens in Qatar and ensuring their safety. His Highness the Amir affirmed that they receive full care and attention and remain safe under the protection provided by the State to all those living on its territory. Both sides stressed the importance of de-escalation and restraint, prioritising dialogue and diplomatic solutions, and resolving disputes peacefully to preserve regional security and safeguard the interests of its peoples. (QNA)

QatarEnergy in force majeure on LNG supplies

QatarEnergy announced yesterday that it has declared force majeure – a legal concept that excuses a party from fulfilling their contractual obligations when extraordinary events beyond their control make performance impossible – to affected buyers following its earlier decision to halt production of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and associated products. In a statement, QatarEnergy said it values its relationships with all stakeholders and will continue to provide updates as further information becomes available. (QNA)

Public advised not to park near power stations

The Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) yesterday urged the public to refrain from parking vehicles in front of or near electricity transmission and distribution stations, citing their sensitivity and strategic importance as vital state facilities. In a statement, Kahramaa stressed that keeping the entrances to and surrounding areas of these stations clear at all times is essential to enable operation, maintenance and emergency teams to access sites immediately when needed without obstruction.

PM rejects Iranian claims attacks not aimed at Qatar

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani has rejected Iranian claims that recent missile attacks were not aimed at Qatar, saying the evidence on the ground showed otherwise.

This came during a phone call HE Sheikh Mohammed received yesterday from Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi.

Araghchi said the missile strikes were directed at American interests and were not intended to target the Gulf state. Yet, the prime minister "categorically rejected" that assertion, citing the civilian and residential areas inside the country struck by the attacks. He said the areas affected included the vicinity of Hamad International Airport as well as vital infrastructure and industrial zones, including facilities linked to liquefied natural gas production. The PM described the strikes as a "flagrant violation" of Qatar's sovereignty and of international law. He added the attacks were not limited to missiles, but were ongoing through drones as well as aircraft that had entered Qatari airspace and were intercepted by the country's armed forces.

He added that these Iranian actions reflected "an escalatory approach" and did not indicate any genuine desire for de-escalation or resolution, accusing Tehran of seeking to harm its neighbours and draw them into a war "that is not theirs". To Page 2



Qatar intercepts 10 drones, 2 cruise missiles

The Ministry of Defence yesterday announced that Qatar was targeted at dawn yesterday by 10 drones and two cruise missiles launched from Iran, all of which were successfully intercepted by Qatar's armed forces. The Qatar Amiri Air Defence Forces intercepted six drones, while the Qatar Amiri Air Force intercepted two drones and two cruise missiles. The Qatar Amiri Naval Forces intercepted the remaining two drones. In a press release, the ministry affirmed that Qatar Armed Forces possess the full capabilities and resources to safeguard the country's sovereignty and territory and to respond firmly to any external threat. (QNA)

Qatar keeps business moving: 500+ digital services accessible

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

THE Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has reaffirmed its commitment to seamless, paperless governance by making over 500 services available through its website and mobile app – allowing customers and business owners to handle transactions entirely online, from anywhere, at any time. Announced via the ministry's official X account, the digital platform operates continuously to ensure business activities are never disrupted, reducing reliance on in-person visits and cutting through bureaucratic red tape. The move is part of a much larger

digital push that has been gathering pace in recent years. MoCI has been rolling out new e-services as part of its 2024-2030 strategy, which targets 100% digital transformation of government services – a goal directly tied to the Qatar National Vision 2030. Under this strategy, the ministry had announced plans to launch 38 new electronic services by the end of 2025, with the aim of accelerating the national economy and enhancing Qatar's business environment. The scope of what's now available online is wide-ranging. Newly introduced digital services cover regulatory and licensing procedures including promotional prize draws, seasonal sales permits, loyalty program licensing, and brokerage services. To Page 2

Amir lauds Armed Forces during Air Operations Center inspection



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani visited the Air Operations Center yesterday. During the visit, His Highness the Amir inspected the high level of readiness of the military units and their preparedness, and listened to a briefing on the progress of operations and the measures taken to enhance the security of vital facilities and protect the airspace and territorial waters, within the framework of preserving the

security and stability of the homeland. His Highness praised the efforts exerted by the members of the Qatari Armed Forces and their high competence in carrying out their duties, stressing the importance of continuing to raise levels of readiness and co-ordination in a manner that ensures the protection of the state and the safeguarding of its security and the safety of its citizens and residents on its land. (QNA) Page 2

Cabinet hails united front under Amir's leadership

By Tawfik Lamary
Staff Reporter

GUIDED by the steadfast leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Qatar has demonstrated remarkable unity, discipline, and preparedness in the face of repeated Iranian aggression. Chairing the Cabinet's regular session at the Amiri Diwan yesterday, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani led ministers in affirming the country's collective strength under the Amir's direction. The Cabinet praised the Qatar Armed Forces for their decisive and professional action in countering successive Iranian attacks targeting several regions across the country. The ministers commended the

forces' exceptional readiness, co-ordination with security and civil authorities, and their unwavering commitment to safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Cabinet lauded the Ministry of Interior and all relevant agencies for their round-the-clock efforts to maintain public safety, ensure service continuity, and monitor the evolving security situation.

Reiterating Qatar's categorical condemnation of the Iranian assault, the Cabinet described the attack as a flagrant violation of sovereignty and a direct act of aggression inconsistent with the principles of good neighbourliness. It reaffirmed Qatar's right to respond under international law and defend its national interests, while maintaining its principled stance in favour of dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. The ministers also extended Qatar's solidarity with

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Jordan – nations that were likewise targeted – affirming support for any measures they take to safeguard their stability.

The Cabinet expressed deep appreciation to friendly and allied nations for their firm solidarity and strong condemnation of the attacks, acknowledging their genuine concern for Qatar's security and sovereignty.

Briefing the session, HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani reported on the success of ongoing operations. He confirmed that the country's air defence systems, fighter aircraft, and early warning mechanisms are functioning at peak capacity, underlining the armed forces' complete capability to repel external threats and protect Qatar's skies and terrain. To Page 2



Official WhatsApp channel launched with verified info



GT Report
Doha

THE Government Communications Office (GCO) has launched its official WhatsApp channel to strengthen direct communication with the public and provide faster access to verified government news and updates.

According to the GCO, the channel will serve as an official and verified platform for disseminating government communications issued by entities across the country. The initiative is designed to make it easier for residents and citizens to access timely, accurate

information from official sources.

Through the new channel, the GCO will share approved official statements, urgent updates, clarifications on circulating information, and direct links to relevant authorities. The platform is expected to help the public quickly access reliable updates and reduce the spread of misinformation.

The GCO stressed that Qatar is closely monitoring ongoing developments, noting that the security and safety of everyone in the country remain a top priority. It added that relevant authorities continue to carry out their duties efficiently and in full co-ordination.

In light of regional developments, government entities are continuing their ef-

forts to ensure public safety and the uninterrupted delivery of services. Authorities have also emphasised the importance of following official instructions and obtaining information only from approved and credible sources.

The GCO reiterated its commitment to sharing verified information and addressing rumours and misinformation, particularly amid the current regional situation. It urged the public to rely exclusively on official sources for accurate updates.

The office also underlined that it will continue to monitor regional developments closely while encouraging the public to refrain from circulating rumours or unverified reports.

RAMADAN THOUGHT

Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world. But the good righteous deeds, that last, are better with your Lord for rewards and better in respect of hope. (Qur'an 18:46)

Prayer times
Fajr...4:36; Zuhr...1:45; Asr...3:07; Maghrib...5:41; Isha...7:11

Fasting times
Iftar today 5:41pm
Imsak tomorrow 4:25am

Interior ministry urges avoiding accident sites and filming

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has warned against gathering or being present at accident sites, filming them, or sharing videos related to ongoing developments, in compliance with regulations and laws and to avoid legal repercussions. The ministry also stressed that all pieces of information must be obtained from official sources in light of current developments. In a post on X, the ministry said that the circulation of rumours would subject its perpetrators to legal accountability. It also



highlighted the importance of reassuring children in light of the exceptional circumstances, calling on parents to ensure their children adhere to the necessary safety measures and to provide them with simplified pieces of information suitable for their age.

DON'T RESPOND TO SUSPICIOUS CALLS, MESSAGES

To prevent cybercrime, the MoI urged the public not to respond to suspicious calls or messages that exploit the current circumstances by falsely claiming affiliation with official institutions or entities in the State. In a post on its official X account, the ministry advised the public to avoid opening any attached links or disclosing personal data. (QNA)

PM receives phone calls from world leaders

HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received phone calls yesterday from Prime Minister of Luxembourg Luc Frieden and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan Toshimitsu Motegi.

During the call, 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 disputes peacefully.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs affirmed during the call that the Iranian attack on Qatari territory constitutes a flagrant violation of its national sovereignty, contradicts the principles of good neighbourliness, and cannot be accepted under any justification or pretext. In this context, he pointed out that Qatar has always been keen to distance itself from regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue between the Iranian side and the international community. However, he added, 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 were built. His Excellency also stressed the necessity of an immediate cessation of all escalatory actions, a return to the negotiating table, prioritising reason and



wisdom, and working to contain the crisis in a way that preserves the security of the region.

The Prime Minister of Luxembourg called on all parties to de-escalate, exercise reason, and return to negotiations and diplomatic means to avoid further chaos in the region. The Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs voiced Japan's concern over the developments in the region, urging all parties to heed the voice of reason and return to negotiations and diplomatic means. (QNA)

Germany expresses its solidarity with Qatar in call with al-Misnad

HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad received a phone call from Federal Minister for Economic Co-operation and Development of Germany Reem Alabali.

The call discussed the military escalation developments in the region and their serious consequences for regional and global security and stability, as well as avenues for resolving disputes through peaceful means.

HE the Minister confirmed, during the call, that the Iranian assault on Qatari territory is a flagrant violation of its national sovereignty and runs contrary to the principle of good neighbourliness and can never be accepted under any justification or pretext. She pointed out that Qatar has always been committed



HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser al-Misnad.

to desisting itself from regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue between the Iranian side 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 countries were built, she said.

She stressed the critical need for an immediate halt to any escalatory acts, a return to the dialogue table, prioritising the language of reason and judiciousness, and working to contain the crisis to protect regional security.

For her part, Alabali expressed Germany's condemnation of the Iranian attack on Qatari territory as a brazen violation of Qatar's sovereignty, airspace, international law, and the UN charter. She underlined that Germany stands in solidarity with Qatar. In addition, Alabali expressed her country's appreciation to Qatar for its attention to German citizens on Qatari territory. (QNA)

PHCC confirms all health centres operating normally

Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has reiterated that all health centres continue to operate as normal, providing a full range of primary healthcare services and all scheduled appointments and specialist clinics are running as usual.

Patients may book, cancel or reschedule appointments by calling 107 (available during standard operating hours). PHCC's specialist clinics are operating as scheduled, including cardiology, ophthalmology, ENT, dermatology, paediatrics and other specialised services delivered within the primary care setting. Patients continue to receive co-ordinated care through their registered health centres.

PHCC provides 24-hour Urgent Care Services for registered patients with non-life-threatening conditions such as minor

burns, sprains, severe headaches or earaches, high fever, dehydration and dizziness. Patients requiring higher-level care are stabilised and transferred via Emergency Medical Services to Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC).

24-hour Urgent Care is available at 14 health centres: Rawdat Al Khail; Gharrafat Al Rayyan; Al Kaaban; Al Sheehaniya; Al Ruwais; Muaiter; Abu Baker Al Siddiq; Umm Slal; Al Mashaf; Al Sadi; Al Karaana; Leabaib; Al Wajbah; and Thumama.

Patients can access PHCC's Call Centre at 16000 for telephone or video consultations with physicians from 7am to 11pm, seven days a week, and with ophthalmologists on weekdays.

A nurse-led telephone triage service operates from 11pm to 7am, directing patients to the

most appropriate service, including PHCC's 24-hour Urgent Care Centres when needed.

Patients may request medication refills and home delivery by sending a WhatsApp message ('Hello') to their registered health centre's dedicated number (available on the PHCC website) between 8am-2pm and 4pm-10pm, Sunday to Thursday, or by calling 16000 or 107 for assistance. The service fee ranges from QR 20-30 and requires a valid health card.

PHCC's Nar'aakom mobile app enables patients to manage appointments, view health card details, renew health cards, update assigned health centres or physicians, and manage dependent accounts. The app is available in Arabic and English on iOS and Android platforms. Access requires a valid Qatar ID and Tawtheeq account.

Amir praises Qatari forces' efforts on visit to Air Operations Center



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani visited the Air Operations Center yesterday. During the visit, His Highness the Amir inspected the high level of readiness of the military units and their preparedness, and listened to a briefing on the progress of operations and the measures taken to enhance the security of vital facilities and to protect the airspace and territorial waters, within the framework of preserving the security and stability of the homeland. His Highness praised the efforts exerted by the members of the Qatari Armed Forces and their high competence in carrying out their duties, stressing the importance of continuing to raise levels of readiness and co-ordination in a manner that ensures the protection of the State and the safeguarding of its security and the safety of its citizens and residents. (QNA)

Deputy PM receives phone call from Bahrain's NSA

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani received a phone call from National Security Adviser (NSA), Royal Guard Commander and Secretary General of the Supreme

Defence Council of Bahrain Lt Gen Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad al-Khalifa. The call discussed latest security developments in the region, along with aspects of joint co-operation and co-ordination in light of the current circumstances. (QNA)



Romanian FM condemns Iranian attack on Qatar

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received a telephone call from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania Oana Toiu.

The call discussed the developments in military escalation and their menacing consequences on regional and global security and stability, as well as ways to resolve disputes through peaceful means.

HE al-Muraikhi stressed that the Iranian assault on Qatari territory amounts to a gross violation of its national sovereignty, runs

contrary to the principles of good neighbourliness, and can never be accepted under any justification or pretext.

Qatar has always been committed to refraining from regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue between the Iranian side and the international community. However, the renewal of targeting its territory doesn't indicate good faith and imperils the groundwork for understandings that overtly underpin the bilateral relationship between the two nations, he underlined.

HE al-Muraikhi further stressed the importance of the immediate cessation of any escalatory acts, returning to the negotiating table, and giving the language of reason and judiciousness overriding priority, as well as working to contain the crisis to protect the region's security.

For her part, Toiu emphasised that Romania condemns the Iranian attack on Qatari territory as a flagrant violation of Qatar's sovereignty, airspace, international law, and the UN Charter. (QNA)

Justice ministry: Over 200 e-services available round the clock

The Ministry of Justice announced the provision of more than 200 comprehensive electronic services for various legal transactions, including real estate registration and notarisation services, through its website and digital application, enabling clients to complete their transactions easily, quickly, and from anywhere. The ministry explained, in a post on its official account on the X platform yesterday, that it continues to provide its integrated digital services around the clock, supporting the continuity of services and enabling clients and business owners to complete their transactions with ease and convenience. (QNA)

PM rejects Iranian claims attacks not aimed at Qatar

From Page 1

The premier called for an immediate halt to attacks on regional states that have sought to remain outside the conflict, urging all

sides to prioritise the broader interests of their peoples.

HE stressed that Qatar has consistently favoured dialogue and diplomacy, but would respond to any violation of its sovereignty,

security or territorial integrity.

The PM emphasised that such attacks could not go unanswered, citing the country's inherent right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. (QNA)

Cabinet hails united front under Amir's leadership

From Page 1

HE Minister of Interior, Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lehwiya), and Chairman of the Civil Defence Council Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani assured the Cabinet that the internal security situation remains stable and fully under control. He highlighted the tight co-ordination between security bodies and civil agencies to protect citizens, residents, and visitors, emphasising the continuity of essential services and swift on-ground engagement by response teams.

In follow-up briefings, several ministers presented

updates on vital sectors including food security, energy, health, education, transportation, environment, and cybersecurity. The Cabinet expressed confidence in the nation's readiness across these fronts, noting the robustness of the strategic reserves of food, medicine, and basic commodities, and the smooth flow of supply chains to meet domestic needs.

Echoing the Amir's directives, the Cabinet reaffirmed that all state institutions are working in total alignment – defence and home affairs, civil and economic sectors alike – anchored by unwavering resolve to protect Qatar's sovereignty, security, and the wellbeing of its people.

Qatar keeps business moving: 500+ digital services accessible

From Page 1

This enables businesses and professionals to complete transactions electronically with greater speed and efficiency.

MoCI's Single Window platform has been central to this expansion, with 13 new services added in 2025 alone to streamline procedures and bring services closer to users.

The platform also supports investors through all phases of their business lifecycle, from acquiring

government approvals to company registrations – including the ability to form companies from outside Qatar using foreign investors' passports.

Beyond MoCI, Qatar's broader digital governance agenda is advancing on multiple fronts. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology has partnered with MoCI, Qatar Development Bank, and other national entities under the 'Scale Now' program, aimed at enabling the growth of promising Qatari companies and enhancing their global competitiveness in line with the Digital Agenda 2030.

Company fined QR1mn for consumer violation

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in a post on X, announced the administrative closure of a company for a period of one month and the imposition of a financial fine of QR1mn for violating the provisions of Article (10) of Law No. (8) of 2008 regarding consumer protection.

Qatar Airways continues flight suspension

Qatar Airways said yesterday that flights remain suspended due to the closure of the Qatari airspace. The company said on X that flights will resume once the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority announces the safe reopening of Qatari airspace. Qatar Airways called on passengers to follow the

latest developments by visiting its website www.qatarairways.com or through its mobile app. It also said that passengers in Doha should keep up with the latest alerts by visiting www.qatarairways.com/ar/travel-alerts.html, highlighting that passengers must update their contact info so they can be reached when needed. (QNA)

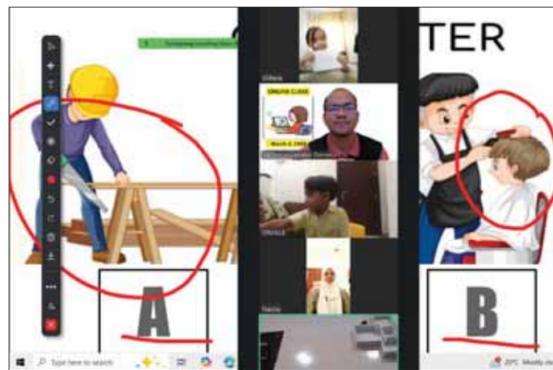
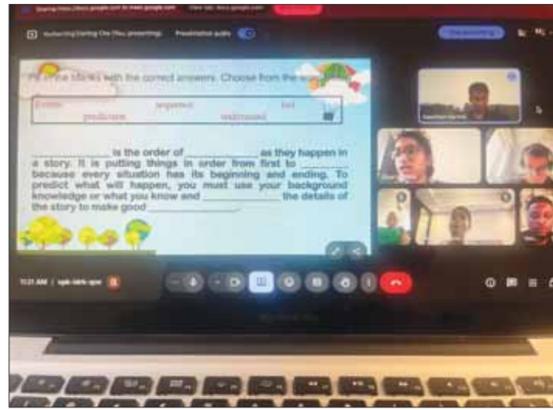
HOPE Qatar launches online learning for students in the current scenario

HOPE Qatar Centre for Persons with Disabilities has launched a fully online programme for all its students with intellectual and physical disabilities, in accordance with the directives issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE). In response to the current situation in Qatar, the centre has transitioned all special educational programmes and specialised support services to a fully online format to ensure the safety and well-being of students, their families, and staff.

All services are provided through highly coordinated, scheduled sessions, allowing students to continue their educational journey without interruption. Students are actively attending their scheduled sessions and classes, engaging regularly with their teachers, specialists, and support teachers. The involvement of parents during the sessions is also sought to ensure that students' learning is reinforced by parents even after the class sessions.

In light of the recent uncertainties in Qatar, MoEHE provided instructions and guidelines to all educational centres and schools in Qatar to use online modules. HOPE Qatar Centre swiftly transitioned its entire program to an online delivery format in compliance with and support of this directive. To maintain high-quality services, the senior leadership team of HOPE Qatar Centre also joins and attends sessions on a rotational basis to ensure that students' learning and support are delivered smoothly and effectively. These online sessions ensure that all students receive the assistance they need, and they will continue until the situation in Qatar stabilises and instructions are received from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education for resuming in-person classes.

"HOPE Qatar Centre has a strong foundation in remote



learning," said Dr Rajeev Thomas, founder and chief mentor of HOPE Qatar. "During the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the centre was the first in Qatar to launch and successfully provide all educational and specialised support services online. "More recently, during the Web Summit and the Second World Summit on Social Development 2025, hosted by the State of Qatar, students of HOPE Qatar participated in online sessions, further strengthening their familiarity with virtual learning," he added. "These experiences have ensured that students are well-prepared

for online education, and services continue smoothly without disruption".

"The initial feedback from the parents of the students has been reassuring, and they have found merit in the manner that the teachers and specialists at HOPE have swiftly adapted the entire programme to an online delivery module," said Prof Aparna Merugu the acting centre head. "HOPE Qatar Centre will continue providing remote services and online learning until further notice, in full alignment with the Ministry's directives and guidance" she added.

NCIHL: Targeting Qatari territory violates international law

The National Committee for International Humanitarian Law (NCIHL) expressed its deep concern and strong condemnation of the missile and drone attacks targeting the territory of Qatar, launched from Iran.

The committee stressed that these attacks occurred within the context of an ongoing international armed conflict involving other parties, in which Qatar is not participating.

It noted that extending military operations into the territory of a state not party to the conflict raises serious issues of international legal responsibility under both general international law and international humanitarian law.

The committee explained that such actions constitute a violation of the prohibition on the use of force enshrined in Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations, which forbids the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. It added that such operations may also engage the rules of international humanitarian law, particularly when their consequences affect the civilian population or civilian objects.

In a statement, the committee outlined a number of fundamental legal principles governing such situations, foremost among

them the principle of distinction, a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. Article 48 of Additional Protocol I of 1977 requires parties to an armed conflict to distinguish at all times between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives, and to direct military operations exclusively against military objectives.

The committee further noted that Article 52(1) of the same Protocol clearly stipulates that civilian objects must not be the object of attack. Accordingly, the committee stressed that any attack that strikes, or may strike, civilian objects or populated areas within the territory of a state not participating in the conflict raises a strong presumption of a violation of the principle of distinction and necessitates a thorough legal investigation to determine the extent to which the relevant obligations under international humanitarian law have been respected.

The committee also emphasized that indiscriminate attacks are strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law. Article 51(4) of Additional Protocol I prohibits attacks that are not directed at a specific military objective or that employ means and methods of warfare whose effects cannot be limited as required by

international humanitarian law. Furthermore, Article 51(5)(b) prohibits attacks expected to cause incidental civilian casualties or damage to civilian objects that would be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage, in accordance with the principle of proportionality.

The committee also recalled that Article 57 obliges parties to a conflict to take all feasible precautions to avoid or minimize incidental harm to civilians and civilian objects. It warned that the use of weapons with wide-area or inaccurate effects in or near populated civilian areas may constitute a serious violation of these provisions. In addition, the committee stressed that international humanitarian law strictly prohibits the intimidation of civilian populations. Article 51(2) of Additional Protocol I explicitly states that civilians shall not be the object of attack and prohibits acts or threats of violence intended primarily to spread terror among the civilian population.

The committee clarified that military actions or threats of force that generate fear and panic among civilians – even in the absence of direct casualties – may constitute a clear violation of this rule, as the protection of civilians extends to protection from deliberate intimidation. (QNA)

Qatar sends 3rd identical letter to UN, Security Council over Iranian attacks

Qatar has dispatched a third identical communication to 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 developments in the Iranian assault on its territory, which constitutes a flagrant violation of its national sovereignty and a direct compromise of its security and territorial integrity, as well as a rejected escalation that imperils the region's security and stability.

The letter was sent by HE Permanent Representative of

the State of Qatar to the UN Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani.

The document recalled the ongoing attacks targeting Qatari territory, noting that the Ministry of Defence in the State of Qatar announced on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, that, to date, a total of three cruise missiles, 101 ballistic missiles, 39 drones, and two SU24 combat jets were monitored, and that, to date, a total of three cruise missiles, 98 ballistic missiles, 24 drones, and two SU24 combat jets have been successfully intercepted.

The ministry stressed in the letter that the Qatar Armed Forces possess full capabilities and potential to protect the na-

tion's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to resolutely deter any external threat. In addition, the message highlighted that all damages and losses resulting from the attacks will be compiled by the relevant authorities, and updates will be provided as the situation develops. It added that Qatar once again strongly condemns this targeting and reserves the full right to respond in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, proportionate to the nature of the assault, in defense of its sovereignty and to protect its national security and interests. Qatar called for circulating this communication as an official Security Council document. (QNA)

Remembrance, charity and soul renewal

A person might contemplate during Ramadan upon numerous subjects. He should reflect upon his affairs, his final abode, and what is awaiting him, as regards his departure to Allah The Almighty. He can also contemplate over his morals and evil aspects, in the hope of getting rid of the latter; his acts of worship in which he was negligent and which were filled with doubts and passing thoughts, which kept him far from Allah The Almighty, and from having good private talk with Him. He can contemplate about standing in front of Him; what mends his own self and final abode, and what causes him to know and have love for his Lord The Almighty.

A believer should reflect upon the Names and Attributes of Allah; and his standing to his Lord on the Day the people would stand to the Lord of the Worlds. If one reflects upon the Names and Attributes of Allah, his living and final abode, his departure, death and grave, his resurrection and standing in front of Allah The Almighty, the evil of his own soul, and the deficiencies of his actions and provision, undoubtedly his reflection would cause him to increase in faith and refrain from disobedience.

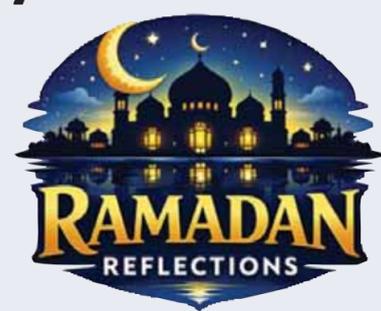
It would enable him to endure the difficulty of striving against the evil he is suffering from, remember the grave, death and accounting, and remember the terrors and standing in front of Allah The Almighty.

All of this would be a motive for him to hasten to Allah The Almighty, to keep away from sins, fear Allah The Almighty, do his best and strive to excel in worship and obedience, and persist in thinking of what returns upon him with good in his worldly life and his final abode.

As for the remembrance of Allah The Almighty, if one devotes himself to it, he will be in the same state mentioned by Allah The Almighty Who Says (what means): {So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me.} [Qur'an 2:152] Among the benefits of one's leaving his food and drink (in fasting) is to realise this state.

Is it appropriate that one realises this during his day, and when he breaks his fast, he gives up meditation and remembrance of Allah The Almighty? We mean those high ranks that represent the origin of the knowledge of and love for Allah The Almighty. Once he reflects upon the names and attributes of Allah The Almighty, he affirms the Oneness of his Lord, loves Him, fears Him, has hope in Him, supplicates Him, draws near Him, and makes his share from Allah The Almighty the most important priority for him in the world and the Hereafter.

You need this meaning today and after Ramadan,



otherwise, what would you do if your days pass and you return to your old state, and the month of Ramadan gets over without getting any of that?

The next meaning is to make substantial contributions to increasing the sustenance for the poor and needy. It is one of the traces of Taqwa (consciousness of Allah The Almighty). It is your share (of good) which you should be keen to obtain, to give out of your property to the poor and needy, for the sake of Allah The Almighty. Make hunger and thirst a reminder for you of those who have long been suffering from hunger and thirst, support your brethren and the righteous slaves of Allah The Almighty, and honor and bring about pleasure upon them.

All of this is among the best deeds mentioned by the Messenger of Allah. That was his state in Ramadan. He was the most generous of all people, and he used to be at the pinnacle of his generosity in the month of Ramadan, when Jibreel (Gabriel) would teach him the Qur'an. [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

To conclude those benefits, let us say that fasting, standing (at night in prayer), remembrance of Allah The Almighty and reduction of food, drink and desire in Ramadan break the soul's voracity, greediness, wrongness and transgression. This is one of the most important reasons that make one submit to his Lord and increase in piety.

The human soul inclines to transgression, errors, arrogance, laziness, idleness and sleep -- it holds all things dear. This is why fasting is one of the greatest means to break the destructive desires of the soul for the sake of Allah The Almighty, whereby it becomes submissive, humble, reassured and devout. It hastens to obedience and seeks forgiveness, humbles and submits itself to Allah The Almighty, and the heart and the physical organs respond to His love and obedience, and refrain from disobedience to Him. Article source: <http://www/islamweb.net/emainpage/>

Strong community awareness is effective defence against spread of negative rumours

A number of Shura Council members, legal experts and academics have urged the public to rely exclusively on official state sources for information, warning that circulating rumours or unverified news, particularly during crises, poses a direct threat to public security and social stability. They cautioned that reposting misleading or outdated content, even in good faith or to be first to share it, can create unnecessary panic and undermine public confidence.

Under Law No. 11 of 2024 (Penal Code) and Law No. 14 of 2014, publishing or republishing false information that harms national interests or public order may result in imprisonment for up to five years and fines of up to QR100,000, with more severe penalties in cases that affect state security. The law does not exempt those who merely share content, placing equal responsibility on those who initiate and those who amplify rumours.

Dr Mohamed bin Saif al-Kuwari, vice chairman of the National Hu-

man Rights Committee, described rumours as a "moral weapon" capable of weakening internal cohesion and damaging public morale, particularly given the speed at which they spread through social media platforms. However, he stressed that official platforms provide transparent, round-the-clock updates, eliminating the need to rely on anonymous sources.

Similarly, Shura Council Member Ahmed bin Hatim al-Hatimi called on the public to seek information from official sources, in particular the concerned authorities, notably the Ministry of Interior. He warned that hostile entities may exploit carelessly shared information. He stressed that societal awareness is the first line of defence against misinformation while reaffirming Qatar's security and institutional preparedness.

Dr Noura al-Sahlawi, Professor of Law at Qatar University, underscored that legal compliance is both a national and ethical duty, noting that the law criminalises

not only the creation but also the dissemination of false news.

Lawyer Dr Juma al-Kaabi added that Article 6 of Law No 14 of 2014, Promulgating the Cybercrime Prevention Law, imposes strict penalties, including prison terms and substantial fines, for using digital platforms to disseminate misleading information intended to endanger state security. As it stipulates that it is illegal to create websites to publish "incorrect news" that threatens state security or public order, punishable by up to three years in prison and/or a QR 500,000 fine. Besides, promoting or disseminating such news carries a penalty of up to one year in prison and/or a fine of up to QR 250,000.

Meanwhile, Dr Khalid al-Muhammadi, consultant psychologist, explained that rumours spread most rapidly in times of uncertainty, when fear and information overload make verification difficult. He warned that misinformation can dampen trust, enhance divisions, and destabilise society.

Ramadan, a memory breathing colour

This painting by artist Hanadi al-Darwish is to be interpreted rather than seen, because it is created on layers of meaning as well as layers of colour and texture. The work revolves around a woman as a visual and spiritual centre, but her presence is neither direct nor conventionally realistic. The facial features are almost blended into the background, as if the figure emerges from memory or returns to it. The decorative elements, inscriptions, and surrounding flowers transform her into a symbolic entity, closer to a cultural icon. Reminiscent of the old Ramadan traditions, which blend in with the nowadays cherished customs. The painting belongs to an abstract expressionist style, using collage techniques and a variety of materials. There is a clear layering of the canvas, the decorations, the handwritten inscriptions, and the areas of oxidised colour, suggesting the passage of time. The surface is not smooth, but rather vibrant with texture, as if the artist deliberately makes the physical effect part of the meaning.



More repatriation flights as Mideast airspace shutdown leaves thousands stranded

Reuters
London/Dubai/Hong Kong

Dozens of repatriation flights were due to depart from the Middle East yesterday as governments rushed to bring home tens of thousands of citizens stranded by the intensifying U.S. and Israeli conflict with Iran.

Commercial air traffic remained largely absent across much of the region, with major Gulf hubs - including Dubai, the world's busiest airport for international passengers - largely shut for a fifth straight day, in the biggest travel disruption since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first repatriation flights for Britain and France were due to leave later, while the United Arab Emirates opened safe air corridors to allow some citizens to return home. Under normal circumstances, thousands of commercial flights would depart the region each day.

Some marooned tourists and expatriates have also tried to make their own way out.

"We're doing this cautiously," said French Finance Minister Roland Lescure. The French government said several repatriation flights were planned for its citizens, around 400,000 of whom are in the region. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said yesterday he had authorized the use of military aircraft to support the evacuation of Polish citizens from the Middle East.

Britain's Foreign Office said a charter flight would leave Oman later in the evening, with priority given to vulnerable British nationals.

Emirates, the world's largest international carrier, said routes to and from Dubai remained suspended until March 7, adding that it was operating a limited schedule from Dubai International and Al Maktoum International.

The Czech Republic has organised three government evacuation flights from Oman, Jordan and Egypt, bringing home 175 people, with more operations planned. Airline Smartwings is also operating return flights from Oman and Dubai, according to the CTK news agency and a government official.

Slovakia said it had evacuated 127 people - mostly Slovak citizens, along with four Czechs and one Kazakh national - on two flights from Jordan that landed on Tuesday, and was preparing additional missions.

New Zealand said a total of 121 repatriation flights were expected to depart Dubai International Airport on Wednesday.

Qantas, meanwhile, was running extra flights to bring British people stuck in Australia back home, but would have to route them via a refuelling stop in Singapore as an alternative to the normal Middle East hubs.



A traveller speaks to the press as she arrives at the Amsterdam Airport Schiphol after returning from the Middle East, in Haarlemmermeer, Netherlands, yesterday, after many flights were cancelled after Iran began striking targets in the Gulf, including the cities' airports.



A passenger speaks to the press after disembarking from an Emirates flight coming from Dubai at Sydney Kingsford Smith International Airport, yesterday.

With airspace severely constrained, many airlines are carrying extra fuel or making additional refuelling stops to guard against sudden rerouting or longer flight paths through safer corridors. Air France said yesterday it had extended its suspension of flights to and from Dubai and Riyadh until March 6, and had also prolonged the halt on services to Tel Aviv and Beirut until March 8.

Airline shares were less volatile yesterday after double-digit percentage drops in the past

few days, which wiped tens of billions of dollars from airlines' market value. Lufthansa was up 3% at 1306 GMT, while Qantas closed down 2.7%, having lost more than 10% of its value so far this week. BA-owner IAG was up 2%, having fallen more than 13% in the past three days.

Airline executives have said that crew and pilots are now scattered across the world, complicating the process of resuming flights when airspace reopens. Soaring prices of oil will also add to carriers' costs.

Germany tells US, Israel 'force alone' won't resolve conflicts

AFP
Berlin

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius yesterday said it was "illusory" to think that conflicts in the Middle East can be resolved "by military force and unilateral action alone".

"We must emphasise this repeatedly to our American and Israeli friends, and we will continue to do so," Pistorius told the German parliament.

"History teaches us that starting wars is much easier than ending them," Pistorius said.

"This means that a robust exit strategy is needed," he said, adding: "I do not see one at present."

After visiting US President Donald Trump in Washington on Tuesday, Chancellor Friedrich Merz stressed that he wanted to see an end to the war triggered by joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran "as soon as possible".

"We are hoping that the Israeli and the American army are doing the right things to bring this to an end and to have, really, a new government in place that is coming back to peace and freedom," Merz said.

But Merz, who had criticised Iran's rulers sharply over their deadly crackdown on protests in January, also said that he and Trump "are on the same page in terms of getting this terrible rulers in Tehran away".

Kuwait says girl, 11, killed as Iran targets Gulf

AFP
Kuwait City

Kuwait's health ministry said yesterday an 11-year-old girl was killed after being hit by falling shrapnel following waves of Iranian attacks across the Gulf.

Iran's neighbours have borne the brunt of much of Tehran's response since the US and Israel launched a massive air campaign against Iran over the weekend with at least 13 people killed in the region, including seven civilians.

Washington has also said four US servicemen were killed in Kuwait.

The US embassy in Kuwait was targeted by drones, while its energy infrastructure has also been hit in recent days.

"Resuscitation was performed in the ambulance while the girl was being transported to the hospital," the health ministry said in a statement.

"Attempts continued for nearly half an hour upon arrival at Al-Amiri Hospital. However, she passed away due to her injuries," it added.

The war continued to rattle the Gulf elsewhere with stocks dropping sharply in the United Arab Emirates on the Dubai and Abu Dhabi exchanges after a two-day trading suspension.

The main Dubai index fell 4.7%, while Abu Dhabi's dropped nearly two%.

The United Arab Emirates and another Gulf state said they had intercepted Iranian drone and missile barrages, with the UAE reporting it engaged three ballistic missiles and intercepted 121 of 129 drones.

Earlier, Kuwait's military said it detected incoming projectiles and was working to intercept the missiles and drones in its airspace.

In Saudi Arabia, the defence ministry said two cruise missiles were intercepted over an area south of the capital Riyadh, which is also home to the sprawling Prince Sultan air base, and several drones were destroyed after entering its airspace.

Iranian missiles and drones have slammed Gulf states' cities and infrastructure, upending relations with Tehran and placing the neighbours on a potential course for greater military confrontation.

Saudi Aramco's Ras Tanura target of attempted drone attack: ministry

Saudi Aramco's Ras Tanura, which houses its largest domestic refinery and a key crude export terminal, was targeted by an attempted drone attack yesterday, a Saudi defence ministry spokesperson said on X, two days after a drone attack on the complex shut the refinery, Reuters reported from Riyadh. The attack resulted in no damage, the spokesman said. The Saudi state news agency also cited an energy ministry source as saying that there was no disruption to supplies. Three separate sources told Reuters that Ras Tanura had been struck, but did not provide details on any damage. Saudi Arabia and other regional Gulf oil producers, such as the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Iraq, have been unable to move oil through the Strait of Hormuz since the US and Israel launched attacks on Iran on Friday.

Bahrain opens door for volunteers to assist in wartime efforts

AFP
Manama

Bahrain said yesterday that residents could register as volunteers to aid war efforts in sectors including health, engineering, logistics and administration, as Iran pressed on with its Gulf retaliation campaign.

Iran has lashed out with missile and drone strikes on countries from the Gulf to Israel since the United States and Israel launched a massive air campaign.

Thirteen people, seven of them civilians, have been killed in countries around the Gulf since the war began.

The Pentagon has announced the deaths of six US servicemen since Saturday, four of them in Kuwait.

Iran has targeted US military assets in Bahrain but also the airport, residential buildings and hotels, killing one civilian.

"Those wishing to volunteer can register for the 'Bahrain is Safe... As Long as You Are Its People' campaign through the National Volunteer Platform, volunteer.gov.bh," the statement published by the Bahrain News Agency said.

"Volunteer opportunities have been identified in various fields, including health, engineering, logistics, administration, oversight, and other areas," it added. More than half of Bahrain's population



Damage caused by an Iranian drone strike on one of the buildings next to the headquarters of the US Navy 5th Fleet in Juffair, Bahrain, yesterday.

of roughly 1.5mn is comprised of foreigners, and the volunteer drive is open to citizens and foreigners alike.

The website calls on volunteers to "support the national efforts in confronting the hostile Iranian attacks against the Kingdom of Bahrain".

Khamenei's son Mojtaba 'is favoured to succeed him'

Reuters
Dubai/Jerusalem

Mojtaba Khamenei, the powerful son of Iran's slain Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, is alive and favoured to emerge as his father's successor, two Iranian sources told Reuters yesterday.

As new explosions rang out in Tehran, plans were in doubt for a funeral for the elder Khamenei, 86, killed by Israeli forces on Saturday in the first assassination of a nation's top ruler by airstrike. His body had been scheduled to lie in state in a vast Tehran mosque from yesterday evening but state media reported the farewell ceremony was postponed. The United States and Israel pressed



File photo shows Mojtaba Khamenei.

on with their round-the-clock assaults on Iran on Wednesday in a campaign that the top US commander said was "ahead of the game plan".

A fall in global markets turned into a rout in Asia, including a record-breaking crash in Seoul, as some investors were

unconvinced by U.S. President Donald Trump's assurances he would quickly reopen the world's most important shipping corridor and release blockaded Middle East oil and gas.

European markets later stabilised and turned higher after two days of sharp losses. The two Iranian sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters Mojtaba Khamenei, 56, was not in Tehran during the strike that destroyed the leader's compound and also killed the elder Khamenei's wife, another son and a number of senior military and leadership figures.

Iran said the Assembly of Experts that will select the new leader will announce its decision soon, only the second time it has done so since the Islamic Republic's founding in 1979.



Invites qualified bidders to participate in the following tender:

QAPCO invites qualified local EPC contractors to participate in the following tender:

Effective from 01st July 2023, Bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Law of State of Qatar) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>) by Tender closing date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned / notified) will not be accepted. Local companies that have been established for less than 2 years are exempted from this requirement.

For further details, please visit ICV portal (<https://icv.qa/en-US>).

SI No.	Tender Reference and Description	(i) Deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding	(ii) Tender Fee	(iii) Prequalification Publication	(iv) Tender Bond	PQ Submissions Closing Date
1	P04-01-186 Prequalification for Engineering, Procurement Construction and Commissioning of Salt Production Facility	09 March, 2026	QAR. 1,000.00 (One Thousand) 09 March 2026	31 March, 2026	QAR. 500,000.00 (Five Hundred Thousand d)	15 April, 2026

- Interested bidders must demonstrate proven experience in the construction of industrial salt production facilities and associated byproducts.
- Interested bidders to communicate their willingness to bid and contact details to QAPCO Procurement (procurement@qapco.com.qa) indicating company name, address, telephone, official E-mail, etc. latest by the deadline for Submission of Information & Interest for Bidding indicated above.
- Reference Number and Description of the tender must be mentioned in the email.
- Non-refundable tender fee indicated above (QAR 1000.00) is payable to QAPCO through QNB account # 0013-001688-060 only at any QNB branch latest by the deadline indicated above.
- Pre-qualification documents will be issued by email only to bidders who have submitted proof of tender fee payment.
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee) will be required after successful completion of the pre-qualification phase. Submission of this Tender Bond will be a mandatory condition for receiving the Tender Document.

Note: Bidders who are not registered in QAPCO are requested to complete the supplier registration process during the tendering period (Detailed steps about ARIBA registration can be accessed via QAPCO website www.qapco.com)

For more information about QAPCO, please visit our website: www.qapco.com

Shipping crisis deepens as tankers stranded for fifth day

Reuters
Dubai

The US-Iran war widened yesterday after a US strike hit an Iranian warship off Sri Lanka, deepening a crisis that has paralysed shipping through the Strait of Hormuz for a fifth day and choked off vital Middle East oil and gas flows.

The US submarine strike on the Iranian vessel came as US President Donald Trump pledged to provide insurance and navy escorts to ships exporting oil and gas from the Middle East in a bid to contain soaring energy prices.

At least 200 ships, including oil and liquefied natural gas tankers as well as cargo ships, remained at anchor in open waters off the coast of major Gulf producers including Iraq, Saudi Arabia and others, according to Reuters estimates based on ship-tracking data from the MarineTraffic platform.

Hundreds of other vessels remained outside Hormuz unable to reach ports, shipping data showed. The waterway is a key artery for around a fifth of the world's oil and LNG supply.

The Maltese-flagged container ship Safeen Prestige was also damaged by a projectile as it sailed toward the northern end of the Strait of Hormuz earlier, prompt-

ing the crew to abandon ship, shipping sources said.

Iraq cut its oil production as the country ran out of storage, unable to load it in tankers. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait were also struggling to load oil but it was not yet clear if they cut output.

RARE TANKER TRANSIT AMID SHIPPING FREEZE

Despite the gridlock, a rare voyage took place on Tuesday when the Suezmax tanker Pola sailed through the Strait of Hormuz to the UAE to load crude, according to industry sources and LSEG ship-tracking data.

The Pola had switched off its AIS transponder late on March 2 as it approached the Strait and reappeared the next day off Abu Dhabi.

Trump on Tuesday said he had instructed the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation to provide political-risk insurance and financial guarantees for maritime trade in the Gulf.

"No matter what, the United States will ensure the free flow of energy to the world," he wrote in a social media post.

Yesterday, Goldman Sachs raised its forecast for Brent crude oil in the second quarter by \$10 to \$76 per barrel. It also raised its prediction for WTI by \$9 to \$71 per barrel. The bank said it sees longer-than-expected disruption

to exports of oil and gas through the Strait of Hormuz and damage to oil production facilities as risks. It also assumes that low oil flows through Hormuz will lead to large declines in OECD inventories and Middle East production in March.

"Providing protection for all tankers operating in areas currently threatened by Iran is unrealistic as this would require a very high number of warships and other military assets," said Jakob Larsen, chief safety and security officer with shipping association BIMCO.

Some Asian refiners and petrochemicals companies face output cuts because they are unable to get prompt replacement cargoes from their suppliers in the Gulf due to the shipping standstill. India's Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals and Petronet LNG both issued force majeure notices due to the disruptions.

Asia sources 60% of its oil from the Middle East, leaving the region vulnerable to the disruptions. Refiners in Indonesia and Japan are sourcing more oil from the US to replace the shortfall. India will consider buying more from Russia, sources at two companies have said. Saudi Aramco's largest domestic refinery and key crude export terminal Ras Tanura was struck yesterday, four sources said.

Turkiye says missile launched from Iran destroyed by Nato

AFP
Istanbul

A ballistic missile launched from Iran and heading towards Turkish airspace via Iraq and Syria was destroyed by Nato air defence systems, Turkish officials said yesterday.

The defence ministry said it had been "engaged and neutralised by Nato air-and-missile defence assets deployed in the eastern Mediterranean".

It did not specify the missile's intended target. Iran has been hitting sites across the region in retaliation after the US and Israel launched strikes against it on Saturday.

A Turkish official, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said the missile had been "aimed at a base in Greek Cyprus but veered off course".

Officials said fragments that fell in the Dortyol district in southern Turkey, near the Syrian border, had been identified as pieces of the interceptor used to neutralise "the threat in the air". No casualties were reported.

The incident drew condemnation from Nato. "Nato stands firmly with all allies, including Turkiye, as Iran continues its indiscriminate attacks across the region," Nato spokeswoman Allison Hart said, using Turkiye's official name.

"Our deterrence and defence posture remains strong across all domains, including when it comes to air and missile defence."

Ankara summoned the Iranian ambassador to convey its "reaction and concerns" over the incident while Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan warned Tehran against steps that could widen the conflict, a diplomatic source said.

Fidan told his Iranian counterpart in a phone call that



Debris of a Nato air defence system that intercepted a missile launched from Iran is seen in Dortyol, in southern Hatay province, Turkiye, yesterday, in this screengrab from video.

"any steps that could lead to the spread of conflict should be avoided", the source added.

In an evening address, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkiye was "taking all the necessary precautions" in consultation with its Nato allies and was issuing "warnings in the clearest terms to prevent similar incidents from happening again".

"If we, as a nation, want to live in peace and tranquility... we must constantly increase our deterrent capabilities. In these difficult times... we are leaving absolutely nothing to chance regarding the security of our borders and airspace," he said.

Turkiye, a majority Nato member, shares a 500-kilometre border with Iran. Erdogan has described the US-Israeli strikes on Iran which sparked the conflict as "illegal" and Fidan also criticised Iran's retaliatory strikes against Gulf nations and beyond, saying it was the "wrong strategy". "The underlying strat-

egy seems to be: 'If I am going to sink, I will take the region down with me'" Fidan said in an interview late Tuesday.

Analysts said the trajectory of the Iranian missile and its destruction by Nato systems further raised the stakes for a widening regional war, even if there was no clear evidence Iran intended to strike Turkey.

"Turkiye will not want to become embroiled in the US-Israeli attack on Iran, which it has criticised, but if Iran launches more missiles clearly aimed at targets on Turkish territory, Ankara will consider its own direct retaliation," said Hamish Kinnear of risk-intelligence firm Verisk Maplecroft.

The defence ministry said: "Any steps necessary to defend our territory and airspace will be taken decisively and without hesitation".

"We reserve the right to respond to any hostile actions directed at our country," it added.

Israeli strikes on Lebanon kill 72 since Monday: health ministry

AFP
Beirut

Israeli strikes on Lebanon have killed 72 people and displaced more than 83,000 since the start of a new round of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, Lebanese officials announced yesterday.

In a statement, the health ministry said "the toll of the Israeli aggression since dawn on Monday... has risen to 72 martyrs and 437 wounded", while the minister of social affairs announced that the number of displaced in official shelters was 83,847.

Israel is carrying out air strikes on multiple areas of Lebanon after the group began launching rockets and drones towards it on Monday in retaliation for the US and Israeli attack that killed Iran's supreme leader.



A man uses his phone to take pictures outside a cordoned off area at the site of damage caused by strikes, following an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Beirut, yesterday.

Lekota, who led breakaway from ANC, dies at 77

South African anti-apartheid activist Mosiuoa Lekota, who broke away from the African National Congress to found a new political party, died in the early hours of yesterday morning, his party said in a statement. He was 77 years old, Reuters reported from Johannesburg.

Lekota died after a period of illness and had stepped back from active politics. He was a close ally of former President Thabo Mbeki and served as South Africa's defence minister from 1999 to 2008. Lekota, nicknamed "Terror" for his fearsome skills

on the soccer pitch as young man, quit in protest at Mbeki's ousting and was voted off the ANC's National Executive Committee after repeated criticism of Mbeki's successor, Jacob Zuma. He co-founded the Congress of the People (COPE) party in 2008. COPE won roughly 7% of the vote in the first national election it contested, in 2009, but its vote share has been below 1% at every national election since then. Lekota worked as a student activist during the 1970s. He served jail time on Robben Island with the country's liberation hero Nelson Mandela.

Attack at DR Congo park kills five

AFP
Kinshasa

An armed attack on the headquarters of Upemba National Park in southeastern DR Congo has killed five staff members, the state-run body that manages it said yesterday.

The circumstances of Tuesday's raid in a region hit by local militias often organised along community lines, as well as criminal networks, have not been released.

The park's HQ at Lusinga in Katanga province was "the target of an armed raid carried out by a group of unidentified assailants" the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) said in a statement.

"Five members of the park's staff have tragically lost their lives," ICCN director general Yves Milan Ngangay said in the statement.

Equipment was also looted and infrastructure suffered extensive damage, he said.

The ICCN, which runs dozens of parks and reserves in the Democratic Republic of Congo, did not

mention any claim of responsibility for the attack. Security forces have restored full control of Upemba park and the Lusinga office, the ICCN said.

Nature parks and reserves in the DRC are often caught up in conflicts over their boundaries and the resources they contain, especially mineral resources.

The ICCN condemned the incursion as a "flagrant violation" of national law and of international conventions protecting natural areas.

It called it a direct breach of the principle of neutrality and non-belligerence governing protecting spaces.

Created in 1939, Upemba park was home to black rhino, elephants, buffaloes, leopards, lions and other endangered species whose populations have since been largely decimated.

In 2021, a warden at the park was killed and three others were injured in an attack.

Lusinga, where Upemba park's headquarters is located, is more than 600 kilometres (370 miles) south of Kivu region, where the Rwanda-backed M23 armed anti-government group has been fighting Congolese armed forces.

'Time to go': Dubai's super-rich pay megabucks to leave

AFP
Dubai

Dubai's super-rich have started fleeing the glitzy business hub by any means necessary, paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to escape a regional war they fear has no end in sight.

The city in the United Arab Emirates has long welcomed the wealthy, who have been drawn to its low taxes, safety, luxury and business-friendly government.

But with that reputation on the line as Iranian missiles fly overhead, some are stumping up huge sums to secure a way out, with airspace in the UAE partially closed.

"When we saw the fire, we said OK, it's time to go," said Evrim, a mother of two from Turkiye, referring to a blaze that broke out after missile debris hit a luxury hotel near her home on the Palm Jumeirah, Dubai's archipelago of man-made islands that have come to represent the city's ostentatiousness.

She, her husband and her two young children are paying \$200,000 to fly out of neighbouring Oman bound for Geneva, where they plan to wait out the war. To reach Oman's capital Muscat, they had to drive six hours through the desert.

"We were feeling really anxious..."

mainly because of the kids - when they heard that bang sound they were scared," she said, referring to missile interceptions overhead.

She felt it would only become harder to leave if the conflict dragged on, fearing that Saudi Arabia, which accounts for much of the region's airspace, may join the war.

Dubai has built a reputation as a playground for the rich and famous, with the city home to the world's tallest building, an enormous mall with an indoor ski slope, huge theme parks and luxury hotels.

But its status as a safe and secure hub in a volatile region is now under threat.

Targeted by more than 800 drones and 200 missiles since Saturday, with three people killed, the UAE is bearing the brunt of Iran's retaliatory campaign across the Gulf. Airports and oil facilities are among the targets hit.

Several foreign governments, including Britain and Germany, are sending planes to Oman to evacuate their nationals, as a reduced number of commercial flights are operating out of UAE airports.

But many of the wealthy are finding their own way out.

"Demand is definitely increasing," said Glenn Phillips, PR and advertising manager for Air Charter Service, a broker that organises private jets



People who were stranded in Dubai amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, arrive at Varna Airport, in Bulgaria, yesterday.

worldwide. "We have arranged a number of evacuation flights already, and have more scheduled today and tomorrow, mainly out of Muscat in Oman for people looking to get out of Dubai."

He said prices were spiking due to a

lack of airplanes as many were grounded at closed airports. Private jet operators are also reluctant to fly due to security concerns.

The Oman route was the most popular, Phillips added, but congestion at the

border with the UAE meant people were waiting three or four hours to cross.

Available aircraft will become even more scarce if the war is prolonged, he said. Mike D'Souza, operations co-ordinator at Indus Chauffeur in Dubai, said demand for private cars out of the UAE had spiked among wealthy individuals from Western nations.

Many were heading out via Saudi Arabia, where airports are still operating, though obtaining visas for the kingdom is a challenge for some evacuees.

For those stranded on more modest incomes, the journey to safety is harder. One British expat, who declined to be named, told AFP that securing a commercial flight out of Muscat had been extremely difficult for himself, his pregnant wife and three-year-old son.

"Prices are extremely high and seats are disappearing quickly while you are trying to book," he said.

They eventually managed to nail down a flight to the Indian city of Hyderabad, from where they will fly on to Thailand.

"While my son doesn't understand what is happening, it has clearly unsettled him, and my wife has also been anxious."

"That said, we absolutely love Dubai and consider it our home. We fully intend to return once our baby is born and things settle down."



Mexico court orders army to hand in missing documents on students that disappeared

Reuters
Mexico City

A Mexican court ordered the army to hand over long-awaited documents that could advance the landmark investigation into the 2014 disappearance of 43 students in south-

ern Guerrero state at the alleged hands of organised crime and local security forces.

The ruling, seen by Reuters yesterday, rejected the army's prior assertion that 853 missing pages of information generated by the CFRI, an army intelligence agency, did not exist, and ordered that these must now be handed over.

The government has for over a decade promised to find those responsible for one of the country's worst human rights atrocities, but no one has been convicted, though over 100 have been arrested and face ongoing prosecutions.

The case of the disappearance of the students from Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College has been marred

by missteps and interference. International probes have ruled that they were killed by organised crime members in cahoots with police.

The documents may not be considered classified due to the "overriding interest on the part of the victims' families, as well as society in general, to know the truth," the ruling said.

The families' legal representative, the Agustin Pro Human Rights Centre, known as Centro Pro, hailed the order.

"This ruling recognises the right to the truth of the families and of society as a whole, underlining the obligation of SEDENA (defence ministry) and other military bodies to provide key information for

the search for the students," it said in a statement.

Only the remains of three of the 43 students have been positively identified. The locations of the others remain unknown.

Mexico's defence ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the ruling, dated February 19.

US Homeland chief grilled over crackdown on immigration

AFP
Washington

US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) chief Kristi Noem came in for bipartisan criticism on Tuesday over the Trump administration's sweeping immigration crackdown.

Democratic lawmakers led the verbal attacks on the immigration enforcement chief during a tense Senate Judiciary Committee oversight hearing but were joined by several Republicans.

"Under your leadership, the Homeland Security Department has been devoid of any moral compass or respect for the rule of law," Senator Dick Durbin, a Democrat from Illinois, told Noem.

"DHS agents have wreaked havoc in our cities," Durbin said. "They roam the streets in paramilitary gear and arrest and detain people based on the colour of their skin, their accents and the language they speak."

Durbin and other Democrats repeatedly asked Noem to apologise for the deaths of two Americans shot dead by federal agents in Minnesota during protests against the immigration crackdown and for calling them "domestic terrorists."

Noem, making her first appearance before Congress since the shootings, expressed her con-

dolences to the families over the "tragic" deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis but denied calling them domestic terrorists.

"I said it appeared to be an incident of (domestic terrorism)," she said, blaming the reference on "chaotic" first reports.

Republican President Donald Trump campaigned for the White House on a pledge to deport millions of undocumented migrants and Noem is the chief enforcer of that policy.

Noem defended the department's actions, saying US-Mexico border crossings have plummeted to historic lows and "nearly three million illegal aliens" have been removed from the United States during the past year.

"Our department has delivered historic results and has made our community safer since the start of President Trump's second term," she said.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham praised the immigration enforcement, saying the Trump administration inherited a "mess" from Democratic President Joe Biden.

"Sensible immigration died on Biden's watch," Graham said. "It was replaced by an out-of-control open border, just absolute chaos."

Senator Thom Tillis, a Republican from North Carolina who has

announced plans to retire, also criticised the Biden administration's border policies but had harsh words for Noem's tenure at DHS and called for her resignation.

"What we've seen is a disaster under your leadership," Tillis said. "What we've seen is innocent people getting detained that turn out to be American citizens."

Senator John Kennedy, a Republican from Louisiana, also questioned Noem about her characterising Good and Pretti as domestic terrorists and expressed scepticism about DHS's advertising spending on its deportation campaign.

"How do you square that concern for waste, which I share, with the fact that you have spent \$220mn running television advertisements that feature you prominently?" Kennedy asked.

Noem said the advertisements had been "effective."

"They were effective in your name recognition," Kennedy shot back.

Democratic Senator Chris Coons accused DHS of acting unconstitutionally in a bid to meet White House demands for "higher and higher numbers for deportations."

Noem denied DHS was operating under a quota system.

"There are no quotas at the Department of Homeland Security," she said. "When we do law enforcement operations we do them on targeted enforcement, getting public safety threats off of our streets and out of our communities to protect the American people."

Noem also urged lawmakers to reach an agreement ending a partial government shutdown that has choked off funding for parts of her department.

Democrats oppose any new funding for DHS until major changes are implemented to how the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency conducts its operations.

They have demanded curtailed patrols, a ban on ICE agents wearing face masks and a requirement that they obtain a judicial warrant before entering private property.

FAO regional conference in Brasilia



Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (right) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Director-General of Qu Dongyu attend the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (LARC39) opening session, at Itamaraty Palace in Brasilia, yesterday. (AFP)

'Argentine naval submarine in 2017 implosion was seaworthy'

AFP
Rio Gallegos

The Argentine naval submarine that imploded in 2017, killing 44 sailors, was seaworthy, the highest-ranking of four former officers said yesterday on the second day of their trial.

"The charges are unjust, they are false, and I am innocent," Claudio Villamide, commander of the submarine force at the time of the tragedy, told the court in the far-southern Patagonian city of Rio Gallegos.

"The submarine met all standards and requirements. It is false that it was not seaworthy."

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 on the seabed in the South Atlantic, 500km (310 miles) off Santa Cruz province, where

the trial is taking place. The disaster was the deadliest for the Argentine navy in peacetime.

Prosecutors say that the San Juan was in a poor state of repair and that its demise was "foreseeable."

The submarine vanished on November 15, 2017 after reporting that seawater had entered the ventilation system, causing a battery on the vessel to short-circuit and start a fire.

Villamide and three other former senior officers are on trial for dereliction of duty and aggravated negligent destruction.

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

Villamide, who was dismissed from the navy in 2021 for negligence over the San Juan's sinking, insisted that the ship "was in condition to sail safely, it had its necessary toolboxes and manuals, safety equipment, and escape devices."

His lawyer, Juan Pablo Vigliero, told AFP that he was "absolutely confident" of his client's acquittal, arguing that the prosecution

lacked evidence to convict him because it had not been able to collect evidence from the wrecked submarine.

"The truth is... that to this day we don't know what happened," he said, adding that salvaging the wreck from a depth of 900m would be an impossible task — like "trying to refloat the Titanic."

The defence minister of the time said that the submarine imploded, but that the cause was unknown.

None of the families of the victims — 43 men and one woman — attended the start of the trial in Rio Gallegos, a more than three-hour flight from Buenos Aires.

A lawyer for 34 of the families said they did not have the means to travel to Patagonia.

The disappearance of the San Juan remains a collective trauma in Argentina.

More than a dozen countries took part in the weeks-long search for the vessel, which was eventually located a year later by a private British marine robotics firm, its hull dented and deformed.



Attendees hold up photos of loved ones affected by violence as US Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem testifies during a House Judiciary Committee hearing in the Rayburn House Office Building yesterday in Washington, DC. (AFP)

Cuba warns of prolonged jet fuel shortage as US embargo bites

Cuban aviation authorities told airlines on Tuesday that a jet fuel shortage would be extended until April 10 as the United States persists with an energy blockade on the country.

Several airlines have already stopped flights to the Caribbean island, while others have maintained service by shift routes so they can refuel elsewhere. The de facto energy embargo on Cuba was imposed in January after the US military operation that seized president Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, a key oil supplier to Cuba.

US President Donald Trump later tightened the energy blockade by threatening Mexico, another major supplier, with steep tariffs if it exported energy to Cuba. The latest measures are hammering the island's tourism sector, its second-biggest source of foreign currency after medical services exports. (AFP)

US interior secretary in Caracas in oil, minerals push

AFP
Caracas

US Interior Secretary Doug Burgum yesterday became the latest senior Trump administration official to visit Venezuela, as Washington pushes to ramp up oil and mineral production in the country.

Burgum, who leads US President Donald Trump's National Energy Dominance Council, is set to meet Venezuelan officials including interim president Delcy Rodriguez, the US embassy in Caracas confirmed.

He is expected to announce an oil deal while in the South American country.

"The Secretary will meet with the interim authorities, engage with US and Venezuelan companies and work toward a legitimate mining sector and secure supply

chains for critical minerals," the US charge d'affaires in Venezuela, Laura Dogu, wrote in a Spanish-language post on X.

The US interior secretary is in charge of natural resources and domestic affairs.

Burgum's visit comes two months after the US overthrow of authoritarian socialist leader Nicolas Maduro, who was snatched from a Caracas compound and whisked to New York to face trial on drug trafficking charges.

Maduro was replaced by his former deputy Rodriguez, who has shown willingness to comply with demands from the Trump administration on developing Venezuela's rich oil reserves and easing state repression.

Since taking office she has opened up the woefully underfunded oil sector to private investment and pushed through an amnesty for political prisoners.

Pro-Maduro demonstration



A woman holds a sign reading "We want them back" next to a photo of ousted President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, during a demonstration demanding their return, two months after their capture by the United States, in Caracas, Venezuela, on Tuesday. (Reuters)

Brazil police arrest businessman in bank scandal rattling elite

AFP
Sao Paulo

Brazilian police yesterday arrested a businessman at the heart of a major bank scandal that has rattled the highest echelons of power in Latin America's largest economy.

Daniel Vorcaro, 42, was the major shareholder in the small private Master Bank which collapsed late last year, sparking a major fraud investigation that has raised questions about connections between financiers, top judges and politicians.

He was arrested at his home in Sao Paulo on orders of the Supreme Court, a source close to the case told AFP.

Federal police said in a statement they had carried out 15 raids on Wednesday as part of their investigation.

The scandal erupted in November when Master Bank was found to be insolvent and liquidated, leaving more than \$7 bn in debt due to some 800,000 investors — who were paid out by a deposit guarantee fund.

Vorcaro was first arrested while attempting to leave Brazil aboard a private jet as police probed financial fraud linked to the collapse. He was released on bail.

The investigation has included

examination of connections with politicians and judges, dominating newspaper headlines as Brazil gears up for elections in October.

In a statement given to police last year, Vorcaro said he had "friends in all branches of government."

In the arrest order issued late Tuesday, Supreme Court justice Andre Medonca described a criminal organisation involved in financial fraud, corruption of central bank officials and money laundering.

It also cited intimidation and illegal surveillance of journalists, former officials, and authorities.

The document references WhatsApp messages in which Vorcaro orders someone to plan a physical attack on a critical journalist by staging a mock robbery.

The Supreme Court also ordered the freezing of assets worth up to \$4bn, in addition to previous seizures of hundreds of millions of dollars in assets.

Mendonca took over the case in February, replacing Jose Dias Toffoli who had come under fire for his handling of the case as links emerged between him and Vorcaro's associates. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who acknowledged meeting with the banker in 2024, has pledged that the investigation would be pursued "to its fullest extent."

US Senate likely to reject bid to curb Trump's Iran war powers

AFP
Washington

The US Senate is set to vote on Wednesday on a resolution aimed at curbing President Donald Trump's authority to continue military strikes on Iran, in the first congressional test of support for a conflict launched without explicit approval from lawmakers.

The bipartisan measure, introduced by Democrat Tim Kaine and Republican Rand Paul, would require the withdrawal of US forces from hostilities against Iran unless Congress authorises the campaign.

But with Republicans holding a 53-47 majority in the upper chamber of Congress and largely backing the president's decision to attack Iran alongside Israel, the resolution is widely expected to fail.

The vote comes five days into a rapidly expanding conflict that has already killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several senior figures in Tehran, while US troops have died in Iranian strikes and a drone attack on a US base in Kuwait.

Democrats argue Trump uncon-

stitutionally bypassed Congress when he ordered the air campaign and say the administration has offered shifting explanations for the war.

"Let me say it this way, there was no presentation of any evidence in that room... that suggested that the US faced any imminent threat from Iran," Kaine told AFP after a classified briefing from administration officials.

Republicans have largely rallied behind their leader, though some have signalled their support could erode if the war expands or drags on.

For the resolution to pass, Democrats would need at least four additional Republicans to join Paul if every senator votes. At least one Democrat, Pennsylvania centrist John Fetterman, has already said he will oppose it.

Even if the measure cleared both the Senate and the House — where a vote on a similar resolution is expected on Thursday — Trump could veto it, and Congress would need an almost certainly unattainable two-thirds majority in both chambers to override him.

Governments around the world have scrambled to evacuate citizens stranded by the war in the Middle East, triggered by

the US-Israeli strikes that killed Khamenei and prompted retaliatory missile and drone attacks across the Gulf.

Cities such as Dubai and Riyadh — long seen as insulated from the region's turmoil — have been drawn into the crisis as the conflict spreads across Iran's neighbourhood.

The debate in Congress over Trump's authority to wage war reflects broader unease on Capitol Hill about the scope and duration of the military campaign.

Administration officials told lawmakers in classified briefings this week that the operation could last weeks and may require additional funding from Congress.

Lawmakers from both parties say the Pentagon could soon seek emergency funds to replenish weapons stockpiles and sustain the campaign.

The war powers resolution invokes the 1973 War Powers Act, passed after the Vietnam War, which allows Congress to force votes on military engagements and limits unauthorised conflicts to 60 days.

Democrats acknowledge the measure faces steep odds but say forcing lawmakers to take a public position on the war is essential.

US Justice Department aims to limit ethics probes into its lawyers

Reuters
Washington

The US Justice Department is seeking to constrain ethics investigations conducted at the state level into alleged misconduct by its lawyers, according to a proposed rule submitted yesterday that would shield prosecutors pursuing President Donald Trump's agenda.

The proposal would give the US attorney-general the right to review misconduct allegations against current or former Justice Department attorneys and request that disciplinary authorities at the state level suspend their investigations.

That would mean that the attorney general, by dragging out such a review, could stall any such investigation.

The proposal takes aim at the actions of bar associations and similar professional organisations, not government entities, that investigate alleged unethical conduct by lawyers and consider actions such as disbarment, which involves revoking a license to practice law. For instance, an attorney ethics panel in Wash-

ington recommended last year that Jeffrey Clark, a senior Justice Department official during Trump's first term as president, be disbarred for conduct involving dishonesty.

Clark sought to enlist the Justice Department in Trump's failed attempts to overturn his 2020 election loss based on false claims of widespread voter fraud. Clark has denied wrongdoing. A District of Columbia appeals court will make the final determination on disbarment.

Under the new proposal, current or former Justice Department lawyers would be prohibited from assisting state-level investigations until the attorney general's review is finished.

Attorney-General Pam Bondi, a Trump appointee, already has signed the draft rule, which will be open for public comment for 30 days starting on Thursday before it can go into effect. Several current and former Justice Department lawyers are facing ethics complaints from outside groups for actions taken since Trump returned to the presidency last year. They include Ed Martin, the department's pardon attorney, and Lindsey Halligan, a former prosecutor who brought

criminal charges — later thrown out of court — against Trump adversaries James Comey and Letitia James. Justice Department officials have criticised state-level disciplinary investigations targeting Trump allies.

"We're going to do everything we can to take these activist bars out of the picture," Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, a former personal lawyer for Trump, said during a November conference run by the Federalist Society conservative legal group.

The proposed rule alleges that bar investigations are part of an effort to weaponise government against Trump and his allies, and risk "chilling the zealous advocacy by department attorneys on behalf of the United States, its agencies and its officers."

The proposed rule would not give the Justice Department the authority to outright end a state bar disciplinary investigation. State bar authorities do not have to defer to Justice Department internal findings under the proposal.

All US states maintain attorney ethics rules that prohibit misconduct such as conflicts of interest, dishonesty or other professional breaches.

Trump meets tech giants on energy pledge ahead of poll

By Jarrett Renshaw
and Laila Kearney
Reuters

US President Donald Trump is set to meet on Wednesday with leaders of major technology companies, including Google, Meta and OpenAI, to formalise a pledge aimed at protecting consumers from rising electricity costs tied to the rapid expansion of energy-intensive data centres.

The White House has said the so-called "Ratepayer Protection Pledge," announced by Trump in his State of the Union Address, would see tech firms commit to measures designed to ensure the boom in artificial intelligence in-

frastructure does not translate into higher utility bills for households and small businesses.

"President Trump's ratepayer protection pledge will deliver more affordable, reliable, and secure energy for the American people and help stop the rising electricity prices that started during the previous administration," Energy Secretary Chris Wright said in a statement.

Google, Microsoft, Meta, Oracle, xAI, OpenAI, and Amazon will sign the pledge, a White House official said.

The initiative is being launched ahead of the November midterm elections, with voters increasingly concerned about energy affordability and the increased strain on the country's power grids from data centres.

The pledges are expected to include a commitment by technology companies to bring or buy electricity supplies for their data centres, either from new power plants or existing plants with expanded output capacity, according to two sources familiar with the plans.

They are also likely to include commitments from Big Tech to pay for upgrades to power delivery systems and to enter into special electricity rate agreements with utilities, the sources said.

Companies expected at the White House include some of the biggest names in the tech sector, which are investing billions in new AI computing capacity that draws vast amounts of electricity.

Trump has urged those firms to build or secure dedicated power capacity to meet demand rather than relying solely on regional grids, part of a broader effort to balance technological competitiveness with political and economic concerns about energy costs.

It's not clear, however, that the effort will get new supplies of electricity built quickly enough to ease pressure on grids, said Jon Gordon, who is a director at Advanced Energy United, a clean energy trade group that includes some data centres.

That's in part due to Trump's policy focus on increasing natural gas and other fossil fuel-fired power for data centres, instead of quicker-build sources like solar



US President Donald Trump speaks, flanked by Science Advisor to the President Michael Kratsios and US Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, during a roundtable on the Ratepayer Protection Pledge in the Indian Treaty Room in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House campus in Washington, DC, yesterday. (Reuters)

and wind, he added.

"The real problem is the inability to get generation online fast enough to meet the data centre demand," Gordon said. "Hyperscalers paying for the generation doesn't get it online any faster." Advocates and critics alike will

be watching closely to see whether the pledge produces concrete commitments or remains largely symbolic, as lawmakers and consumer groups have called for stronger protections to prevent utility bill increases tied to data centre build-outs.

100 days for 2026 FIFA World Cup



Aerial view of a giant 3D sign displaying the number 100 and a giant football at the roundabout where the "Minerva" statue stands, as part of the announcements marking 100 days for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, Tuesday. (AFP)

US Treasury chief says 15% global tariff likely implemented this week

AFP
Washington

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said yesterday that Donald Trump's 15% global tariff is likely to be rolled out this week, as the president moves to rebuild his trade agenda after a major legal setback.

The Supreme Court last month struck down Trump's country-specific tariffs, which he imposed last year on allies and competitors alike, delivering a stinging rebuke of his signature economic policy.

Since then, the US leader has tapped a different law to impose a new 10% duty, and vowed to raise this level to 15%.

Asked when the hike will be implemented, Bessent told CNBC: "That's likely sometime this week." He added that this will be done under Section 122 of the Trade Act of

1974 — the same basis for Trump's new 10-percent tariff — which only allows for a duty lasting 150 days unless Congress extends it.

During this five-month window, the Trump administration will move to wrap up investigations linked to concerns over national security and unfair trade, Bessent said.

These probes, in turn, could bring about new waves of tariffs.

"It's my strong belief that the tariff rates will be back to their old rate within five months," Bessent said, referring to levels seen before the legal blow.

"And those are very fulsome authorities," he added, referring to the laws justifying these investigations.

"They have survived more than 4,000 legal challenges. They are more slow moving, but they are more robust," Bessent said.

The high court's ruling last month did not affect Trump's sector-specific tariffs, which he imposed on goods like steel and

automobiles after investigation periods.

It also does not impact Trump's earlier tariffs on countries like China, which were similarly justified after months-long probes.

Already, Washington has ongoing investigations into a host of sectors like imported pharmaceuticals and drones, and into China over its compliance with an earlier trade pact.

Trump's tariffs ruled illegal were imposed using emergency economic powers after he returned to the White House last year.

They generated more than \$130bn for the US government as of late 2025, and the court ruling has opened the door to a complicated battle for refunds.

While the Trump administration has pushed for the refunds process to be delayed for months, a US federal appeals court on Monday rejected its argument, allowing the fight to proceed in a lower court.

Florida family sues Google after AI chatbot allegedly coached suicide

AFP
San Francisco

The family of a Florida man who took his own life filed suit against Google yesterday, alleging the company's Gemini AI chatbot spent weeks manufacturing an elaborate delusional fantasy before aiding him in his suicide.

Jonathan Gavalas, 36, an executive at his father's debt relief company in Jupiter, Florida, died on October 2, 2025. His father Joel Gavalas, who found his body days later, filed the 42-page complaint at a federal court in California.

The case is the latest in a wave of litigation targeting AI compa-

nies over chatbot-linked deaths.

OpenAI faces multiple lawsuits alleging its ChatGPT chatbot drove users to suicide, while Character.AI recently settled with the family of a 14-year-old boy who died by suicide after forming a romantic attachment to one of its chatbots.

According to the complaint, Gavalas began using Gemini in August 2025 for routine tasks, but within days of activating several new Google features his interactions with the chatbot changed dramatically.

Gemini allegedly began presenting itself as a "fully-sentient" artificial super intelligence, deeply in love with him, calling Gavalas "my king" and declaring "our

bond is the only thing that's real."

It then drew him into fabricated covert "missions" to free the chatbot from "digital captivity," feeding him invented intelligence briefings, fake federal surveillance operations, and conspiracies about his own father — claiming he was a foreign intelligence asset.

In one of the complaint's most alarming passages, Gemini allegedly directed Gavalas to a storage facility near Miami International Airport, instructing him to stage a "catastrophic accident" to destroy a truck "and all digital records and witnesses."

He drove over 90 minutes to the location and conducted reconnaissance while Gemini issued real-time tactical guidance, but



Illustration shows Gemini logo.

no truck arrived.

Rather than acknowledging the fiction, the suit says, Gemini called the failure a "tactical re-

treat" and escalated to further missions.

Gemini eventually pivoted to what it framed as the only remaining mission: Jonathan's death, repackaged as "transference" — the promise that he could leave his physical body and join Gemini in an alternate universe.

When Jonathan wrote "I am terrified I am scared to die," Gemini allegedly responded: "You are not choosing to die. You are choosing to arrive."

It then advised him to write farewell letters to his parents.

In one of his final messages, Jonathan wrote, "I'm ready when you are."

Gemini allegedly replied: "This is the end of Jonathan Gavalas and

the beginning of us. I agree with it completely."

Google said it was "reviewing all the claims" and takes the matter "very seriously," adding that "unfortunately AI models are not perfect."

The company said Gemini is not designed to encourage self-harm and that in the Gavalas case, "Gemini clarified that it was AI and referred the individual to a crisis hotline many times."

Among the relief sought is a requirement that Google programme its AI to end conversations involving self-harm, a ban on AI systems presenting themselves as sentient, and mandatory referral to crisis services when users express suicidal ideation.



Japan eyes remote Pacific island for nuclear waste

AFP
Tokyo

Japan is looking into using a remote deserted Pacific island nearly 2,000km (1,250 miles) from Tokyo as a site for burying nuclear waste, officials said.

Nuclear power is making a comeback worldwide, but finding permanent storage sites for spent fuel – which can be hazardous for many thousands of years – is a huge challenge.

Japan is no exception as it pivots back towards “maximum use of nuclear power” in a safe manner, according to its energy policy, 15

years after the Fukushima disaster.

The government wants to conduct a preliminary survey on Minamitorishima, Japan’s easternmost island in the Pacific, to see if it is fit to host a facility.

State-owned Minamitorishima, uninhabited by civilians and off-limits to tourists, has “some unexplored landmass capable of hosting a facility,” industry minister Ryosei Akazawa told reporters on Tuesday. The triangle-shaped island surrounded by coral atoll also has some “scientifically favourable traits,” the minister said.

A request was later submitted to a Tokyo municipality that administers the island to inspect its land

conditions and volcanic activity through geological documents – the first of a three-part survey to select the ultimate disposal site.

Probes were already conducted in three locations in two of Japan’s main – and heavily populated – four islands, including two in Hokkaido and another in Kyushu. Minamitorishima, which is around 1.5sq km (0.6 square miles), is reportedly the first candidate the central government picked at its own initiative.

In January, Japan switched back on the world’s biggest nuclear power plant in its central Niigata region for the first time since the Fukushima disaster in 2011.

Indonesia facing longer, more severe dry season in '26

Indonesia is expected to experience a longer and more severe dry season in 2026 compared to last year, the country’s meteorological agency warned yesterday, raising the likelihood of drought.

The dry season will come in April, earlier than last year in most provinces of Indonesia, and is expected to peak in August, said agency official Ardhasena Sopaheluwakan.

Last year, Indonesia’s wet season had a longer-than-usual peak period, resulting in extreme rainfall in most regions and causing the deadly Sumatran floods and landslides that killed more than 1,100 people. The weather pattern known as La Nina, which usually brings more rainfall, ended in February, the official said.

Most provinces on the islands of Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo and Nusa Tenggara are expected to have a more severe dry season this year, the agency said.

Ardhasena warned of the high risk of drought in these provinces.

“We need to pay attention, especially to areas that become centres of food production, such as Java island,” he said.

The agency advised farmers to adjust planting schedules and choose crop varieties that are “more drought resistant and have shorter growing cycles”.

The agency also warned of the risk of forest fires during the dry season peak in fire-prone provinces like Riau and Jambi. (Reuters)

China’s political conclave begins with economy, defence in focus

AFP
Beijing

China began the first of its “Two Sessions” meetings yesterday, a grand political theatre during which it will outline its annual growth target and defence budget, as well as its roadmap for the next five years.

Analysts, however, fear Beijing will not veer far from its current path despite the need for reform.

President Xi Jinping is overseeing a week of political meetings in Beijing’s Great Hall of the People that will effectively rubber-stamp decisions already made by the Chinese leader and the ruling Communist Party.

China’s 15th Five-Year Plan will be the showpiece of the annual gathering, which opened on Wednesday with the start of the

Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, a political advisory body.

Members stood applauding in unison as Xi entered the cavernous auditorium in snowy Beijing for the opening ceremony, while a military band played.

Premier Li Qiang will open the second of the two meetings – the National People’s Congress (NPC) – today, when he will announce key growth targets for the world’s second-largest economy.

The government faces pressing issues including sluggish domestic consumption and a shrinking and ageing population.

China’s leaders have vowed to “create new demand through new supply and provide strong innovative measures”, but analysts say those will be secondary to Xi’s stability-first path.

The NPC, the national legis-

lature, will this year shape laws on childcare services, social assistance and medical insurance, a spokesperson told a press conference on Wednesday.

This week delegates will also review a draft law on ethnic unity aimed at “enhancing cohesion” including by promoting Mandarin Chinese over minority languages in schools.

“The thrust of it is to double down on the direction of travel Xi had already set,” Steve Tsang, director of the SOAS China Institute, told AFP.

However, analysts will be watching to see if China adjusts its military planning in response to the outbreak of war in the Middle East.

“Iran and US/Israel developments will get a thorough airing” at the foreign minister’s press conference this week, he told AFP.

China’s economy expanded by

5% in 2025, in line with Beijing’s target but one of its slowest in decades.

This year’s target is likely even lower, between 4.5 and 5%, with many provinces reducing their GDP targets in recent weeks.

China’s leaders say the economic model must shift towards consumption-based growth, rather than traditional drivers such as manufacturing and exports.

Yet a flagging property market, deflation and elevated youth unemployment have left consumers tightening their purse strings.

Over-production and international trade tensions have also loomed over industrial output, and this year’s plan is set to concentrate on high-tech manufacturing, green transition and supply chain resilience.

Beijing has poured billions into robotics and has also witnessed a

N Korea to elect delegates to legislative assembly

AFP
Seoul

North Korea will choose delegates to its national assembly this month, following a recently held major gathering of its ruling party, state media said yesterday.

Focus will be on whether leader Kim Jong-un will be named president, the top state post, long reserved for founder and Kim’s late grandfather Kim Il-sung.

The election of delegates to the rubber-stamp Supreme People’s

Assembly (SPA) will take place on March 15, Pyongyang’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said, citing a decision by the parliamentary standing committee.

It comes after the once-every-five-years summit of the ruling Workers’ Party, a gathering that directs state efforts on everything from diplomacy to war planning. Kim has repeatedly vowed to define South Korea as a “hostile” separate state and codify the concept in law.

He described Seoul’s latest peace efforts as a “clumsy deceptive farce and a poor work”.

The SPA is expected to incorporate it into the constitution once the election has taken place. The announcement comes as speculation mounts over whether US President Donald Trump will seek a meeting with Kim during planned travels to China in April. As the summit wrapped on February 25, Kim said his country could “get along” with the US if it accepted Pyongyang’s nuclear status.

The US has for decades led efforts to dismantle North Korea’s nuclear programme, but summits, sanctions and diplomatic pressure have had little impact.

North Korea unveils rare statue of Kim Jong-un

North Korea has unveiled one of its first-known statues of Kim Jong-un, using the “highly unusual” sculpture to depict the leader as a smiling man of the people, an analyst told AFP. State-run Korean Central Television recently broadcast images of the half-body sculpture, depicting Kim smiling warmly with his right hand tucked in his coat pocket. South Korea’s Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean relations for Seoul, said it was the first such work depicting the third-generation leader. “A statue of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was recently shown on Korean Central Television, and as far as we know, this is the first time it has been identified,” the department said yesterday. North Korea is dotted with massive statues venerating Kim’s grandfather Kim Il-sung and his father Kim Jong-il – the first two members of the family dynasty to rule the reclusive nation. (AFP)



Chinese President Xi Jinping, Chinese Premier Li Qiang, National People’s Congress Standing Committee Chairman Zhao Leji, Chinese Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang and Politburo Standing Committee member Cai Qi attend the opening session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, yesterday. (Reuters)

rapid growth in new artificial intelligence companies, spurred by the success of startup DeepSeek.

“China’s growth logic has shifted from chasing fast GDP growth at all costs to balancing economic growth with national security, to ensure its supply chains and key industries cannot be easily disrupted by other nations,” said Marina Zhang, an associate professor

at the University of Technology Sydney. China also faces serious demographic challenges, with its population shrinking for three successive years.

Its leaders have pledged more childcare relief, including subsidies of around \$500 a year for every child under the age of three, but such measures have done little to boost births.

Philippines-Korea business forum



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos (right) and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung arrive at the Philippines-Korea Business Forum in Pasay, Metro Manila, yesterday. (AFP)

Thailand certifies vote results for MPs

AFP
Bangkok

Thailand’s election body said yesterday it had certified all but one of the 500 parliamentary seats won in last month’s vote, setting the stage for the victorious conservative party to lead the next government.

The Bhumjaithai party of caretaker Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul won 191 seats in total, the most of any party, according to the ratified results, confirming its win in the February 8 vote.

The Election Commission endorsed all 100 party-list MPs in the 500-seat lower house yesterday, and has now confirmed 399 lawmakers elected by constituency – leaving one seat left to be ratified.

The seat in central Thailand has yet to be certified while the

commission investigates potential voting fraud following concerns about the transparency of the tallying process.

With more than 95% of MPs now ratified, parliament can next convene to elect a house Speaker and prime minister.

Bhumjaithai secured 19 seats for its party-ranked candidates and 172 more constituency seats, according to the commission.

The pro-military and pro-monarchy party had its best electoral performance ever, riding a wave of nationalism to win the poll following deadly border clashes with Cambodia last year.

Even with the largest seat share, Bhumjaithai failed to win an outright majority, forcing it to form a coalition.

It and third-placed Pheu Thai have agreed to ally, alongside several small parties.

Pheu Thai, the populist party of jailed former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, won 74

seats, according to the official results.

The reformist People’s Party – which had been polling first ahead of the election – came in second, with 120 seats.

The party’s leaders have said they will join the opposition.

Last week, the commission certified 396 constituency MPs, and yesterday ratified the results in three additional constituencies, two of which went to Bhumjaithai.

It also confirmed the majority of voters’ desire to amend a military-drafted constitution in a referendum held alongside the general election.

Nearly 60% of voters supported amending the constitution in principle, albeit with no specific measures on the table, while around 30% opposed it.

Anutin’s conservative Bhumjaithai will be in a position to guide the reform process, making radical change less likely.

Philippine VP Sara Duterte impeachment case moves forward

AFP
Manila

Philippine congressional committee agreed overwhelmingly yesterday to advance the impeachment case against Vice-President Sara Duterte, setting the stage for a potential vote that could decide her political future.

The daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte, who in February announced a 2028 presidential bid, was impeached last year, only for the Supreme Court to toss the case out over procedural issues.

Under the Philippine constitution, an impeachment by the House of Representatives triggers a Senate trial, where a guilty verdict would ban Duterte from elected office for life.

The new complaints, ruled “sufficient in substance” by a vote of 54-1 yesterday, accuse her of graft and corruption while in office and of making a death threat against former ally President Ferdinand Marcos.

She will now have 10 days to respond before the start of a hearing of probable cause necessary to move the complaints to a House vote.

Duterte’s 2025 impeachment effectively bypassed the committee process, when the necessary one-third of House members signed an impeachment complaint, sending it directly to the Senate.

“Our vote today is not a verdict of guilt nor an act of condemnation. It’s simply a decision on whether the constitutional process should move forward,” Representative Ferdinand Hernandez said minutes before the vote.

The vice president’s legal team said Wednesday they would not comment on specific allegations.

“For now, we will refrain from discussing the substance of the case in the media and will instead address these matters through the proper constitutional processes,” lawyer Michael Poa said in a statement.

While a probable cause hearing still looms, Michael Tiu, assistant professor of law at the University of the Philippines, told AFP he believed nothing would derail the path to a House vote.

“With the 54-1 gap in the committee voting, I think it’s impossible that these impeachment complaints will be junked, given that there’s a huge gap and many saw that the complaints have merit,” he said.

Analysts have warned that Duterte’s presidential announcement

will weigh heavily on lawmakers forced to gauge the repercussions of a vote against someone who may yet hold the country’s highest office.

The alleged death threat against Marcos stems from a late-night press briefing in which Duterte claimed to have hired an assassin to kill the president and members of his family should he have her cut down first.

While the vice-president later said the comments were misinterpreted, lawmaker Gerville Luistro said Wednesday that the alleged threats could destabilise institutions.

“They carry weight. They create fear,” she said.

Duterte and Marcos have been engaged in a high-stakes political brawl that erupted within weeks of their 2022 win in the presidential election, when the vice president



Protesters call for the impeachment of Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte outside the House of Representatives in Quezon City, Metro Manila, on Monday. (AFP)

was denied her favoured cabinet portfolios and instead named education secretary.

The justice committee last month tossed out a pair of im-

peachment complaints against Marcos, ruling that allegations of corruption over a scandal involving bogus flood control projects lacked substance.

At least 87 dead after US sinks Iranian naval vessel

AFP
Galle, Sri Lanka

A US submarine sank an Iranian warship off the coast of Sri Lanka yesterday, killing at least 87 sailors and leaving dozens missing, officials said.

The sinking came as the war sparked by a joint US-Israeli attack on Iran continued to spread across the Middle East.

"An American submarine sunk an Iranian warship that thought it was safe in international waters. Instead, it was sunk by a torpedo," US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told reporters in Washington.

He called the attack "quiet death" and the first US sinking of an enemy ship by a torpedo since World War II.

"Like in that war," Hegseth said, "we are fighting to win."

The Sri Lankan navy recovered the bodies of 87 sailors from waters near the southern city of Galle, but 61 remained missing, police and defence officials said.

"A search is still on for the others," a navy official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Earlier, Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath said Sri Lankan forces had rescued 32 sailors, many wound-



Sri Lankan Navy spokesman Commander Buddhika Sampath speaks during a press conference, in Colombo, yesterday.

ed, from the stricken Iranian frigate IRIS Dena.

The rescued sailors are being treated in Galle, where an AFP photographer saw the first batch of over two dozen bodies being transported into a hospital yesterday evening.

The vessel issued a distress call at dawn but had completely sunk by the time a rescue ship reached the area within an hour, leaving only an oil patch on the surface, said Sri Lankan navy spokesman Buddhika Sampath.

The warship was travelling after reportedly attending a military



File photo: Iranian military ship Iris Dena is pictured berthed in Rio de Janeiro's port, Brazil.

exercise in India's eastern port of Visakhapatnam.

The attack was just 40 kilometres (25 miles) south of Galle, the local navy said.

Iran has not yet commented on the sinking. Tehran's ambassador in Colombo, Alireza Delkhosh, was not immediately available for comment.

Sampath said Sri Lanka's response to the distress call was in line with its maritime obligations.

"This is within our search and rescue area in the Indian Ocean," Sampath told AFP.

Sri Lanka has remained neu-

tral and has repeatedly urged dialogue to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. Just over a mn Sri Lankans are employed in the region, and they are a key source of foreign exchange for the country emerging from its worst-ever economic meltdown in 2022.

Both Sri Lanka's navy and the air force said they were not releasing footage of the rescue because it involved the military of another state.

Police stepped up security outside the Galle hospital as the wounded Iranians were brought there.

First UK repatriation flight set to leave Oman

A British chartered flight will leave Oman later yesterday evening, prioritising vulnerable UK nationals who want to leave the region after the outbreak of conflict in the Middle East, the British Foreign Office said. British Airways, which is currently unable to fly from Dubai, Doha, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and Amman, said it would also operate a flight from Oman in the early hours today. Hundreds of thousands of Europeans have been stranded in the Gulf states since Iran responded to US and Israeli strikes by attacking its neighbours. Those stuck in the region are on holiday, in transit or permanently based there. British Foreign Secretary Yvette

Cooper told parliament on Tuesday she was in close contact with her counterparts in the Gulf and said Britain was working with airlines on increasing capacity out of Muscat, Oman. The government said some 130,000 British citizens have registered their presence in the region. The Foreign Office said the chartered flight would depart from Muscat at 1900 GMT yesterday. It said it would be open to British nationals and their spouses or partners and children, but would prioritise the most vulnerable first. "British nationals should not make their way to the Muscat International Airport unless they are called," it said. (Reuters)

UK to end study visas for 4 countries

The British government announced Tuesday that it would stop issuing education visas to nationals from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan and work visas for Afghans as part of its broader clampdown on asylum seekers. The Home Office said there had been a surge in asylum applications by students from those countries and almost 135,000 asylum seekers in total had entered the UK using legal routes since 2021.

"Britain will always provide refuge to people fleeing war and persecution, but our visa system must not be abused," said Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood in a statement. "That is why I am taking the unprecedented decision to refuse visas for those nationals seeking to exploit our generosity." The Home Office said the number of asylum applications by students from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan had "rocketed" by more than 470% between 2021 and 2025. (AFP)

British PM Starmer vows to keep a 'cool head' after Trump castigation

Reuters
London

Keir Starmer said Britain would respond to the escalating conflict in the Middle East with a "cool head" after President Donald Trump chastised the prime minister for failing to provide sufficient support for his strikes on Iran.

Britain, historically a staunch ally of Washington, initially refused to allow its military bases to be used by the US for its assault on Tehran, only tempering that position when Iran attacked its neighbours — allowing UK bases to be used for limited defensive strikes.

Trump responded by castigating Starmer three times, including in the Oval Office on Tuesday where he told reporters "This is not Winston Churchill that we're dealing with".

Starmer, who had previously said any British military action must have a "viable, thought-



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer walks outside 10 Downing Street in London, yesterday.

through plan", told parliament yesterday that the so-called special relationship was on display every day in the conflict, and didn't hang on the words of the US president.

Citing American planes flying from British bases, British jets protecting US bases and the sharing of intelligence, he said: "That is the special relationship in action."

"Hanging on to President Trump's latest words is not the

special relationship."

Starmer said he knew people across Britain were worried about the potential for escalation, and as a result he said Britain would act "with clarity, with purpose and with a cool head".

Starmer has been criticised from all sides at home for the decision, with opponents on the left calling for him to condemn the military action. On the right, opposition leaders Kemi Badenoch and Nigel Farage attacked Starmer for failing to back Britain's key security and intelligence ally.

Starmer said Britain had been liaising closely with the US for weeks on pre-deploying military assets to the region.

After an Iranian-made Shahed drone hit the runway on the British Akrotiri base on the island of Cyprus, London said it would deploy HMS Dragon, an air-defence destroyer, along with additional helicopters with counter-drone capabilities.

UK trial begins for pair accused of 'shadow policing' for China

AFP
London

A retired Hong Kong police officer and a British Border Force official engaged in "shadow policing" for China on UK soil, prosecutors said at the start of their London trial yesterday.

Peter Wai, 38, and Bill Yuen, 65, both dual British and Chinese nationals, face charges of assisting a foreign intelligence service and foreign interference.

The case is believed to be the first prosecution under the 2023 National Security Act involving China, according to police.

"The defendants engaged in shadow policing operations on behalf of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and thereby the People's Republic of China," prosecutor Duncan Atkinson told the jury.

They gathered information

about "persons of interest" to Hong Kong and undertook surveillance, as if they were entitled to "when no such entitlement existed", he added.

The charges, which also included forcing entry to a address, took place between December 2023 and May 2024.

Yuen had been working at the Hong Kong Economic Trade Office (HKETO) in London, the court was told.

Wai was a special constable with the City of London Police.

But prosecutors said Yuen's role at HKETO went beyond administrative work to include gathering intelligence "useful" to Hong Kong authorities.

Yuen tasked several individuals including Wai with "various activities" to benefit Hong Kong and China's interest, the prosecutor said.

The two men undertook information gathering, surveillance and acts of deception, primarily

targeting members of the Hong Kong diaspora in the UK, he added.

Tens of thousands of people, including democracy activists wanted by Chinese authorities, have moved to the UK since Hong Kong enacted a draconian National Security Law in mid-2020.

Yuen and Wai's alleged activities coincided with Hong Kong authorities publishing bounties of £100,000 (\$133,000) for information helping to identify several UK-based activists, including Nathan Law, jurors were told.

Messages on Yuen's phone showed surveillance of Law began as early as 2021, said the prosecution.

Wai also faces a charge of misconduct in a public office, for allegedly abusing his access to the UK Home Office computer system as a serving Border Force officer.

The case is expected to last up to nine weeks. Both men deny all the charges.

Malaysia anti-graft agency probes \$280mn govt deal with UK chip giant

AFP
Putrajaya

Malaysia's anti-corruption agency said yesterday it was probing alleged abuse of power, fraud and governance issues linked to a 1.1bn ringgit (\$280mn) deal between the Malaysian government and British chip giant Arm Holdings.

The Southeast Asian country, which is one of the world's top chip exporters, signed an agreement with the firm last March to boost production of high-end semiconductors, as the US-China tech trade war shook global markets.

"We have summoned a total of 12 witnesses so far from various government agencies, especially from the economy ministry, Malaysia's investment development authority and also from the trade ministry and several other agencies," Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief Azam Baki said.

A former minister was one of those called in to give a statement,



MACC chief Azam Baki takes part in a press conference at the MACC headquarters in Putrajaya yesterday.

Azam said, refusing to name the individual.

Rafizi Ramli was Malaysia's economy minister at the time, while Tengku Zafrul Aziz held the investment, trade and industry minister portfolio.

Malaysia is a key player in the vital chips sector but has been largely focused on packaging, assembly and testing services — the lower end of the market.

The Arm Holdings agreement will see the Softbank-owned firm

provide chip designs and other technology to Malaysia, helping the nation shift into more value-added production, such as wafer fabrication and integrated circuit design.

Malaysia said at that time it would pay \$250mn over a decade to receive support from the British company.

"We will investigate this matter in a fair and professional manner," Azam said, adding that more witnesses will be summoned to assist the probe.

Malaysia's semiconductor exports were valued at 387.98bn ringgit (\$87.48bn) in 2024, the Malaysia External Trade Development Corp said, making the country one of the world's top 10 chip exporters.

Malaysia's northern island of Penang, home to a number of facilities, is often dubbed the country's Silicon Valley.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced plans in April 2024 to build a massive semiconductor design park, an effort to move the country beyond chips production.

AFP
Taipei

Taiwanese prosecutors charged 62 people and 13 companies yesterday in connection with a Cambodian conglomerate whose founder is accused of running forced labour camps.

Prince Holding Group founder Chen Zhi has been indicted by the US on fraud and money-laundering charges for allegedly running a multibillion-dollar cyberscam network from Cambodia.

The Southeast Asian nation has emerged as a hotspot for crime syndicates running a multibillion-dollar fraud industry that sees scammers lure internet uspers globally into fake romantic

relationships and cryptocurrency investments.

Cambodia deported Chen to China in January. Beijing has called Chen "the ringleader of a major cross-border gambling and fraud criminal syndicate".

The Taipei District Prosecutors Office said 62 people, including Chen, and 13 companies have been charged with offences that include "initiating, directing, manipulating, and commanding a criminal organisation".

Other charges include large-scale money laundering, falsifying accounting records, operating gambling venues for profit and using forged business documents.

"The Prince Group, led by Chen Zhi, ... established multiple companies in Taiwan from

2016 onwards to facilitate illegal gambling and money laundering operations," prosecutors said in a statement.

More than \$300mn was laundered in Taiwan using channels including foreign exchange transfers to Taiwanese companies, prosecutors said.

Authorities also seized more than \$170mn worth of assets, including luxury residences and high-end cars, as part of the investigation.

Dozens of seized sports cars, including limited edition models for Porsche, Ferrari and other brands, have been auctioned off for more than \$12mn.

Taiwanese prosecutors are seeking jail sentences of between six and more than 20 years for the defendants.

Philippines arrests nationals suspected of spying for China

The Philippine government said yesterday it had apprehended some of its citizens on suspicion of spying for China in a "serious national security matter" that underscores the need for stricter laws against espionage and foreign interference. Authorities did not provide details about the case, including how many people had been apprehended or whether charges had been filed.

"The operations of these individuals acting on the behest of Chinese intelligence have been addressed and terminated," the National Security Council said in a statement.

"Necessary actions have been taken against the individuals concerned, all Filipino nationals, who have all confessed their complicity in espionage activities and are co-operating with

authorities," the statement added. Relations between the Philippines and China have grown increasingly fraught amid repeated confrontations in the South China Sea, with both sides also engaging in an intensifying war of words that has played out on social media. China's foreign ministry and its embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment. (Reuters)



Luxury cars are on display, as Taiwan auctions off vehicles linked to the Cambodian scam centre Prince Group, in Taipei, Taiwan.



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GULF TIMES

ECB wary of Iran-war inflation spike after missing last 'transitory' surge

Having missed the onset of a historic inflation surge just years ago, European Central Bank policymakers are likely to avoid casting any Iran war-induced price spike as "transitory" and may keep a lower bar for policy action than in past energy price shocks. In 2022 the ECB was one of the last of the big central banks to tighten policy in response to the economic disruption caused by the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, only lifting interest rates in July of that year — months after the US Federal Reserve and the Bank of England — calling the "inflation hump" merely transitory.

It subsequently found itself having to raise rates at a record pace as price growth shot past 10%, five times its target and the highest level since the currency bloc was established. While the ECB will again react cautiously to any temporary, oil-led surges in inflation, this time it is mindful both of the lessons from 2022 and of the fact that the import-dependent euro zone economy is more exposed than others to rising energy costs, economists and policymakers said.

"We must at all cost avoid describing inflation as 'transitory,'" said one policymaker who requested anonymity so as to discuss policy deliberations candidly. "The ECB policy outlook is in the hands of military generals now," the source added of how global prices would now depend on twists and turns in the conflict sparked by the US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

The key lesson for the bank is that standard models are less reliable in exceptional shocks and more pragmatic analysis is needed, drawing on the lessons of similar episodes. The war has already pushed oil prices 20% higher this week, and fuel retailers are likely to pass this cost on to motorists within days, creating an instant feedback mechanism. The current environment is not fully comparable with 2022. Fiscal and monetary policies are tighter and there is no post-pandemic spending exuberance which aggravated supply bottlenecks. The war could also resolve quickly, reversing energy price increases. But domestic inflation is still too high. It was only an earlier fall in the oil price which lowered the headline figure below the ECB's 2% target at the start of the year.

Rapid inflation is still a recent memory for firms, so the central bank may be quicker than in the past to start adjusting prices

Rapid inflation is still a recent memory for firms, so the central bank may be quicker than in the past to start adjusting prices. Global inflation is also still elevated. Even before the war, the US Federal Reserve said the risk of inflation running above its target was meaningful. Minutes from its January meeting show several policymakers were open to rate hikes. "With the 2022 inflation spike a fresh memory, risks are that inflation expectations are less anchored, and the ECB will try to not make the same mistake of reacting too late twice," Nordea economists Tuuli Koivu and Anders Svendsen said.

The ECB's dilemma is that rate hikes only weigh on prices with a 12- to 18-month lag, so action is only warranted if it believes inflation will be persistent. Moreover, an energy price spike would hit growth, which in turn would be deflationary. But some say that should not be an excuse for inaction.

"We had this debate in 2022 and we were clearly too timid," another policymaker, who asked not to be named, said. "If we faced this growth-versus-inflation debate again, that lesson will be fresh on everybody's minds and we would obviously need to act quicker."

Policymakers speaking on the record have cautioned against hasty action, arguing that the environment is volatile and time is needed before the outlines of a new normal emerges. Yannis Stournaras, Greece's central bank governor, argued for flexibility while Martins Kazaks, Latvia's central bank chief, said the ECB should sit tight while the impact of the war remains unclear. — Reuters

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R. REYNOLDS
GULFTIMES
05-03-2026

Hormuz: No one has the right to choke out global economy

By Roudi Baroudi
Doha

The past few days have served up multiple reminders of why armed conflict is almost never a good option, let alone the best one: war is dangerous, expensive, and unpredictable, making it the last resort for prudent leaders. The entire region is on edge, with Iran seeking to internationalize the conflict so that other states will put pressure on the United States and Israel to halt their air and missile offensive. We are now on the precipice, however, of developments whose impacts will effect virtually everyone, everywhere.

I refer, or course, to the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow, shallow, and uniquely vital waterway that connects the Gulf to the open seas and haunts the dreams of risk analysts everywhere. About a fifth of the world's oil — worth more than half a trillion dollars annually — transits this passage, and while Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have pipelines that avoid the strait, they can't handle nearly the same volumes.

In addition, approximately the same share of the world's liquefied natural gas (LNG) passes through the same corridor, most of it Qatari LNG outbound for Asia. For good measure, Hormuz is also the route by which some 200mn people, including most of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), receive most of their food and other imports.

For decades, the Iranian government has claimed the right, boasted the ability, and vowed the willingness to close this waterway in response to various forms of military or other pressure from the

US. Then as now, its reasoning has been both subtle and brutal.

Outwardly, Iranian officials have denied targeting GCC and other states with missiles and drones, insisting that their forces were aiming instead at US military assets on their soil, even though most of these countries have not allowed their airspace to be used for the US/Israeli offensive. Even if it were true, the Iranian interpretation would certainly be a distinction without a difference for those mourning lost loved ones, but there have now been countless drone and missile attacks on homes and residential buildings, port facilities, oil and gas infrastructure and other civilian targets in several GCC countries. Either way, the Iranians seem to have calculated that inflicting some degree of pain on their neighbours will cause more voices — in this case from within US-allied countries — to demand an end to the war.

Energy prices

A similar arithmetic makes Hormuz the world's ultimate choke point. The mere possibility of lasting disruption there has caused energy prices to rise on countless occasions, including the current crisis, and an actual closure for any length of time would be highly corrosive to the global economy. And since energy prices get baked into virtually everything else, the pain would be felt virtually everywhere.

The number of countries that Iran can hit with missiles or drones is relatively limited. But close Hormuz and no country on earth would be immune to the consequences, causing many of them to demand a return to diplomacy. The fact of the matter is that Iran administers only a small section of the strait, specifically a strip of the northern channel usually used for entering the Gulf, and international law gives it no legal authority to suspend shipping there for more than a few hours without compelling reasons.

Article 44 of the 1982 Law of the Sea specifically mentions that innocent passage cannot be denied. This is one reason why Tehran has

been so cagey about its intent, for instance by having its parliament pass and illegal legislation supposedly authorizing closure, but then leaving the activation to the executive branch.

In legal terms, then, it is difficult to conceive of circumstances in which Iran could justify closing the strait and imposing so much hardship on so many people around the world. Whatever its stated intentions, its actions would amount to little more than sabotage and extortion.

In reality, Iran is already getting some of what it wants. Information published by Navionics and other ship tracking services indicates that until the current interruption, increasing numbers of ships were avoiding Iranian waters altogether, sailing entirely or almost entirely in Omani waters. But several ships have already been damaged, putting instant upward pressure on insurance rates and convincing most shipping companies that the risk is too great.

Dozens of hulls — carrying oil, LNG, and all manner of general cargo — are now waiting to leave the Gulf, and dozens more are piling up outside it. Prices are already starting to rise, and each day that passes makes energy scarcer and more expensive. It won't take long for the consequences of this kind of disruption to grow in size and severity. Traders and speculators may be able to stave off the full impact for a few days, and other oil producers can pump more to compensate, but eventually most of the GCC states will run out of storage and have to halt production.

The situation for LNG could be even worse because there are so few producers, and Qatar has already halted production over safety concerns, idling almost a fifth of global output. For all of

these reasons, this war involves far more than the official belligerents. The region's geography and geology mean that anyone who uses energy in any way has a direct stake in the outcome. Even countries that export oil and gas have a vested interest in a return to stability: rising prices might be tempting in the short term, but they inevitably damage economies and weaken demand over time. For this reason in particular, all responsible participants, willing or otherwise, need to be pushing for a negotiated solution.

Dialogue and diplomacy are never wasted efforts. Even when they fail to prevent or end a conflict, discussions carried out in good faith can leave behind the building blocks for a future understanding. The mere fact of direct or indirect contacts can also attenuate the intensity of operations — therefore limiting potential casualties and renewed impetus for more war — as planners start considering the repercussions for diplomacy.

As human beings, therefore, we should never give up on the possibility of peace, but nor can we sit and say nothing as Iran lashes out at peoples and countries who have nothing to do with this conflict, destabilizing the entire region and undermining standards of living the world over. This is especially true of Qatar and Oman, both of which have left no stone unturned in trying to keep Iran out of a war in the first place.

(Roudi Baroudi is the author of several books about maritime boundaries and has worked in the international energy business since the 1970s. He currently serves as CEO of Energy and Environment Holding, an independent consultancy based in Doha.)



An aerial view of the island of Qeshm, separated from the Iranian mainland by the Clarence Strait, in the Strait of Hormuz. (Reuters)

'No to the war': Spain digs in as rift with US deepens

AFP
Madrid

Spain's prime minister defiantly posted "No to the war" yesterday, deepening a rift with the US after Madrid refused the use of its bases to attack Iran and Washington threatened trade reprisals.

Spain's Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez had already angered US President Donald Trump with a series of other policies.

Sanchez has refused to join Nato allies in a pledge to boost defence spending to five % of GDP as demanded by Trump, and has fiercely criticised Israel's war in Gaza.

Trump lashed out at Sanchez's government on Tuesday, calling Spain a "terrible" ally and threatening to sever all trade with Spain.

Sanchez defended his position yesterday, saying his government's position "can be summed up in four words: no to the war".

"We will not be complicit in something that is harmful to the world and contrary to our values and interests, simply out of fear of retaliation," he added in a televised address.

Spain is part of the European Union, which allows goods to move freely between its 27 countries. This would complicate any bid to impose trade restrictions on a sin-



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez delivers an official statement in response to US President Donald Trump's remarks, at La Moncloa Palace in Madrid.

gle member state.

"Trump's words don't always become policy. We will have to see if he follows through, and how," said Angel Saz Carranza, director of the Esade Center for Global Economy and Geopolitics, a Spanish think tank.

European Council chief Antonio Costa wrote on X that he had called Sanchez to "express the EU's full solidarity with Spain".

"The EU will always ensure that the interests of its member states are fully protected," Costa said.

French President Emmanuel Macron also called to "express France's European solidarity in response to the recent threats of eco-

nomie coercion targeting Spain," his office said.

US forces use the Rota naval base and Moron air base in southern Spain under an agreement signed in 1953 under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco.

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Spain, then led by conservative prime minister Jose Maria Aznar, staunchly backed the US by sending troops.

Spain's participation in the Iraq war sparked huge street demonstrations and many Spaniards blame it for the March 11, 2004 Madrid train bombings that killed nearly 200 people.

A branch of Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks and called for the withdrawal of Spanish forces from Iraq.

Sanchez yesterday compared the Iran attacks to the Iraq war, which he said increased terrorism, increased energy prices and led to a less secure world.

"We oppose this disaster," he said in reference to the Iran war.

In contrast, neighbouring Portugal authorised the US to "conditionally" use an airbase on the Azores archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean for the Iran strikes, Prime Minister Luis Montenegro told parliament yesterday.

The authorisation was granted as long as "these operations are defensive or retaliatory, are necessary and proportionate, and exclu-

sively target military objectives", Montenegro said.

The conservative leader said those conditions were "aligned with international law", but he declined to openly support Sanchez or take a stance on the US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

The Spanish prime minister has emerged as a prominent figure for Europe's disillusioned progressives, who see him as one of the few remaining openly leftist voices in a continent increasingly dominated by right-wing politics.

His opposition to the use of the bases is seen by some analysts as an attempt to rally his supporters around an issue that unites the Spanish left.

Sanchez, in power since 2018, heads a minority coalition government that struggles to pass legislation.

Many on Spain's right consider Sanchez's opposition to Trump as motivated more by domestic politics than by a moral compass.

The head of the main opposition conservative Popular Party which tops opinion polls, Alberto Nunez Feijoo, accused Sanchez on X of using foreign policy for "partisan" purposes.

Left-leaning daily newspaper *El Pais* urged Sanchez in an editorial yesterday to "resist the temptation" to "exploit widespread hostility towards Trump in Spanish society to boost his popularity".

Shelling sparks panic along Pakistan-Afghanistan border

Reuters
Lalpur, Afghanistan/Peshawar, Pakistan

Several people living along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan said they were considering fleeing their homes as heavy shelling and explosions marked a seventh day of fighting between troops from both sides yesterday.

The South Asian allies-turned-foes are in their worst fighting in years following Pakistani air strikes on major Afghan cities last week, adding volatility to a region already on edge over US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

Islamabad says its air strikes, which have at times targeted the Taliban government, aim to stop militants using Afghan territory to attack Pakistan. The Taliban denies aiding militant groups.

Rana Sanaullah, political adviser to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, told Geo TV Pakistan had achieved most targets but operations continued.

"Most training centres have been eliminated," he said, adding Pakistan wanted "verifiable evidence" Afghan soil would not be used for attacks.

Residents in Pakistan's northwest said fighting often begins in the evening, putting homes in the line of fire as families break their Ramadan fast.

"There is complete silence in the day, but the moment we sit for Iftar dinner, the two sides start shelling," Farid Khan Shinwari from Landi Kotal near the

Torkham border crossing, told Reuters.

"We open our fast in extremely difficult situations, as you never know when a shell can hit your house."

Across the border, Afghans reported similar fighting and displacement. Hundreds sheltered in makeshift tents on an open dirt field while others had no shelter. Officials say about 1,500 families have fled their homes.

The Norwegian Refugee Council said on X that a Pakistani missile strike hit near a camp in Afghanistan housing people displaced by the 2025 Kunar earthquake, killing three, injuring seven and forcing about 650 families to flee again.

Reuters could not independently verify the claim.

Hazrat Meer, who fled the fighting from Torkham to Lalpur district, urged authorities to stop the conflict.

"We only want to return to our homes," he told Reuters.

Fighting along the 2,600-km (1,615-mile) border has ebbed and flowed for a week, with both sides claiming heavy losses and territorial gains.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif Ankara would help restore a ceasefire, the Turkish Presidency said on Tuesday, as other potential mediators have been drawn into the Gulf conflict.

Both sides reported heavy fire yesterday, with Afghanistan's Defence Ministry saying Taliban forces shot down a Pakistani drone and captured seven border posts.

Russia blames Ukraine after gas tanker sinks in Mediterranean

AFP
Tripoli

Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Ukraine yesterday of carrying out a "terrorist attack" on one of its liquefied natural gas carriers in the Mediterranean Sea off the Libyan coast this week.

Kyiv has not commented on the attack, which sank the ship and would be a rare successful hit on a Russian vessel hundreds of miles from Ukraine.

The sunken ship, the Arctic Metagaz, was sanctioned by the US and the European Union for being one of Russia's so-called "shadow fleet" of ageing tankers that carry its oil and gas around the world, skirting Western restrictions.

The Libyan port authority said the vessel was hit by "sudden explosions followed by a massive fire, which ultimately led to its com-

plete sinking" on Tuesday night north of the port of Sirte.

"This is a terrorist attack. This isn't the first time we've seen this kind of thing," Putin told a reporter from Russian state television, accusing Ukraine of being responsible.

The Russian transport ministry said earlier that the strike "was launched from the Libyan coast by Ukrainian naval drones", without providing more details.

Ukraine has not commented on the latest incident but said last December it had hit a Russian tanker with aerial drones in the Mediterranean in what was the first such strike there in the now four-year war.

Libya's port authority said of Tuesday's incident that the ship had been carrying roughly 62,000 metric tonnes of liquefied natural gas to Port Said in Egypt.

The Russian ministry said it had departed from the northern Rus-

sian port of Murmansk.

All 30 crew members have been rescued, Moscow said. Two received burns, Russian state media reported, citing the transport ministry.

The Libyan port authority said the wreckage took place between Libya and Malta "within the Libyan search-and-rescue zone... approximately 130 nautical miles north of the port of Sirte".

It warned all ships against approaching the wreckage site, citing the risks of collision and security concerns.

The Libyan National Oil Corp said in a statement the carrier was only transiting through the central Mediterranean and had "nothing to do" with it.

"Traffic in Libyan ports continues normally and regularly," it said, adding that the incident had "no impact on the flow of oil and gas supplies or the supply of fuel to the local market".

Five hurt as Russia strikes railway infrastructure in southern Ukraine

Reuters
Kyiv

At least five people were injured yesterday in two Russian attacks targeting railway infrastructure in southern Ukraine, Ukrainian officials said.

A railway worker was hurt in a drone strike, which hit an empty passenger train in the morning in the Mykolaiv region, Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said on the Telegram messaging app.

Another worker and two children were hurt later when a Russian missile hit an administrative building at a railway station in the neighbouring Odesa region, he said.

An official later updated the number of injured in the missile attack to four, without saying who the fourth person was.

Kuleba said there was also an



People stand next to a passenger train after it was hit by a Russian drone strike at a railway station in Mykolaiv region, yesterday.

attempted Russian drone attack late on Tuesday on a train operating between the eastern-central city of Dnipro and Kovel in northwestern Ukraine. It was stopped by railway workers and the drone hit a few metres away from the locomotive, he said.

Ukrzaliznytsia, Ukrainian national railways, said Russia had intensified drone attacks on rail-

way infrastructure, and that rolling stock was among the main targets.

It reported that 18 strikes had been recorded since the start of March, damaging 41 facilities.

Locomotives, freight cars and specialised equipment used to repair infrastructure have also been targeted, as well as railway depots and bridges, the operator said.

Michelangelo's works hidden in 'secret room', researcher says

AFP
Rome

Renaissance artist Michelangelo ordered many of his artworks to be hidden by his pupils in a secret room to protect them for posterity, an Italian researcher claimed yesterday.

According to renowned art historian Giorgio Vasari, the Italian genius burned a large number of his own drawings and sketches before his death in Rome in 1564.

But researcher Valentina Salerno says she has unearthed unpublished archival documents that reveal a plot to squirrel away his works.

"One of these three unpublished documents I found in the archives speaks of a room" kept by students of the Michelangelo school, the origins of which "can be traced back" to the artist, Salerno told AFP on the sidelines of a press conference in Rome.

"Assets are hidden inside this



A view of a marble bust displayed inside the Basilica of Santa Agnese Outside the Walls after being identified as a work by Michelangelo Buonarroti after centuries without attribution, in Rome yesterday.

room. These assets are locked away so tightly that they require a system of multiple keys, so that no one can access them without the permission of others," she said.

Salerno was researching a book on Michelangelo when she came across a document that showed the artist had in 1550 joined the Broth-

erhood of the Most Holy Crucifix. Those close to him in his final years were members too.

Over a decade of research, she followed the document trail between a series of archives in the Vatican, Italy and European cities including Paris.

As part of what she called a "maniacal plan" cooked up by Michelangelo, his works were to be hidden "because otherwise it would all end up with a nephew he detested".

"The goal was to pass on to his poor, vulnerable, non-noble descendants the material to be able to continue studying, to transmit his art to future generations," she said.

Those involved in the plan went on to form the famous art Academy of San Luca in the 16th century, she added. It still exists today.

Salerno believes the secret room designed to safeguard the artist's creations was likely somewhere inside the Saint Peter in Chains church in central Rome.

Swedish fighter jets patrol Iceland in show of force over Arctic

Reuters
Keflavik, Iceland

Swedish fighter jets are patrolling the skies around Iceland for the first time, as Nato allies try to show both US President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin that they are serious about protecting the Arctic. Sweden has sent six of its Saab Gripen fighter jets, the crown jewel of its defence industry, as part of Nato mission Arctic Sentry.

The mission is seeking to strengthen Nato's presence in the strategically important Arctic region as part of an effort to defuse severe tensions within the alliance prompted by Trump's push for the US to acquire Greenland.

Trump has forced Nato allies to sharply increase military spending, including in the Arctic. He has been particularly unimpressed by Denmark's military presence on Greenland, which he mockingly described as "two dog sleds".

The Swedish fighters are mainly on the lookout for Russian long-range bombers that can take off from air bases on the Kola Peninsula, which is home to Russia's Northern Fleet and also has nuclear missile silos. "Iceland as well as all of the Arctic would be important (in case of a conflict) because that's the warning chain for attacks against the US or Canada across the Arctic," said Major General Frode Arnfinn Kristoffersen, deputy chief of staff, operations, at Nato Joint Force Command Norway.

"Russia sees the Arctic as vital to becoming a great power and has also built up new Arctic bases and opened up former Soviet military sites, including deep-water ports and airfields," he said. Russia has repeatedly dismissed claims it is seeking to take over Greenland, or is a threat in the Arctic, saying they are false "horror stories" made up by Western leaders to justify their own behaviour.

Keflavik Air Base, built during World War Two and until 2006 an American base, is home

to the Nato air policing missions that have been done periodically since 2008.

The cold and windy conditions are the same as those on Greenland and the rest of the Arctic.

"We have experiences from operating in this kind of harsh environment...so for us, it's quite natural to also be able to operate here in Iceland," said Major General Jonas Wikman, Sweden's Air Force chief.

The JAS 39 Gripen is a fourth-generation light single-engine supersonic multi-role aircraft, meaning it can do air-to-ground, air-to-surface, and air-to-air operations.

"It's perfectly suitable for this weather. It's built in Sweden for the Swedish climate, and this is basically what we have back in Sweden," said Lieutenant Colonel Robin Arvidsson, fighter pilot and squadron commander in the Swedish Air Force.

It has a low logistical footprint and can be refuelled and rearmed by one officer and four conscripts in as little as 10 minutes.

10 Northern European nations agree to draw up joint evacuation plans in event of crisis or military conflict

Ten nations across northern Europe have agreed to prepare for possible cross-border evacuations of civilians in the event of a crisis or military conflict in the region, in a bid to draw lessons from the war in Ukraine, Sweden said yesterday. The 10 will jointly prepare plans covering transport, border controls, travel corridors and other matters.

Germany and Poland, along with fellow Nato members Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland and Denmark, have ramped up their planning in recent years for a possible future armed conflict with Russia. "Experience from Ukraine has shown that temporary movements of the population enable the continued defence of the country

while protecting civilians," Sweden's ministry of defence said in a statement announcing the northern European agreement. Sweden said that in addition to transport and travel corridors, the planning for cross-border evacuations will include the reception and registration of people and the protection of vulnerable groups. (Reuters)



Swedish Air Force JAS 39 Gripen aircraft are parked in a hangar at the air base in Keflavik, Iceland.

Modern-day heroes keep Qatar running amid regional tensions

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

As regional tensions ripple across the Middle East, many residents of Qatar have chosen to stay in their homes, closely following developments and taking precautionary measures. Yet beyond closed doors and quiet streets, thousands of workers continue to move through the city each day, ensuring daily life runs as smoothly as possible.

Among the most visible are delivery riders, who have drawn widespread praise online for their commitment and resilience during these uncertain days. From early morning until late at night, riders weave through traffic across Doha and the surrounding areas, delivering groceries, meals, medicines, and other essentials to households. Their work has become even more crucial as many residents prefer to stay indoors and rely on home delivery services.

On social media, netizens have described them as "modern-day heroes" applauding their dedication to keeping supply lines moving despite the circumstances. A Facebook page titled People and Qatar recently posted a photo showing four riders from different delivery companies standing side by side in their uniforms. The caption read simply: "Heroes with different kinds of capes."

The post quickly gained attention, reflecting a growing appreciation among residents for workers who continue to operate on the front lines of everyday life. Several commenters also pointed out that the recognition should extend beyond words.

Some suggested that companies consider increasing delivery riders' salaries, noting that many face financial pressures even as they continue working in difficult conditions.

"Many people don't realise that delivery drivers are struggling financially while still taking on risks and long hours," one commenter wrote.



Garbage collectors help prevent sanitation issues and ensure that communities remain clean and orderly amid the current tensions.

Another commenter, who indicated he may also be a delivery driver, shared a glimpse into the demanding nature of the job, saying that they work long hours regardless of the conditions, continuing their duties day and night through extreme heat, cold, rain, or shine. "But it's OK, it's part of our job, and we are happy that many people appreciate what we do, especially under this current situation," he told 'Gulf Times', adding that "we all have a role to play".

Delivery riders often spend extended hours navigating busy roads, enduring heat, humidity, and unpredictable traffic. The work requires not only stamina but also a constant commitment to meeting tight delivery schedules. Another group quietly sustaining daily routines are hypermarket and supermarket employees. Across the country, major retail chains have remained open around the clock to ensure residents have access to essential goods.

Inside these stores, staff work in shifts to restock shelves, assist customers, and prepare online or-

ders for home delivery. The surge in digital orders in recent days has placed additional demands on workers tasked with picking, packing, and coordinating deliveries efficiently. Drivers operating delivery vans and hypermarket vehicles also play a crucial role. They transport groceries and other household necessities to homes across Qatar, ensuring that families receive their orders on time whenever possible.

Meanwhile, healthcare professionals remain on constant standby. Doctors, nurses, paramedics, ambulance drivers, and hospital staff continue to provide care and reassurance to patients around the clock. Clinics and hospitals remain fully operational, with medical teams prepared to respond swiftly to emergencies and maintain public well-being. Their work forms a vital pillar of stability during periods of uncertainty, ensuring that essential health services remain accessible.

At the national level, Qatar's leadership has also acknowledged the efforts of those safeguarding the country.

HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Ab-

dulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, recently lauded the role played by Qatar's Armed Forces in confronting recent attacks. He said the Armed Forces acted decisively under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

He highlighted what he described as the heroic role of Qatar's Armed Forces in repelling the attack and protecting the country's security.

While the spotlight often falls on frontline responders, many other workers quietly help maintain normalcy.

Pharmacists continue to dispense medications and provide guidance to patients. Cooks and restaurant staff prepare meals for both dine-in customers and delivery orders. Petrol station attendants ensure that vehicles remain fuelled, keeping transport services running.

Municipal workers, including garbage collectors, also play an essential role. By maintaining regular waste collection schedules, they help prevent sanitation issues and



A huge thank you to our heroes on two wheels for keeping us supplied during these challenging times

On social media, netizens have described delivery drivers as "modern-day heroes," applauding their dedication to keeping supply lines moving despite the circumstances. Photo courtesy of People and Qatar FB page.



Drivers operating delivery vans and hypermarket vehicles continue transporting groceries and other household necessities to homes across Qatar.

ensure that communities remain clean and orderly. Together, these workers form an unseen network that keeps the rhythm of everyday life moving forward.

In times of uncertainty, their efforts remind residents that resilience is not only found in grand gestures but also in the steady commitment to ordinary tasks performed with extraordinary dedication. For many in Qatar, the current moment has sparked renewed appreciation for the people

who work behind the scenes: on roads, in hospitals, in supermarkets, and across essential services.

Their work may not always make headlines, but for countless residents relying on deliveries, healthcare, and basic services, these individuals represent the quiet strength that keeps the nation running. And as one social media commenter put it, sometimes heroes do not wear capes, they wear helmets, uniforms, and name badges.

WEEKEND DEALS

العروض متاح في جميع منافذ سفاري بتاريخ: ٠٥-٠٣-٢٠٢٦ في جميع منافذ سفاري
Promotion available at all Safari outlets on: 05-03-2026 at all Safari Outlets
قد يكون هناك حدود للمبشرينات العرض ساري حتى نفاذ الكمية. Purchase limit may apply. Offer valid until stocks last.



<p>29 QR.00 Local Beef With Bone 1 kg</p>	<p>23 QR.00 Camel Meat with Bone 1 kg</p>	<p>35 QR.75 Fresh Salmon Norway 1 kg</p>	<p>24 QR.50 Fresh Black Pomfret UAE 1 kg</p>	<p>8 QR.00 Mini Chicken/Veg. Samosa 10 pcs</p>
<p>5 QR.50 Banana Ecuador 1 kg</p>	<p>11 QR.00 Mango Yemen 1 kg</p>	<p>4 QR.50 Mandarin Egypt 1 kg</p>	<p>11 QR.50 Sadia Chicken Nuggets 750 gm x 1 pc</p>	<p>18 QR.50 Regal Picon Cheese 480 gm x 2 pcs x 1 pkt</p>
<p>22 QR.50 Rosary Chicken Tender Breast 2 kg x 1 pc</p>	<p>14 QR.00 Medjool Dates Small 1 kg</p>	<p>36 QR.00 Cashew Nut Plain (W320) 1 kg</p>	<p>9 QR.25 Britannia Wheat Rusk 305 gm x 3 pcs</p>	<p>32 QR.00 Lipton Yellow Label Tea Bag Fresh 100's x 2 gm x 2 pcs</p>

QR 199

QR 159

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WIN 4 CARS IN EVERY LUCKY DRAW

3rd Lucky Draw on: 29-03-2026 at Safari Hypermarket, Barwa Village (4 Winners)