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His Highness the Amir received a phone call from Finnish President Alexander Stubb, who inquired after the situation in Qatar following the Iranian aggression.

He expressed his country's condemnation of the attacks and solidarity with Qatar in all steps taken to protect its sovereignty and security.

He also praised Qatar's peacemaking role and its endeavours in establishing international security and peace.

The two sides affirmed during the call the importance of de-escalation and prioritising diplomatic path and political dialogue to contain the crisis.

They underlined the need to reach an im-

More world leaders back Qatar

mediate solution to stop the war, reaffirming the necessity to commit to the principles of international law and the UN charter to strengthen the region's security as well as regional and international stability.

His Highness the Amir also received a phone call from Belgian King Philippe.

The king expressed Belgium's solidarity with Qatar and its people amid the recent Iranian attacks, condemning the military actions that threaten regional security and stability.

He reaffirmed Belgium's support for measures taken by Qatar to safeguard its security and offered any necessary assistance.

The leaders also discussed key regional and international developments of mutual interest.

They stressed the importance of de-escalation and diplomatic efforts to resolve disputes peacefully, aiming to strengthen security and stability in the Gulf and protect the interests of regional populations.

His Highness the Amir received a phone call from Czech President Petr Pavel as well.

The Czech president expressed his country's solidarity with Qatar and condemned Iran's military actions, which target the security and sovereignty of states, and affirmed the Czech Republic's

rejection of any practices that undermine regional security and stability.

He also praised Qatar's role in supporting peace efforts and promoting regional stability, commending its dialogue and diplomacy based approach.

The Czech leader also stressed the need for urgent action to halt military operations and contain the escalation, calling for intensified international efforts to reach a swift solution to the crisis that preserves the region's security and stability.

In his call with His Highness the Amir, Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten also expressed his country's solidarity with Qa-

tar, condemning Iranian aggression that he felt threatened the security and sovereignty of states.

He also praised Qatar for its diplomacy aimed at enhancing peace and dialogue in the region, and its pivotal role in supporting de-escalation efforts and consolidating international security and stability.

The prime minister also expressed his thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir for the care that Qatar provides to the Dutch community under these exceptional circumstances.

His Highness the Amir thanked The Netherlands for its solidarity, affirming Qatar's keenness to ensure the safety and security of the communities residing on its territory, including the Dutch community. - QNA

Education ministry holds fifth meeting of Risk Management Committee

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) held its fifth meeting of the "Institutional Risk Management and Business Continuity Committee" yesterday to review the progress of the educational process and to follow-up on the implementation of the "Distance Learning" system.

Chaired by HE the Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid al-Khater, the meeting reviewed operational performance indicators in kindergartens, public and private schools, and higher education institutions.

The meeting also addressed the situation of Qatari students studying abroad to ensure the stability of their academic progress, in coordination with relevant authorities.

The minister and other officials also reviewed live broadcast lessons to ensure the quality of interaction and the smooth running of classes in the virtual classrooms.

The MoEHE affirmed in a statement that the continuity of education is a firm national priority, managed according to operational plans that ensure stability.

The ministry emphasised its complete readiness at both the

academic and technical levels to maintain the quality of educational outcomes.

The ministry also clarified that the suspension of in-person classes at nurseries will continue until further notice, while the distance (asynchronous) learning system will continue for kindergarten students, in accordance with the updated guidelines to ensure behavioral and technical compliance.

The MoEHE also emphasised the paramount role of families as key partners in the success of this phase, through creating a supportive home environment and monitoring student attendance.

It confirmed that attendance and assessment will continue according to the established procedures.

For higher education, the ministry affirmed its ongoing coordination to align academic policies with the requirements of current circumstances.

Training and human resources development programmes will continue via digital platforms, while programmes requiring in-person attendance will be postponed until further notice, as to ensure a seamless integration of roles between educational institutions and the community. - QNA

Qatar condemns Iran's targeting of Turkiye and Azerbaijan

Qatar has strongly condemned attempts to target Turkiye with a ballistic missile and an airport in Azerbaijan using Iranian drones. In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the incidents as a "dangerous escalation" and a "blatant violation of state sovereignty".

The ministry said that the attacks were part of a series of "reckless" actions by Iran, adding that Iran's continued opening of new fronts and expansion of tensions with neighbouring countries represents a serious risk to the stability of the region.

Qatar called on Iran to immediately stop "irresponsible policies that undermine regional security", advising it to prioritise the interests of the region's people and adhere to the principles of good neighbourliness and international law.

The statement also reaffirmed Qatar's full solidarity with Turkiye and Azerbaijan. - QNA

Qatar reiterates peacebuilding and its preservation as foreign policy priority

Qatar has affirmed that peacebuilding and its preservation represent a top priority for the country and an integral part of its foreign policy, which aims to prevent conflicts and resolve them through peaceful means, by hosting negotiations and facilitating constructive dialogue and mediation to achieve lasting peace.

This came in a statement delivered by the Third Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs's Human Resources Department, Hamad Abdullah al-Obaidli, during the panel discussion on human

rights and the culture of peace, Item 3, within the framework of the 61st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

He said that maintaining the sustainability of peace requires adherence to the rules of international law governing peaceful relations between states, and refraining from the use of force, or the threat of its use, against other states in a manner that contradicts the principles and purposes of the United Nations.

Al-Obaidli indicated that Qatar has focused on implementing development programmes that en-

hance the sustainability of peace, adding that it has also carried out specific projects to provide education to millions of children deprived of it due to conflicts.

He pointed out that Qatar has contributed to strengthening international efforts aimed at combating violent extremism through supporting the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), which works to promote a culture of peace by focusing on projects that address poverty reduction, education, and youth employment, in order to rebuild resilience within communities. - QNA

Qatar scientists develop AI that designs like nature

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Dr Bentria said that ThinQa uses advanced models to analyse natural phenomena and translate biological principles into innovative design solutions.

"It generates precise, manufacturable 3D models optimised for immediate printing and testing," he noted. "This innovation has been grounded with peer-reviewed research and has validated biomimicry principles for reliable results."

Dr Bentria said the platform can understand limitations and advantages and translate them into a 3D design.

"So the platform uses a multi-agent AI system that reads all the user input, reads more about scientific papers, and then generates a script-based tool," he said. "When you run it using ThinQa, it generates a 3D prototype."

"One of the areas that we are working on is the carbon dioxide (CO₂) capture filters," Dr Bentria continued. "We are trying actually to optimise the



QEERI scientist Dr El Tayeb Bentria.

existing one, using the rules of biomimicry to maximise the surface area, or to make the shapes capture more CO₂."

"The filter has a certain design, but using biomimicry, you can enhance its capabilities," he pointed out.

He said the platform is designed to be used for students too.

"We are planning also to have a STEM-based version, where students, actually high school students, can do their projects and get printable 3D prototypes in hours, instead of spending much time building them by hand," he said, referring to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

"This is in the piloting stage," Dr Bentria added. "I think it will take less than a year to launch the full version of the platform."

"We are testing the efficiency of the results that are generated and once it is done, this will be launched in full scale," he said. "We have filed for the patents and hopefully the platform will be launched before the end of this year."



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani.

Qatar University committee discusses education and research continuity

Qatar University (QU) has discussed ways to ensure the continuity of education and research during current circumstances, reviewing the procedures and operational plans that guarantee the efficient continuation of academic programs

and research activities.

During its Executive Management Committee (EMC) meeting, chaired by QU president Dr Omar al-Ansari, the committee stressed the importance of supporting students, faculty members, and researchers, as well as maintaining

the quality of educational and research outputs.

The committee also emphasised the necessity of providing the necessary digital learning environment to ensure the uninterrupted continuation of the academic process. - QNA



Qatar joins GCC, EU joint bid to contain crisis

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Calling for an immediate end to hostilities, the ministers urged Iran to cease all military operations and return to the path of diplomacy.

They underscored their commitment to resolving disputes through dialogue and stressed adherence to the UN Charter and principles of international humanitarian law.

The meeting also praised Oman's constructive role in facilitating communication and de-escalation efforts prior to the attacks.

Reaffirming the GCC states' inherent right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter, the ministers declared that the Gulf nations reserve the right to take all necessary measures to defend their territories and people.

At the same time, they reiterated their determination to pursue diplomatic channels to secure a sustainable resolution that prevents Iran from developing nuclear weapons and halts the proliferation of ballistic missiles, drones, and other destabilising technologies.

The discussions also highlighted the critical importance of safeguarding regional airspace and maritime routes - particularly through the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb - to ensure freedom of navigation and stability of global energy supplies.

The ministers commended the EU for its naval op-

Italy to send air defences to aid Gulf states

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni announced yesterday that Italy will send air defences to support Gulf states currently under attack from Iran. She said in a statement that "Italy, like the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, intends to send aid to the Gulf countries".

Meloni said that the support comes not just because "they are friendly nations but because there are tens of thousands of Italians there", along with "around 2,000 Italian soldiers that must be protected".

The prime minister revealed that authorisations are in place for the United States to use its bases in Italy for operations that do not include bombing, noting that any change to this would require the approval of the government and parliament. - QNA

erations ASPIDES and ATALANTA, which enhance maritime security and protect vital trade routes.

In closing, both sides reaffirmed the significance of the GCC-EU strategic partnership, first established in 1988 and renewed at the Brussels Summit in 2024.

They pledged intensified co-ordination to uphold peace, protect regional security, and ensure that the Gulf remains a cornerstone of global economic stability.

Environment ministry offers more than 160 e-services for individuals and companies

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) has announced that it offers over 160 e-services that enable individuals and companies to conveniently complete environmental transactions without the need to visit the ministry's headquarters, as part of ongoing

efforts to develop government services and enhance the digital transformation of their delivery.

The ministry said in a statement yesterday that its e-services enable beneficiaries to apply for various environmental transactions through the MoECC's website or the Bee'ah application, contrib-

uting to streamlining procedures, saving time and effort, and allowing completion of transactions from anywhere, 24/7.

The ministry has invited the public to visit its website to learn more about the available services and to obtain further information. - QNA

WHO says it has verified 13 attacks on health sites in Iran

The World Health Organisation (WHO) chief said yesterday that it has verified 13 attacks on health infrastructure in Iran amid a US-Israeli campaign and it was checking reports that four medics were killed and 25 others injured.

"The WHO has verified 13 attacks on healthcare in Iran and one in Lebanon," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference, without attributing blame or giving details.

The WHO's Eastern Mediterranean regional director, Dr Hanan Balkhy, added at the same briefing that four ambulances in Iran were also affected and that hospitals and other health sites suffered minor damage due to strikes nearby, citing Iranian authorities.

One of these hospitals in the capital Tehran was evacuated as a result, the UN health agency previously said.

Iran's ambassador to the UN in Geneva has alleged that 10 facilities have been hit by military strikes in a letter to Tedros earlier this week. — Reuters

US will have a role in choosing Iran's next leader: Trump

Reuters/AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump told Reuters in a telephone interview yesterday that the United States will have a role in choosing Iran's next leader.

Trump said that it was very early in the process of picking a new leader but that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's son Mojtaba was an unlikely choice.

"We want to be involved in the process of choosing the person who is going to lead Iran into the future," Trump said. "We don't have to go back every five years and do this again and again... somebody that's going to be great for the people, great for the country."

In an interview with Axios, he drew a comparison to Venezuela, where interim president Delcy Rodriguez has co-operated

with him under threat of violence after the United States ousted her boss, Nicolas Maduro.

"Khamenei's son is a lightweight. I have to be involved in the appointment, like with Delcy," Trump said.

It was unclear in what way Trump would be able to take a role in the Islamic republic's selection of a new supreme leader, a decision made by an assembly of senior Shia Muslim clerics mostly staunchly opposed to the United States. Trump was raised a Presbyterian.

However, his remarks imply a willingness to work with someone from within the Islamic republic rather than seek to topple the government, which has been a sworn enemy of the United States since the 1979 Islamic revolution toppled the pro-Western shah.

The late shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, has proposed that he return as a transitional figure

Son of last shah says Iran clerics' next leader will be illegitimate

The son of the last shah toppled in Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution said yesterday that whoever the clerical government chooses to succeed the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will be illegitimate.

Reza Pahlavi, who has positioned himself as an alternative if the Islamic republic falls, said on social media that "victory is near" after Khamenei was killed last weekend as the United States and Israel launched the war.

"Any attempt to appoint a successor for him is pre-destined to fail. Whomever is introduced... will lack legitimacy and will be considered an accomplice to the bloody record of this regime and its criminal leaders," Pahlavi said.

Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of Khamenei, is among the contenders to succeed his father. Pahlavi said it made no difference if the next supreme leader were "Mojtaba or Hassan" — a reference to another potential contender, Hassan Rouhani, the former president who was considered a moderate within the system and championed diplomacy with the United States. — AFP

before Iran drafts a new constitution as a secular democracy.

Earlier yesterday Pahlavi said that any new supreme leader within the Islamic republic would be illegitimate (see accompanying report).

Work halted at WHO's Dubai emergency hub

The Middle East war has forced the World Health Organisation (WHO) to suspend operations at its global emergency logistics hub in Dubai, the UN agency's chief said yesterday.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the impact of the conflict, sparked by the US-Israeli attacks on Iran on Saturday, "goes beyond the immediately affected countries".

"Operations at the WHO's logistics hub for global health emergencies in Dubai are currently on hold due to insecurity," he told a press conference.

Last year, the Dubai logistics hub processed

more than 500 emergency orders for 75 countries around the world, Hanan Balkhy, the WHO's Eastern Mediterranean regional director, told reporters.

"Humanitarian health supply chains are now being jeopardised," she warned.

Balkhy said that "the hub's operations are temporarily on hold due to insecurity, airspace closures and restrictions affecting access to the Strait of Hormuz".

The disruption, she said, was "preventing access to \$18mn in humanitarian health supplies while another \$8mn in shipments cannot reach the hub".

It was affecting over 50 emergency supply requests from 25 countries, as well as some \$6mn in medicines destined for the Gaza Strip.

On top of that, \$1.6mn in polio laboratory supplies were being held up, which could have dire impacts for Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the disease is endemic, she cautioned.

Balkhy said the WHO was discussing and co-ordinating with authorities in the United Arab Emirates on how to continue using the hub.

It was also in discussions with other countries and humanitarian partners on using other hubs in Nairobi, Dakar and Brindisi to establish other routes. — AFP

More flights take off despite continued military strikes

Fewer commercial flights were cancelled yesterday in the Middle East despite continued military strikes, with more than 100 flights taking off from the United Arab Emirates, according to a specialist data firm.

The United States and Israel launched a campaign of air strikes against Iran on Saturday, killing its supreme leader and sparking retaliatory attacks by Tehran across the Gulf, with airports also targeted.

Airports in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are major hubs for travel between Europe and Asia, so the closure of the region's airspace quickly left tens of thousands of travellers stranded.

Cirium, a company specialising in aviation sector data, said 87 flights took off yesterday from Dubai's international airport, the world's second-largest airport by passengers, and 15 from Abu Dhabi.

Another 60 flights left Oman's capital Muscat.

However, no flights left the airports in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar.

Cirium said that the 43.1% of flights across the region were cancelled yesterday.

That is down from 61% on Wednesday, and more than 65% between Sunday and Tuesday.

Among the aircraft leaving Dubai were the super jumbo A380s flown by flag carrier Emirates.

Other Emirates A380s returned from abroad, including from destinations such as Los Angeles.

"With the limited re-opening of airspace, Emirates is operating a reduced flight schedule until further notice," the airline said on its website.

It added that customers with earlier bookings were being given priority to reserve new flights.

According to the flight tracking website FlightRadar24, flights departing from the United Arab Emirates were heading south to keep its distance from the Gulf and Iran.

Qatar Airways, whose regular operations are suspended until further notice, said yesterday that it would carry out a limited number of repatriation flights for travellers stranded in the region.

It said it would operate flights from Muscat to London, Berlin and Rome, as well as from Riyadh to Frankfurt. — AFP

Bombing of Tehran intensifies as war enters sixth day with over 1,200 dead

Reuters/AFP
Dubai/Jerusalem/Tehran

The US-Israeli campaign against Iran entered its sixth day yesterday with what residents described as even more intensive bombing, while Iran vowed to retaliate anywhere following a US attack on a ship thousands of miles from the battle zone.

Iran's state-run Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs said yesterday that the death toll from US and Israeli strikes on the Islamic republic has risen to 1,230.

"The number of martyrs from the aggressive military attack carried out by criminal America and the usurping Israeli regime against the Islamic homeland had reached 1,230 as of March 5," the foundation said, according to Iran's official IRNA news agency.

Inside Iran, the abrupt postponement of a planned three days of mourning for slain supreme leader Ali Khamenei interrupted apparent plans to swiftly anoint Khamenei's hardliner son as his successor.

"Today is worse than yesterday. They are striking northern Tehran. We have nowhere to go. It is like a war zone. Help us," said Mohammadreza, 36, by phone from Tehran, with a shaky voice as explosions rang out from what Israel described as its latest wave of strikes on Iranian government targets.

Although some international financial markets recovered from falls earlier in the week, the economic impact of the campaign



People run as smoke rises following an explosion in Tehran yesterday. — Reuters

intensified, with countries around the world cut off from a fifth of global supplies of oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Iran meanwhile vowed to take revenge for a US torpedo attack on an Iranian warship off the coast of Sri Lanka on Wednesday, which killed more than 80 sailors.

Iran's foreign minister said that Washington would "bitterly regret" the precedent it had set by sinking a ship in international waters without warning.

A commander of the Revolutionary Guards, General Kioumars Heydari, told state TV: "We have decided to fight Americans wherever they are."

The body of Ayatollah Khamenei, killed in the first hours of the US-Israeli air campaign in the first assassination of a country's top ruler by an airstrike, had been due to lie in state in a Tehran prayer hall from Wednesday evening to launch three days of mourning.

However, the memorial, ex-

pected to draw many thousands of mourners to the streets, was abruptly and indefinitely postponed shortly before it was due to begin.

In the hours before announcing the delay, Iranian officials had said that they were close to naming Khamenei's successor, and that the leading candidate was his son Mojtaba, a powerful hardliner whose selection would be a strong gesture of defiance.

Iranian officials gave no reason

for the postponement of the memorial, but a source told Reuters that it was motivated in part by fear of assassination of those attending while Israeli and US warplanes remain in the skies.

Israel has said it would consider any replacement for Khamenei who continued hostile policies an immediate target to be killed.

Two sources familiar with Israel's battle plans said that having killed many Iranian leaders during nearly a week of strikes, Israel was now planning to enter a second phase when it would target underground bunkers where Iran stores its missiles.

Israel has said its aim is to overthrow Iran's clerical rulers.

Washington says its goal is to prevent Tehran from being able to project force beyond its borders, but it has also called on Iranians to rise up and seize power.

The war has had global economic impact, above all from the interruption to tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of global oil and LPG flows along Iran's coast.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had hit a US tanker in the northern part of the Gulf and the vessel was on fire, the latest of numerous reports of such attacks.

Passage through the strait would be under Iranian control, the Guards said.

Azerbaijan said four Iranian drones had crossed its border and wounded four people, and it was preparing a response.

Iran, which has launched drones and missiles against US allies in the region, denied blame for the incident.

More tankers come under attack

By Jonathan Saul and Anna Hirtenstein
Reuters

More tankers came under attack in Gulf waters yesterday as the US-Iran war escalated, and Iranian drones entered Azerbaijan, threatening to spread the crisis to more oil producers in the region.

A Bahamas-flagged crude oil tanker was targeted by an Iranian remote-controlled boat laden with explosives while anchored near Iraq's Khor al Zubair port, according to initial assessments.

A second tanker at anchor off Kuwait was taking on water and spilling oil after a large explosion on its port side.

Nine vessels have come under attack since the conflict broke out between the US, Israel and Iran on Saturday.

Iran launched a wave of missiles at Israel early yesterday and also sent drones into Azerbaijan, injuring four people.

The escalation comes after a motion to halt the US attacks was blocked in Washington and as the son of Iran's slain supreme leader emerged as a frontrunner to succeed him, suggesting that Tehran was not about to buckle under the pressure.

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

Hundreds of other vessels remained outside the Strait of 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.

President Donald Trump offered US Navy escorts and insurance in a bid to restart shipping flows and curtail energy prices.

Insurance market Lloyd's of London said yesterday that it is engaging with the US government on a plan.

BP evacuated foreign staff from Iraq's Rumaila oil field after two unidentified drones landed inside the field, Iraqi oil sources said.

Iraq has cut its oil production by nearly 1.5mn barrels a day as it ran out of storage and was unable to load tankers, officials told Reuters.

A refinery in Kuwait shut down and another reduced its processing rate.

A third refinery in Bahrain also cut its output. Russian President Vladimir Putin said his country could halt gas supplies to Europe right now, amid the spike in energy prices from the Iran crisis.

Qatar, which provides 20% of the world's LNG supply, halted gas production earlier this week due to the conflict.

Other major producers such as the US and Australia have little spare capacity to offset this lost supply, according to Reuters calculations and industry analysts.

The EU's task of refilling its gas storage in the coming months has become riskier and more expensive due to the Iran conflict and disrupted LNG supplies.

It still imports some gas from Russia, planning to end pipeline supply by late 2027 and ban new short-term LNG contracts from late April 2026.

Asian importers came under further pressure from the disruptions in supply from the Middle East.

China asked refiners not to sign new contracts to export fuel and to try to cancel shipments already committed, several people with knowledge of the matter said yesterday.

Iran denies attacking US embassy in Riyadh

Iran's ambassador to Saudi Arabia Alireza Enayati categorically denied yesterday that his country hit the US embassy in Riyadh this week, after Saudi officials said Iran targeted the compound with drones.

Saudi Arabia has repeatedly accused Tehran of launching missile salvos and drone attacks at its territory and warned that the kingdom reserved the right to defend itself, including by retaliating.

Iran had earlier denied attacking the sprawling Ras Tanura refinery — one of the largest in the Middle East — which Riyadh had also accused Tehran of targeting twice with drones.

Enayati added to the denial, saying Iran also had no hand in the targeting of the US embassy that triggered a fire on the compound.

"We confirmed that Iran has no role in the attack on the US embassy in Riyadh," the ambassador told AFP. "If the operations command in Tehran attacks somewhere, it takes responsibility for it."

Before the outbreak of war, Riyadh had thrown its weight behind diplomatic efforts to defuse tensions between Tehran and Washington and vowed that its airspace and territory would not be allowed to be used for attacks against Iran.

Enayati said Iran remained appreciative of that pledge by the kingdom.

"We appreciate what we have repeatedly heard from Saudi Arabia — that it does not allow its airspace, waters, or territory to be used against the Islamic Republic of Iran," he told AFP. "We welcome and affirm this position."

After years of enmity, Shia-dominated Iran and Sunni-majority Saudi Arabia resumed relations in March 2023 under a surprise China-brokered deal.

Riyadh severed ties with the Islamic republic in 2016 after its embassy in Tehran and consulate in the northwestern city of Mashhad were attacked during protests after Saudi Arabia executed Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr. — AFP

Seafarers can refuse to sail through Mideast Gulf region: union

Seafarers have the right to refuse to sail on ships passing through the Middle East Gulf, including the Strait of Hormuz, after the threat level for the region was raised to its highest level, the leading labour union and shipping industry groups said yesterday.

Around 300 ships are anchored on both sides of the Strait while the US-led war against Iran escalates.

Since February 28, nine ships have been damaged and at least one seafarer has been killed.

As part of negotiated arrangements reached yesterday between mariners and commercial shipping companies, known as the International Bargaining Forum (IBF), seafarers can refuse to sail into the area, with repatriation at the company's cost and compensation equal to two months' basic wage.

In addition, they will receive higher pay and compensation will be doubled in the event of death or disability, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) said in a statement.

"Today's designation ensures that seafarers on vessels covered by IBF agreements have critical protections if they operate in this dangerous region," ITF general secretary Stephen Cotton said.

"The fact we have to take these measures at all is a damning indictment of the situation facing seafarers today," he said. "No worker should have to risk being killed or maimed simply for doing their job — particularly when that job is transporting the oil and goods that keep the world's economies running." — Reuters



Iran issues warning to people who dare defy Internet blackout

By Adam Plowright
AFP

Iranian authorities were issuing warnings to people connecting to the Internet in defiance of a communications blackout that had left the Islamic republic largely cut off from the outside world, witnesses told AFP yesterday.

Iran's Internet connectivity was currently running at "around 1% of ordinary levels", monitor group Netblocks said yesterday, leaving most Iranians struggling to access basic information, navigation tools or communication apps.

Those who had successfully connected using VPNs (virtual private networks) to circumvent the controls had received warnings over their phones.

"If you repeatedly connect to the international Internet in the coming days, your line will be blocked and the necessary measures

will be taken to refer your case to the judicial authorities," the messages said.

A Tehran resident, who messaged AFP on condition of anonymity for security reasons, said the "Internet speed is very slow". "You can't call and voice messages don't get delivered. We can just text," the resident added.

Iran cut off Internet access on Saturday after Israel and the United States launched air strikes on the country which continued yesterday for a sixth day.

Calls from overseas to Iranian mobile phones or landlines were near-impossible, making the task of reporting on the conflict difficult for journalists who face tight controls while working in the country.

Inside Iran, simple tasks like checking in on relatives, driving with navigation tools such as Google Maps, or checking websites for information had become impossible.

Only the highly limited local intranet was available.

Israeli and US air strikes have also repeatedly targeted Iranian state television and radio infrastructure.

Shima, a 33-year-old in Tehran with a sporadic Internet connection, said that she was helping friends by sending news to their relatives about life in the capital hit by waves of strikes.

"I need to call many people, even strangers, on behalf of their families," she told AFP.

Some Iranians had resorted to using illegal Starlink terminals, the Elon Musk-owned satellite-based Internet provider that proved crucial for communication in Ukraine after Russia's invasion in 2022.

"The Internet situation here is abysmal," a resident in Bukan in western Iran, who asked not to be named, said in a message sent to AFP. "It connects and disconnects. The connection is slow so the VPNs don't work."

However, Iran found ways of disrupting Starlink during national protests in January

when a similar Internet blackout was imposed for several weeks.

The country also cut the Internet during last June's 12-day war with Israel and during 2022 mass protests.

Awyar Shekhi, a member of the Norway-based Hengaw Organisation for Human Rights, said their work documenting civilian deaths in the bombing or abuses by Iranian authorities had been complicated by severe communication problems.

"It's a struggle for us right now, but it's not the first time that we are facing a cutoff," she told AFP. "We've built our own networks to be prepared (for) such times to be able to get information through our sources when there is no Internet."

Iranian exiles like her were also struggling. "For Iranians in the diaspora, it's stressful and they live with anxiety about their families, not knowing if they have been able to find shelter, or whether they have left their homes," she said.

20,000 seafarers, 15,000 cruise passengers trapped in Gulf: IMO

AFP
London

Around 20,000 seafarers and 15,000 cruise ship passengers are stuck in the Gulf because of the Middle East war, the UN's International Maritime Organisation (IMO) told AFP yesterday.

The shipping regulator's secretary-general Arsenio Dominguez said that the "IMO is ready to work with all stakeholders to help ensure the safety and well-being of the seafarers affected".

The maritime sector said it had designated the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman and Gulf as a "war-like operations area", granting seafarers additional protections as the Middle East war engulfs the crucial energy transit route.

Since war erupted on Saturday, the IMO has recorded seven incidents involving ships in the region that have resulted in two deaths and another seven people wounded.

"Beyond the economic impact of these alarming attacks, it is a humanitarian issue. No attack on innocent seafarers is ever justified," Dominguez told AFP. "I reiterate my call for all shipping companies to exercise maximum caution when operating in the affected region."

Iran has effectively shut down the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's crude and considerable supplies of liquefied natural gas travel.

Several shipping groups, including Danish shipping giant Maersk, have suspended bookings in the Gulf.

Maritime employers and unions representing their workers said yesterday that their upgraded designation of the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman and Gulf from a "high risk area designation" three days ago "reflects the continuing and heightened threat to seafarers and vessels operating in the region".

"Hundreds of vessels are stranded in the Gulf following the halt of vessel movements through the Strait of Hormuz, highlighting the scale of disruption and risk facing civilian crews in the region," said a joint statement from the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the Joint Negotiating Group, which represents maritime employers.

ITF general secretary Stephen Cotton told AFP that after 32 years involvement with the federation, "this is the worst" he has seen it, "because it's so unclear on the diplomatic level".

While seafarers can request to leave a ship and be repatriated, the reality is not so clear.

"You can't push a button and you immediately leave a vessel," said Cotton. "If you've got a crew of 25, you probably need 16 to safely run the vessel."

On Wednesday Iran's Revolutionary Guards claimed "complete control" of the Strait, with reports of additional vessels coming under attack.

Energy intelligence firm Kpler said oil tanker transits through the Strait had dropped by 90% from last week.

With energy prices already soaring, US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the US Navy was ready to escort oil tankers through the crucial shipping route.

Somali parliament approves changes to constitution

Reuters
Mogadishu

Somalia's parliament voted to change its constitution and extend the term in office for lawmakers and the president, the president and the parliament's speaker said, pushing back

planned elections by a year.

Somalia has endured conflict and clan battles with no strong central government since the fall of autocratic ruler Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991.

While an African Union peace-keeping mission has pushed back the 1 Qaeda-linked al Shabaab group, it still controls vast areas of

the countryside and has the ability to conduct regular strikes on major population centres.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud had reached a deal last August with some opposition leaders stipulating that, while lawmakers would be directly elected in 2026, the president would still be chosen by parliament.

A 2024 law restored universal suffrage ahead of the vote.

On Wednesday, 222 lawmakers from the parliament and senate out of a total of 329 voted by acclamation to change the law, extending their term and that of the president to five years, from four years previously.

"Today is a historic day for it

is the official completion of the constitution which had dragged for a long period," the president told a press conference on Wednesday.

Opposition party leaders, including former presidents and former prime ministers, rejected the amendment and called for elections in May as planned.

Seven troops, 11 civilians killed in Nigerian militant raid

At least 18 people, including seven troops, were killed when religious militants raided a base and a nearby community in northeast Nigeria's Borno state near the Cameroon border, residents, militia members and rangers told AFP yesterday.

Africa's most populous nation is battling a 16-year insurgency, with the Nigerian army's attempts to fight the uptick in radical Islamist violence complicated by the presence of other armed groups in the region.

Fighters from the Boko Haram group attacked an army base outside Ngoshe village in Gwoza district late on Tuesday, dislodging the soldiers after a fierce gun battle, sources told AFP.

After the troops withdrew, the jihadists raided Ngoshe, killed residents in indiscriminate shootings and abducted dozens of women and children, the sources said.

Shu'aibu Habu, a local ranger in the area, said 11 people were killed in Ngoshe village and that rangers and volunteers recovered bodies of at least "seven soldiers" killed by the religious militants.

"We recovered the bodies of three soldiers inside the base and four others in the bush," Habu said. "Eleven residents of Ngoshe, including women and children, were killed."

The militants kidnapped several people, including the local imam and a military officer, the ranger said.

"They sacked a base and raided the village, killing and abducting many people," Babakura Kolo, a member of militia assisting the military in the region, told AFP, without giving a toll.

He, however, said around 30 women and children were kidnapped.

Isa Laminu, another ranger who gave the same toll as Habu, said five of his relatives were among those abducted.

Hindatu Musa Yahaya, a Ngoshe resident, said her sister was killed when "a stray bullet hit her in her bedroom" during the attack, but her four children were unharmed.

Nigerian military authorities have not issued a statement on the incident.

A security report seen by AFP said Nigerian military air strikes killed "more than 50" religious militants in their "hideouts" in Ngoshe on Tuesday, in an apparent response to the sacking of the base.

Since 2009, the religious militant insurgency in Nigeria, led primarily by Boko Haram and its rival faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) group, has left more than 40,000 dead and 2mn displaced in the northeast of the country, according to the United Nations.

Last month, the United States began deploying troops to Nigeria to provide technical and training support to the country's soldiers in fighting the religious militant groups.

The US Africa Command said that 200 troops were expected to join the deployment overall. - AFP

Israel orders people to leave swathe of Beirut

Reuters/AFP
Beirut/Jerusalem

Israel has warned residents to leave Beirut's southern suburbs, including Hezbollah-controlled areas, prompting an exodus from a swathe of the capital, which a far-right Israeli minister said would soon resemble parts of Gaza.

Suggesting a major escalation looms in Israel's offensive against the Iran-backed Hezbollah, an Israeli military spokesperson told residents of the southern suburbs to move east and north, posting a map showing four large districts of the capital that he said they must leave.

Lebanon was pulled into the war in the Middle East on Monday, when Hezbollah opened fire, sparking Israeli airstrikes focused on the southern suburbs, and on southern and eastern Lebanon.

"Save your lives, evacuate your homes immediately," the military spokesperson, Avichay Adraee, posted on X, saying that any movement southwards may endanger their lives.

Roads out of the suburbs were clogged as people fled by car and on foot, television footage showed.

Gunfire was heard in the southern suburbs, known as Dahiyeh, warning residents to leave.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich posted a video on X from near the Lebanon border, in which he said that Dahiyeh would soon resemble parts of Gaza, where Israel's two-year military campaign against



A woman in a wheelchair and other people, displaced from southern Beirut after the Israeli army's warning prompted residents to evacuate, gather at Martyrs' Square in Beirut. - Reuters

Hezbollah's ally Hamas has left much of the territory in ruins.

"The Dahiyeh will look like Khan Younis. Our northern residents will soon live in quiet, peace and security," said Smotrich, who sits on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet.

The area highlighted in the Israeli military map includes neighbourhoods controlled by Hezbollah but also spreads into adjoining ones.

While Israel has previously ordered people to leave buildings in Dahiyeh, it is the first time it has instructed residents of the entire area to leave.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said yesterday that the Israeli military's call for residents of vast areas of southern Lebanon to evacuate raised "serious risks of violations of the laws of war".

"Calling on everyone who

lives south of the Litani (River) to evacuate immediately raises serious legal and humanitarian red flags and fears for the safety of civilians," said Ramzi Kaiss, Lebanon researcher at HRW.

"How are older people, the sick and people with disabilities going to be able to evacuate immediately? And how will their safety be guaranteed as they leave?" he said in a statement from the rights group.

HRW said "the sweeping nature" of Israel's call raised "concerns that their purpose is not to protect civilians", adding that the area was home to hundreds of thousands of people.

The evacuation call "raises serious risks of violations of the laws of war", it added. Hundreds of displaced people gathered in downtown Beirut near the sea.

Many, including women and

children, could be seen wearing backpacks.

A car drove past with mattresses and blankets strapped to the roof, a Reuters reporter said.

On Wednesday, the Israeli military ordered residents to leave an area of southern Lebanon amounting to about 8% of its territory.

Nearly all outgoing and incoming flights to Beirut airport, which is adjacent to the zone identified by the Israeli military, were cancelled for both yesterday evening and today.

Some residents of Beirut's southern suburbs told Reuters that they had received calls from European numbers playing a recorded message from someone identifying themselves as a member of the Israeli military and telling them to leave their homes.

Beirut's predominantly Shia Muslim southern suburbs are among the capital's most densely populated areas.

The area was pounded by Israeli airstrikes during a war with Hezbollah in 2024, and during a previous war with Israel in 2006.

Israeli bombardment and warnings have already forced tens of thousands of Lebanese to flee homes in the southern suburbs and the south this week.

The Lebanese health ministry said 102 people have been killed in Israeli attacks. Its figures do not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Unicef, the UN children's agency, said on Wednesday that seven children had been killed.

There have been no reports of fatalities in Israel as a result of Hezbollah attacks.

Africa 'exposed' to Middle East war, within reach of Iran's missiles

By Eric Randolph
AFP

Africa hosts military bases within reach of Iranian missiles and is feeling the impact of rising oil prices and threats to shipping, as the continent again suffers from events largely beyond its control.

The continent is "structurally exposed" to the Middle East war, said Hubert Kinkoh, senior researcher at the CARPO think tank. "Energy imports, foreign military bases, and its proximity to maritime chokepoints mean the war's effects reach African shores quickly."

The Horn of Africa includes possible targets for Iranian strikes, notably the 4,000 US military personnel at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti.

It lies less than 100 miles (160km) from Yemen, where Houthi rebels have an arsenal of ballistic and anti-ship missiles, and drones, courtesy of Iran.

The Houthis have not engaged in the conflict despite vowing to do so, but have previously caused major trade disruption with attacks on Red Sea shipping during the Israel-Hamas war.

Somaliland, just south of Djibouti, could also be a target as it hosts a major port and military base at Berbera run by another Iranian enemy, the United Arab Emirates.

Israel recently became the only country to recognise Somaliland's independence from Somalia, and a Western diplomat told AFP that it may already have troops in Somaliland.

"Berbera is not a confirmed target, but its location (near the southern entrance to the Red Sea) leaves it vulnerable, particularly as Iran-aligned groups widen the range of facilities they view as linked to US or allied operations," said Kinkoh.

Economically, the war is terrible timing for Africa, just as a weaker dollar and lower interest rates offered some breathing space for its many deeply indebted nations.

The war is disrupting global trade, diverting ships from the Suez Canal to the pricier route around the Cape, and hiking prices across the board, including for energy and food.

An oil producer like Nigeria might be benefited, but it locked in low prices for its exports in long-term contracts and remains a net importer of refined fuel because of its limited refining capacity.

Pump prices in Nigeria were up around 14% this week.

Nigerian think tank SBM Intelligence said the new crisis has exposed its government's "wait-and-see" approach to international affairs, which leaves its "economic interests subject to forces beyond our control" - a criticism that could be levelled at many on the continent.

African economies also rely on remittances from the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers in the Gulf that are now threatened.

Previous crises in the Middle East have revealed the near-total lack of evacuation planning or even emergency hotlines for them.

While some African countries have done too little, others are accused of overreach.

South Africa is perhaps the most exposed diplomatically, having already riled the United States with its opposition to Israel, and hosted Iranian warships for naval exercises in January - even if the government has since disavowed its involvement and said the military acted against presidential orders.

"South Africa will want to reinforce the signalling to the world that it is a non-aligned neutral actor. That is a message it's going to really struggle to sell, given

that Iran was so active in the exercise," said Timothy Walker, of the Institute for Security Studies.

William Gumede, professor of public management at the University of Witwatersrand, said South Africa's geopolitical posturing was ill-advised and could now trigger US sanctions against members of the government.

"Our economy is so vulnerable... We do not have a luxury to try to grandstand globally," he said.

In the longer term, the war is bound to play into the shifting geopolitics of the region, which have seen Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and others expand their reach into Africa - building ports and infrastructure, supplying drones, establishing military bases and drilling for oil, especially in east Africa.

Gulf powers have been accused of fomenting conflict in places like Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia, and so some hope the new war may have positive consequences.

"A UAE forced to concentrate on defending its own airspace and territory may reduce its footprint in African conflicts, creating space for African-led peace processes to function more effectively," said SBM Intelligence.

Mexico steps up investigations into fuel smuggling by drug cartels

Reuters
Mexico City

Mexico has expanded a probe into fuel smuggling at sea ports highlighted in a 2025 Reuters investigation into cartel-linked fuel crimes, according to a government document reviewed by the news agency outlining actions taken by the administration.

The February document says the anti-corruption ministry is overseeing internal investigations within the ports of Guaymas, Tampico and Ensenada as well as in the Navy and customs agency.

The government previously had acknowledged probes into suspected fuel smuggling at the Port of Tampico and last year arrested

14 people allegedly involved, including customs agents and Navy officials.

The government comments on the fuel smuggling investigations came in response to questions from the opposition National Action Party (PAN) about suspected corruption within state agencies that purportedly allowed fuel smuggling to flourish in Mexico. The fuel smuggling section was part of a broader 217-page response to questions from senators about the administration's performance on its policy priorities.

That section of the document, available on the Senate's website, was first reported by local media.

The port administrations of Guaymas, Tampico and Ensenada didn't respond to requests to comment, nor did Mexico's Attorney



Members of the Mexican navy patrol in a boat next to a refinery of Mexican state oil company Pemex as Mexico expands probe into cartel-linked maritime fuel-smuggling at key ports, in Ciudad Madero, Mexico. (Reuters/File photo)

General's office, Navy or customs agency.

Fuel smuggling in Mexico involves falsifying shipping and

customs paperwork on fuel coming mainly from the United States. Smugglers evade a steep Mexican tax on imported diesel and gaso-

line by declaring it to be some other type of petroleum product that's exempt from the duty. The savings can amount to more than half a cargo's value.

Illicit fuel and stolen crude are now the second-largest source of revenue for Mexico's cartels behind narcotics, according to the US Treasury Department.

Emboldened smugglers have graduated from truck and rail shipments to using petroleum tankers, a development that US and Mexican security officials say points to collusion between cartels and crooked port insiders.

In its 2025 investigation, Reuters tracked a vessel that offloaded imported diesel in the ports of Ensenada and Guaymas that was declared in Mexico to be tax-free lu-

bricants, costing the government \$7mn in lost duties.

The importer was suspected to be a front company for the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, according to three Mexican security officials and an undated government security document viewed by Reuters.

PAN in its questions urged the federal government to explain how it would investigate, dismantle and punish anyone involved in the fuel smuggling network, including high-ranking government officials that may be part of it.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has been under intense pressure from US President Donald Trump to crack down on drug cartels.

PAN and the president's office did not respond to requests for comment.

Brazil ratifies EU, Mercosur trade deal

AFP
Brasília

Brazil's Senate on Wednesday ratified a deal between the Mercosur bloc and the European Union that creates one of the world's largest free trade areas.

The deal involves the four founding members of the South American trade bloc, and has already been ratified by Argentina and Uruguay. Paraguay's parliament still needs to approve it.

The European Commission announced last week that it would provisionally implement the mammoth deal, pending the EU top court's ruling on its legality.

The move angered France, which has led opposition to the deal and unsuccessfully attempted to block it over worries for its farmers, who fear being undercut by cheaper goods from Brazil and its neighbours.

The deal was signed in January after 25 years of tricky negotiations.

It was given fresh impetus amid the sweeping use of tariffs and trade threats by US President Donald Trump's administration, which sent countries scrambling for new partnerships.

Together, the EU and Mercosur account for 30% of global GDP and more than 700mn consumers.

The treaty eliminates tariffs on more than 90% of bilateral trade.

The deal will favour European exports of cars, wine and cheese, while making it easier



Brazilian Senate President Davi Alcolumbre speaks during a session to vote on the approval of the free trade agreement between Mercosur and the European Union, in Brasilia, on Wednesday. (AFP)

for South American beef, poultry, sugar, rice, honey and soybeans to enter Europe.

Brazil — the world's largest producer of coffee, meat and soybeans, among other foodstuffs — was one of the strongest backers of the deal.

"The world today is more fragmented, more sceptical, and more protectionist. This makes the agreement with our European partners even more relevant and even more necessary," Senator Tereza Cristina said during the debate in the Brazilian legislature.

On the European side, Spain and Germany are in favour of the pact, which will benefit exports of machinery and spirits to the Mercosur bloc.

But some European farmers reacted angrily, rolling tractors into cities like Paris, Brussels and Warsaw to protest a feared influx of cheaper goods produced with lower standards and banned pesticides.

Argentina resumes construction of Santa Cruz dam complex

Argentina's government and the state energy company ENARSA have agreed to restart construction of the Santa Cruz hydroelectric dam complex in the south of the country, resolving long-standing disputes with contractors, the Economy Ministry said.

The Jorge Cepernic dam, the smaller of two structures that is at 46% completion, is the priority for restart, the ministry added in a statement.

The government of libertarian Javier Milei estimates that Cepernic could be finished by 2030 and add 1,860GWh to Argentina's national grid.

Economy Minister Luis Caputo welcomed the deal on X yesterday, saying Argentina continues to normalise the energy sector.

Additional investment of \$5bn is estimated to be needed to complete both dams.

Dams were originally due by 2023, but the project stalled after 2016 with the contract not fulfilled and no price redeterminations carried out. Contractor accumulated claims exceeding \$700mn from years of unresolved disputes.

Tendered in 2013, in 2017 the construction of the two Chinese-financed hydroelectric dams was approved by the government.

The projects were assigned to China Gezhouba Group Corp and the local group Electroingenieria by the government of former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Approximately \$1.8bn have been spent across both dams to date. (Reuters)

Military force is the only way to defeat cartels: US

Reuters
Miami

White House official Stephen Miller told a gathering of Latin American military leaders yesterday that drug cartels can only be defeated with military force.

The comments make explicit a shift in US policy under President Donald Trump, whose administration has blown up suspected drug boats, seized the president of Venezuela in January and aided Mexico last month in its operation to capture that country's most wanted cartel boss.

"We have learned after decades of effort that there is not a criminal justice solution to the cartel problem," Miller, the White House homeland security adviser, told Latin American defense leaders gathered at the US Southern Command headquarters.

"The reason why this is a conference with military leadership and not a conference of lawyers is because these organisations can only be defeated with mili-

Miller says cartels should be treated brutally; Trump to host Latin American leaders at summit this weekend

itary power." Legal experts and Democrats have questioned the legality of the US strategy, disputing the Trump administration's policy that equates drug traffickers with members of terrorist organisations like al Qaeda and Islamic State.

Miller said there was no difference, adding that drug cartels "should be treated just as brutally and just as ruthlessly as we treat those organisations."

The US policy has unnerved some traditional US military partners in Latin America, including Colombia, which did not send a delegation to the gathering. Brazil and Mexico also did not send delegations.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said he wanted the conference to focus on operations that lead to closer coop-

eration against drug trafficking.

He drew applause for promising to make available resources to Southern Command, which oversees US forces in Latin America and for years has complained about being short on resources. It will now need to compete for US troops, warships and aircraft as the US war against Iran unfolds.

Ryan Berg, director of the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the goal was to gather like-minded, pro-Washington governments to provide more structure to new kinds of cooperation in the region.

That includes this week's announcement that US military forces are assisting Ecuador combat drug trafficking.

"The very recent example of Ecuador will serve as the model for other countries attending the conference," Berg said.

Berg said the conference would also set the stage for an Americas summit hosted by Trump in Miami this weekend where the U.S. is expected to advance a counter-China agenda.

Many Latin American nations now see China, not the Unit-

ed States, as their top trading partner, and Trump has taken aim at Chinese ties there. That includes Panama, home to a strategic canal that Trump has threatened to take back by force, if necessary.

Trump's national security strategy, published in December, argued that the US should revive the 19th-century Monroe Doctrine declaring the Western Hemisphere as Washington's zone of influence. Hegseth joked this could be called the 'Donroe Doctrine', to laughter in the crowd.

Critics say the rhetoric represents modern-day imperialism and that US military actions in Venezuela and the Caribbean have added to fears in a region where Washington has a troubled history of military interventions. Addressing a region with many religions and ethnicities, Hegseth said it remained to be seen whether Latin American nations will remain Western and Christian.

"We face an essential test whether our nations will be and remain Western nations with distinct characteristics, Christian nations under God," Hegseth said.

Nursing home collapses in Brazil, two dead



Minas Gerais' firefighters work at a collapsed nursing home in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais State, Brazil, yesterday. A collapse at a nursing home in the southeastern Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte left at least two people dead, while firefighters worked to rescue 10 other victims from the rubble. (AFP)

Cuba says power grid back online, blames US oil blockade for blackout

Reuters
Havana

Cuba brought its national electrical grid back online yesterday after the country had been largely without power for 16 hours in an outage that Energy Ministry officials linked to the oil blockade of Cuba imposed by the United States.

Cuba has frequently struggled to keep the lights on during a years-long economic crisis but the Communist-run government faces new challenges under increased pressure from US President Donald Trump.

"The system doesn't have the strength that it should have, but it is connected from Pinar del Rio to Guantanamo," Lazaro Guerra, director of electricity for the Energy Ministry, told state television, referring to the entire west-to-east geography of the eyebrow-shaped Caribbean island.

Power generation still lagged with roughly 590MW online, officials said, compared to its normal effective capacity of just under 2,000MW, but electricity was gradually being restored.

In Havana, according to local utility EELH, roughly 36% of the city had come back online — a process the company said would



A vintage car passes by high tension electrical wires as Cuba brought its national electrical grid back online in Havana, Cuba, yesterday. (Reuters)

proceed gradually. Since the United States captured Venezue-

lan President Nicolas Maduro on Jan 3, it has cut off Venezuelan

oil shipments to Cuba, depriving the country of its most important source of imported oil. The US also threatened to impose tariffs on any other country that exported oil to Cuba, leading Mexico to suspend any planned shipments. The grid becomes more vulnerable to shutdowns when power generation is depressed.

The electric company Union Electrica (UNE) said on Wednesday the blackout was caused by an unexpected outage at Antonio Guiteras thermoelectric plant about 100km (62 miles) east of Havana, and that repairs there would take three or four days.

"The current operational situation is fundamentally marked by the fuel shortage in the country. This shortage, coupled with the power outage (at the Guiteras plant), clearly triggered the system failure," Guerra said.

When asked by a journalist if the outage was a direct consequence of the US oil blockade, Guerra said, "Exactly." Cuba has experienced a series of major, often nationwide blackouts in recent years, even before US actions to block oil sales, as Venezuela had already cut back on shipments and with Cuba's ageing power grid in need of investment.



24 US states announce lawsuit to stop Trump's latest global tariffs

Reuters
Washington

A group of 24 US states will sue President Donald Trump's administration yesterday in the first legal challenge to his newly imposed 10% global tariffs, alleging that the president cannot sidestep a recent US Supreme Court ruling that invalidated most of his previous tariffs on imported goods by citing new legal authority, according to a spokesperson for the Oregon attorney-general's office.

The mostly Democratic-led states, including New York, California and Oregon, argue the new tariffs, which Trump announced immediately after the high court ruling on February 20, are also illegal. The tariffs were imposed for 150 days under the Trade Act of 1974, which is meant to address short-term monetary emergencies, not routine trade deficits that arise when a wealthy nation like the United States imports more than it exports, according to the states' lawsuit which will be filed in the New York-based US Court

of International Trade. Trump's February 20 executive order imposed a 10% tariff on imports, but US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Wednesday that those rates would likely rise to 15% later this week.

Trump has made tariffs a central pillar of his foreign policy in his second term, claiming sweeping authority to issue tariffs without input from Congress. But the Supreme Court on February 20 handed Trump a stinging defeat when it struck down a huge swath of tariffs he had imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, ruling that the law did not give him the power he claimed.

Trump responded by criticising the justices who ruled against him and announcing new duties under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, a law that - like IEEPA - had never before been used to impose tariffs in the U.S. Trump has also imposed other tariffs, on imports like autos, steel and aluminium, under more traditional legal authority. Those tariffs are safer from legal challenges.

The states that sued argue that

the Trade Act allows for tariffs only to address a "balance of payments" deficit, which last occurred in the presidency of Republican former President Richard Nixon as the US was abandoning the gold standard.

The balance-of-payments deficit measures in the Trade Act are primarily meant to address monetary risks like a sudden and significant depreciation of the dollar in foreign exchange markets, according to the states. Trump, however, has misapplied that standard in an attempt to instead address U.S. "trade deficits," which occur when a nation imports more than it exports, according to the states.

The states are asking the court to issue an order that would block the new tariffs and order any tariff payments already made under Section 122 authority to be refunded. Meanwhile, the court is grappling with about 2,000 lawsuits from businesses seeking refunds for more than \$130 billion in IEEPA tariff payments made by importers before the Supreme Court's February ruling. On Wednesday, the court ordered US customs to begin processing tariff refunds.

Trump says Zelensky 'has to get a deal done', insists Putin ready

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday described Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky as the obstacle to a deal with Russia, whose leader Vladimir Putin he insisted was co-operative.

"Zelensky, he has to get on the ball, and he has to get a deal done," Trump said in an interview with Politico.

Trump, returning to language he used during a tense White

House meeting a year ago where he and Vice-President JD Vance publicly berated Zelensky, suggested that the Ukrainian leader was in a weak position and needed to make compromises.

"It's unthinkable that he's the obstacle," Trump was quoted as saying. "You don't have the cards. Now he's got even less cards."

"I think Putin is ready to make a deal," Trump said.

Trump has long said that US support for Ukraine is wasteful to the United States and has spoken admirably in the past about Putin, whom he invited to Alaska in August.

Trump's latest comments on Ukraine came after he launched a war with Israel against Iran on Saturday, which is estimated to have cost the United States billions of dollars already.

Trump vowed to end the Ukraine war on his first day in office in January 2025 but has acknowledged that he has found the goal difficult, with Russia keeping up attacks on Ukraine.

Trump has balked at taking more aggressive action against Putin, arguing that he is the only leader who can negotiate with both sides.

US president taps Mullin to replace Noem



US Senator Markwayne Mullin (R-OK), tapped by President Donald Trump to replace Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, holds a rubber ball while speaking to members of the media as he departs the US Capitol after a vote in the Senate on funding for DHS, in Washington, DC, yesterday. (Reuters)

US appeals court rules Trump can suspend refugee admissions

By Nate Raymond
Reuters

A US appeals court yesterday ruled that President Donald Trump had the authority to indefinitely suspend admissions of foreign citizens seeking to enter the United States under the US refugee resettlement program. A three-judge panel of the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals reached that conclusion as it largely overturned injunctions issued by a judge in Seattle last year that blocked the halt on refugee admissions and related actions.

Trump, a Republican, had immediately paused refugee resettlement after taking office in January 2025, saying the US Refugee Admissions Program must ensure refugees admitted to the US "appropriately assimilate".

A class-action lawsuit by refugees, family members and resettlement organisations followed.

Senior US Circuit Judge Jay Bybee, writing for the panel, said the court recognised the "enormous practical implications" of its decision to largely overturn rulings issued in that case by US District Judge Jamal Whitehead, whose decisions in the plaintiffs' favour were mostly paused while the appeal proceeded.

"There are over one hundred thousand vetted and conditionally approved refugees, many of whom may have spent years completing the USRAP process in a third country only to be turned away on the tarmac," Bybee wrote.

But Bybee, who like the other appellate judges was appointed by a Republican president, said the result was due to Congress granting the president sweeping powers to suspend entry to immigrants.

"Whether that consequence reflects prudent policy is not a question for this court," Bybee wrote.

Mevlud Akay Alp, a lawyer for the plaintiffs at the International Refugee Assistance

Project, in a statement said the ruling "removes the ability for refugees stranded by the refugee ban to be safely resettled, or even have their cases processed, while President Trump's cruel ban continues."

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

While the court largely overturned Whitehead's rulings, it upheld on a 2-1 vote injunctions blocking the end of services to already-admitted refugees and the termination of cooperative agreements with resettlement support centres.

US Circuit Judge Kenneth Lee, a Trump appointee, partially dissented, saying he would completely overturn the injunctions by Whitehead, an appointee of Democratic President Joe Biden.

"District courts cannot stand athwart, yelling 'stop' just because they genuinely believe they are the last refuge against policies that they deem to be deeply unjust," he wrote.

Death anniversary of Hugo Chavez



The honour guard performs a changing of the guard while supporters of the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez pay tribute at his tomb in the 4F military fort, Cuartel de la Montana, which houses his mausoleum, to commemorate the 13th anniversary of his death, in Caracas, Venezuela, yesterday. (Reuters)

US regulators say banks won't face extra capital charges on tokenised securities

Reuters
Reuters

US banking regulators clarified yesterday that banks should not have to hold additional capital against losses when dealing with blockchain-based securities, saying their rules are "technology neutral".

The Federal Reserve, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and Office of the Comptroller of the Currency issued new guidance clarifying that they will not distinguish between tokenised securities and traditional securities when it comes to bank capital.

The agencies said they were issuing the document due to increasing interest from banks in representing ownership rights in tokenised securities.

"The technologies used to issue and transact in a security do not generally impact its capital treatment," the agencies said in a statement. Buoyed by President Donald Trump's pro-crypto stance and his administration's push for friendly regulations, the crypto industry last year rushed to capitalise on a global surge in enthusiasm for the sector, with companies like Robinhood, Kraken and Gemini launching tokenised stocks in Europe. The industry



says tokenised shares - blockchain-based instruments that track traditional equities - could revolutionise stock markets by allowing shares to be traded 24/7 and settled instantly, boosting liquidity and reducing transaction costs.

A few companies have issued their own experimental stock tokens on the blockchain - software that acts as a shared digital ledger - but most tokenised shares are pegged to public companies and issued by third parties. Other companies, including BlackRock and Franklin Templeton, offer tokenised treasury products.

Trump undertakes sweeping makeover of White House, Washington

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump is pursuing an ambitious re-making of Washington, from a \$400mn White House ballroom to a 250-foot arch and a renovated Kennedy Center.

Trump's sweeping redesign efforts would be arguably the most dramatic by a US president since Theodore Roosevelt championed a structural overhaul of the National Mall in the early 1900s. In the 1950s, Harry Truman gutted and rebuilt the White House.

Here are some of Trump's passion projects, which have drawn sharp criticism from Americans concerned about pocket-book issues and the preservation of historic landmarks.

WHITE HOUSE BALLROOM

Trump has said his planned 90,000sq ft ballroom will be "the Greatest of its kind ever built", matching the existing White

House in height and scale. Estimated to cost \$400 million, he said it will be funded by wealthy individuals and corporations. But the president's enthusiasm about the project, which he says will seat 1,000 guests, has not been widely shared. He has faced public backlash since he demolished the East Wing to make room for the structure, despite earlier assurances that he would not.

A Washington Post-ABC News-Ipsos poll in October found 56% of Americans opposed the project, with 28% supporting it.

Preservationists and opponents of the project criticised the loss of the East Wing - which housed the offices of the first lady and the White House movie theatre - and raised concerns that it could visually overpower the main mansion.

The work on the project provides a daily cacophony of construction noise between the White House and the Treasury Department, a disruption likely to continue for much of Trump's three remaining years in office.

The National Capital Planning Commission, whose chairman is a top White House aide, is scheduled to hear public comments on the project Thursday with deliberation and a vote expected on April 2.

KENNEDY CENTER

Congress authorised the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts to honour the Democratic president who was assassinated in 1963. That name went unchallenged for decades - until a Trump-appointed board voted last year to rename it the Trump-Kennedy Center.

The storied cultural centre saw a flurry of show cancellations and slumping ticket sales after Trump's takeover.

On February 1, Trump announced that the property will close for two years beginning July 4 for a major overhaul. Trump insists the structure needs a retool, citing problems with the plumbing and crumbling masonry.

He has said he does not plan to tear down the Kennedy Center but

remains unclear, as there is a possibility it could interfere with the flight path of southbound planes on the final approach to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport a few miles away.

INDEPENDENCE ARCH

Across the Potomac River from the Lincoln Memorial lies a non-descript highway roundabout upon which Trump wants to build what he calls the Independence Arch - an arch reminiscent of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, except much bigger.

The height of the arch, with eagle statues and a Lady Liberty-type figure on top, has been estimated at 250 feet. That is higher than the Lincoln Memorial and not far off the size of the US Capitol, which at 288 feet can be seen across much of Washington.

By contrast, the Arc de Triomphe in Paris is 164 feet high. Trump told reporters on January 31 that he wanted a large arch because "we're the biggest, most powerful nation." Whether the arch will actually be built with a 250-foot height

remains unclear, as there is a possibility it could interfere with the flight path of southbound planes on the final approach to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport a few miles away.

THE OVAL OFFICE

Trump embarked on his first major redecoration project at the White House when he moved back into the Oval Office in January 2025.

He transformed the storied room with gold accents and statuettes, portraits of famous Americans pulled from storage - including some who are not easily identifiable - and a copy of the Declaration of Independence hanging on the wall behind a black sheet.

Busts of Abraham Lincoln and Benjamin Franklin are now situated on tables near his desk. The level of bric-a-brac can give the room a cluttered, old library feel compared to the styles of previous presidents, but Trump is pleased with it and likes to give tours to visitors.

THE ROSE GARDEN AND WHITE HOUSE GROUNDS

Outside the Oval Office, Trump replaced the Rose Garden's iconic grass lawn with a white stone patio and umbrella-covered tables to give it a patio style much like Trump has by his pool at his Mar-a-Lago Club in Palm Beach, Florida. He said the stone was needed because women wearing high heels would sink into the soil.

Along the nearby colonnade walkway, Trump placed portraits of America's 47 presidents on the wall, with a plaque beneath each inscribed with Trump's view of that person. Bitter at his loss to Democrat Joe Biden in the 2020 election, Trump replaced Biden's portrait with an image of an autopen, a device he and other Republicans have criticised Biden for using for signing documents despite it being a fairly standard practice for recent presidents.

Elsewhere on the White House grounds, Trump has placed large flagpoles on both the North and South Lawns.

Iran crisis could disrupt supply of key chipmaking materials, South Korea warns

South Korea sources helium, bromine from Middle East; AI data centre plans in Middle East could face setbacks

Reuters
Seoul

The US-Israel war with Iran could disrupt supplies of key semiconductor manufacturing materials, a South Korean ruling party lawmaker said yesterday, as the conflict in the Middle East entered its sixth day.

South Korea's chip industry, which supplies around two-thirds of global memory chips, is also concerned that a prolonged conflict in Iran will lead to higher energy costs and prices, Kim Young-bae said after meeting with executives from companies such as Samsung Electronics and trade groups.

"Officials raised a possibility that semiconductor production could be disrupted if some of these key materials cannot be sourced from the Middle East," he said at a briefing with reporters, giving he-

lium as one example.

Helium is essential for heat management during semiconductor production and it has no viable alternatives currently. It is only produced in a handful of countries, with Qatar among the leading players in the industry.

The warnings come as chipmakers grapple with severe supply bottlenecks due to surging chip demand from AI data centre operators that has tightened supplies to many other industries, including smartphones, laptops and automobiles.

South Korean chipmaker SK Hynix said in a statement it has "long secured diverse supply chains and sufficient inventory" of helium, "therefore there is almost no chance that the company will be affected."

Samsung declined to comment. Taiwan's TSMC said in a statement that it did not anticipate any significant impact currently, and will continue monitoring the situation closely.

Contract chipmaker GlobalFoundries said it is "in direct contact with suppliers, customers and

partners in the region", and "mitigation plans" are in place.

South Korea's industry ministry said the country relies heavily on the Middle East for 14 other items in chip supply chains, including bromine and chip inspection equipment, but that many of them can be sourced domestically or from other markets.

South Korea's chip industry also warned the crisis could deal a setback to plans by big tech firms to build AI data centres in the Middle East in the longer term, thus weighing on chip demand, said

Kim, the ruling party lawmaker. Amazon said on Monday some of its data centres in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain were damaged by drone strikes, sparking questions around Big Tech's pace of expansion in the region.

US tech giants like Microsoft and Nvidia have been positioning the UAE as a regional hub for artificial intelligence computing needed to power services such as ChatGPT. Iran launched a wave of missiles at Israel early yesterday in retaliation for US and Israeli strikes.

Japan startup's space rocket fails for third time



The launch scene of Kairos No. 3 is seen in Nachikatsuura Town, Wakayama Prefecture, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Tokyo

Japanese startup's third attempt to put a satellite in orbit failed yesterday after its rocket spiralled back to Earth shortly after take-off.

Space One, hoping to become the first private Japanese firm to put a satellite in space, said that what went wrong was "under investigation".

TV footage showed the Kairos rocket blasting off from the launch site in the coastal Wakayama region of western Japan at 11:10am (0210 GMT) up into the blue sky.

But shortly afterwards, the slim, white 18m (60-foot) rocket appeared to run out of power and head back downwards in a spin.

It was unclear where it landed. Tokyo-based Space One told a press conference that "no major anomalies" had been identified within the aircraft itself and the rocket had not deviated from its flight path.

"So it seems reasonable to assume that some issue occurred within the flight interruption system," the firm said, referring to a safety mechanism capable of automatically ending the flight.

The rocket was carrying several satellites including one for a high school in Tokyo, according to the firm.

The company's first launch attempt ended in spectacular failure in March 2024 when the solid-fuel rocket exploded seconds after lift-off.

A second try started off better only for the rocket to suddenly spiral downwards after engineers terminated the operation because of a technical problem.

The latest launch had been slated to happen on Wednesday, only to be cancelled due to an-

other glitch just 28.9 seconds before lift-off.

Companies such as Space One want to offer cheaper and more frequent space exploration opportunities than governments.

The startup is hoping to establish a satellite-launching service to tap into expanding global demand - emulating Elon Musk's SpaceX, which has contracts with Nasa and the Pentagon.

Space One was founded in 2018 by businesses including Canon Electronics, IHI Aerospace, construction firm Shimizu and the government-run Development Bank of Japan.

The national Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) is also on a mission to become a major player for satellite launches.

JAXA's next-generation H3 launch system had experienced multiple failed take-off attempts before a successful blast-off in February 2024.

In December, however, Japan's flagship H3 rocket failed to launch a geolocation satellite into orbit due to engine failure.

In 2024, JAXA landed an unmanned probe on the Moon - albeit at a crooked angle - making it just the fifth country to achieve a "soft landing".

The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM), dubbed the "Moon Sniper" for its landing precision, nonetheless intermittently sent back signals for many months.

And last year Japan's ispace failed in its attempt to become only the third private firm - and the first outside the US - to achieve a controlled arrival on the Moon.

Contact with the ispace's unmanned Resilience craft was lost as the probe made its final descent onto the lunar surface and was believed to have crash landed.

formance test, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

"The arming of the Navy with nuclear weapons is making satisfactory progress," Kim said, according to KCNA.

"All these successes constitute a radical change in defending our maritime sovereignty, something that we have not achieved for half a century," he added.

The following day he oversaw the missile launch from the ship, which was "successfully carried out," KCNA said.

The Choe Hyon is one of two 5,000-tonne destroyers in the North's arsenal, both launched last year as Kim seeks to ramp up the country's naval capabilities.

A third vessel is under construction, which Kim also visited on Wednesday, according to KCNA.

Pyeongyang has previously said the Choe Hyon is equipped with the "most powerful weapons".

Some analysts said the ship could be equipped with short-

range tactical missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads - although North Korea has not proven it has the ability to miniaturise its atomic arsenal.

Pyeongyang last week condemned the ongoing US and Israeli attack on Iran as an "illegal act of aggression", claiming it had shown Washington's "rogue" nature.

Kim's latest move involving the ship appears to be "intended as a show of force amid the ongoing Iran situation and ahead of upcoming South Korea-US joint military drills," Yang Moo-jin, former president of the University of North Korean Studies, told AFP.

Pyeongyang and Washington are longtime adversaries but the US has mounted a push to revive high-level talks with the North in recent months.

Reports and analysts have suggested the US is eyeing a potential summit between US President Donald Trump and the North's Kim this year.

Australia, Canada sign new deals on critical minerals

Reuters
Sydney

Australia and Canada said yesterday they had signed new agreements on critical minerals as Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney made a landmark address to the Australian parliament, a sign of the developing bond between the "middle powers".

Carney is on a multi-leg trip across the Asia-Pacific region also taking in Japan and India. His stop in Australia included the first address to Australia's parliament by a Canadian leader since 2007.

"In a world of great power rivalry, middle powers have a choice: compete for favour or combine for strength," he told lawmakers.

Introducing Carney in parliament, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said his address represented the closeness of the ties between the two nations.

"Australia and Canada are middle powers in a world that is

changing. We cannot change it back, but we can back ourselves, back our citizens, and back each other," he said.

Albanese told a press conference that Australia would join Canada's G7 critical minerals production alliance.

"We have agreed to deepen our relationship across several areas, building on our joint declaration of intent on critical minerals that we signed last year," he told a press conference.

The G7 alliance is a Canada-led initiative to diversify and secure global critical minerals production and supply.

Canada and Australia together produce about a third of global lithium and uranium, as well as more than 40% of global iron ore.

Western nations have been attempting to diversify their supply chains away from China, which still controls the majority of production and processing of critical minerals, essential for semiconductors and defence applications.

Canada believes that the best way to address the issue of concentrated supply of critical min-



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese shakes hands with Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney at the Australian Parliament House, in Canberra, Australia, yesterday. (Reuters)

erals is through a production alliance or a buyers' club rather than just a price floor, Energy and Mining Minister Tim Hodgson told Reuters on Tuesday.

Australia has already allocated A\$1.2bn (\$850mn) to build a critical minerals stockpile, beginning with antimony, gallium and rare earths.

That will now be more closely aligned with Canada's defence stockpiling regime that has a

similar aim, Albanese said. "There's a lot Canada and Australia can do together on critical minerals as producer nations," Australian Resources Minister Madeleine King told Reuters ahead of Carney's visit.

Australia and Canada will also deepen cooperation in areas including defence and maritime security, trade and artificial intelligence, the two leaders said.

'Philippine resupply mission data leaked to Chinese intelligence'

A spokesman for the National Security Council (NSC) of the Philippines yesterday said some information on the country's resupply missions in the South China Sea was compromised and passed on to Chinese intelligence agents.

His statement came a day after the Philippine government said it apprehended some of its citizens on suspicion of spying for China in a "serious national security matter".

NSC spokesman Cornelio Valencia called the breach "alarming" but limited in scope, adding that the channels used to transmit the information had been shut down.

"Rotation and resupply data fall under operational security because disclosing it can endanger personnel, and that has been compromised," Valencia said.

Philippine and Chinese vessels have frequent run-ins during Manila's resupply missions to its occupied features in the South China Sea. And Chinese diplomats, Philippine lawmakers, and a Coast Guard spokesperson have recently engaged in heated public exchanges over the disputed waterway. Valencia said three Filipinos had been apprehended and "there could be more." He declined to say whether charges would be filed.

Reuters spoke with the three accused people last month under an agreement with security sources on the condition that their identities not be revealed. One of the accused, who obtained information on deployments, resupply runs and personnel rotations through a connection with a Philippine Coast Guard staffer, said he passed the details to his contact using a phone issued to him. The accused showed Reuters the phone, which contained

a Tetris game that, when a code was entered, opened a hidden messaging platform that he said he used to communicate with his handler. "What I can say is that they're co-operating with our security services," Valencia said. "They have confessed and admitted to it. They disclosed the data that they were able to get and share, the assessments they made and how they were recruited."

China's Foreign Ministry rejected the Philippines' accusations, saying yesterday: "We object to it, the case is not clear and there is no conclusive evidence." Another accused person told Reuters that he was initially approached by a Filipina acquaintance when he was a junior staffer at the Department of National Defence with an offer to write opinion articles in return for money. That later expanded to providing information related to the South China Sea and the defence ministry's bilateral engagement with Philippine allies, including the US, he said. He did not immediately realise he was working for Chinese agents and only became suspicious later, but it was hard to stop as he needed the money, he said, adding that he did this work between 2023 and 2025.

The recruitment pattern mirrors methods seen in other foreign intelligence operations, where seemingly innocuous offers of consultancy or writing work are used as entry points before escalating into requests for sensitive material. Last year, Reuters reported that networks linked to Chinese actors have used consulting firms and covert job offers to lure targets, often exploiting financial vulnerabilities and gradually seeking more sensitive information, a pattern analysts say follows techniques used by previous Chinese intelligence operations. (Reuters)

Indonesia gives Meta 'stern warning' over disinformation

Indonesia's communications ministry has issued a "stern warning" to Meta Platforms Inc for failing to curb the spread of online gambling and disinformation, the ministry said yesterday.

The warning came after Indonesia's Communications and Digital Affairs Minister Meutya Hafid on Wednesday made an unscheduled visit to Meta's operational office in Jakarta.

Meta was warned over its low level of compliance with Indonesia's regulation regarding the spread of content that involved disinformation, online gambling, defamation and hate speech across its platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, the ministry said.

Meta had taken action over only 28.47% of flagged content related to online gambling and disinformation, the ministry said. "Disinformation, defamation, and hate content threaten lives in Indonesia, yet Meta has allowed them to persist," Meutya said. The ministry urged Meta to strengthen its content moderation systems and accelerate the removal of illegal and harmful material. (Reuters)

N Korea's Kim oversees naval destroyer, cruise missile test

AFP
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un oversaw tests this week of his country's naval destroyer, claiming Pyongyang is in the process of "arming the Navy with nuclear weapons", state media reported yesterday.

The tests, including a launch of a sea-to-surface cruise missile, come shortly after Kim led a major once-in-five-years Party Congress, at which he renewed goals of a military buildup and vowed to forcefully respond to any threats.

It also comes as the nuclear-armed North's key foe - the US - launched its joint offensive with Israel against Iran, aiming to wipe out the Islamic republic's nuclear programme, missiles and navy.

Kim inspected on Tuesday a "Choe Hyon" class ship - one of two launched last year - and oversaw a "shakedown" or per-

formance test, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

"The arming of the Navy with nuclear weapons is making satisfactory progress," Kim said, according to KCNA.

"All these successes constitute a radical change in defending our maritime sovereignty, something that we have not achieved for half a century," he added.

The following day he oversaw the missile launch from the ship, which was "successfully carried out," KCNA said.

The Choe Hyon is one of two 5,000-tonne destroyers in the North's arsenal, both launched last year as Kim seeks to ramp up the country's naval capabilities.

A third vessel is under construction, which Kim also visited on Wednesday, according to KCNA.

Pyeongyang has previously said the Choe Hyon is equipped with the "most powerful weapons".

Some analysts said the ship could be equipped with short-

range tactical missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads - although North Korea has not proven it has the ability to miniaturise its atomic arsenal.

Pyeongyang last week condemned the ongoing US and Israeli attack on Iran as an "illegal act of aggression", claiming it had shown Washington's "rogue" nature.

Kim's latest move involving the ship appears to be "intended as a show of force amid the ongoing Iran situation and ahead of upcoming South Korea-US joint military drills," Yang Moo-jin, former president of the University of North Korean Studies, told AFP.

Pyeongyang and Washington are longtime adversaries but the US has mounted a push to revive high-level talks with the North in recent months.

Reports and analysts have suggested the US is eyeing a potential summit between US President Donald Trump and the North's Kim this year.



The Choe Hyon naval destroyer conducts a missile test launch overseen by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on Wednesday. (Reuters)

After largely ignoring those overtures for months, Kim said last month that the two nations could "get along" if Washington accepted Pyongyang's nuclear status.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un inspecting the sea trials of the destroyer Choe Hyon ahead of its commissioning an undisclosed location in North Korea. (AFP)



Nepal awaits results in key post-uprising election

AFP
Kathmandu

Nepal voted yesterday for a new parliament in a high-stakes showdown between an entrenched old guard and a powerful youth movement, six months after deadly anti-corruption protests toppled the government.

Key figures contesting for power include the Marxist former prime minister seeking a return to office, a rapper-turned-mayor bidding for the youth vote, and the newly elected leader of the powerful Nepali Congress party.

Election commission officials collected ballot boxes after voting closed, with papers taken under guard to centres before counting.

"The voting process has been concluded peacefully and enthusiastically," Chief Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari told reporters, saying turnout had been around 60% according to initial estimates.

Some winners are expected to be published as early as today, but full results may take several days.

It may then take time before a government is formed if, as many analysts expect, no party wins an outright majority.

"Nepalis have been waiting for change for so long, from one system to another," said Nilanta Shakya, 60, a retired engineer, who was among the first to vote at a college in the capital, Kathmandu.

"I hope there is a meaningful change this time," she added.

Voters have chosen who replaces the interim government in place since the September 2025 uprising, in which at least 77 people were killed, and parliament and scores of government buildings were torched.

Youth-led protests under a loose Gen Z banner began as a demonstration against a brief social media ban, but were fed by wider grievances at corruption and a woeful economy.

Sushila Karki, the interim prime minister, said the vote was critical in "determining our future"



Polling officials stand next to the ballot boxes after voting in the country's general election ended, at Bhashantapur Durbar Square in Kathmandu, yesterday.

The polls are one of the most hotly contested elections in the Himalayan republic of 30mn people since the end of a civil war in 2006.

Thousands of soldiers and police have been deployed.

The election saw a wave of younger candidates promising to tackle Nepal's dismal economy, challenging veteran politicians who have dominated for decades and argue that their experience guarantees stability and security.

"Today feels like a day of celebration," said Nirmala Bhandari, 50, a housewife, who danced in the street with friends for a video for social media, after casting her vote in Bhaktapur district outside the capital.

"I am hopeful that the country will get new leaders and that we will build a better nation."

Helicopters will be used to collect ballot boxes from snowbound mountain regions across Nepal, home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks, including Mount Everest.

But all eyes will be focused on the hot farming plains south of Kathmandu, where all three prime ministerial hopefuls contested seats — a departure from past elections that focused on the capital.

KP Sharma Oli, the 74-year-old Marxist leader ousted as prime minister last year and

seeking a return to power, was challenged in the usually sleepy eastern district of Jhapa by former Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah, a 35-year-old rapper-turned-politician.

"This election must re-establish democracy and contribute to end non-political, anarchic and violent tendencies," Oli said after voting, insisting his party would win the largest number of seats.

The Jhapa-5 constituency, with around 163,000 voters, will determine whether Oli secures his seat or whether Shah enters parliament.

Shah, from the centrist Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), who queued to vote in Kathmandu dressed in a black suit and sunglasses, has cast himself as a symbol of youth-driven political change.

Also in the race as aspiring prime minister is Gagan Thapa, 49, the new head of the country's oldest party, Nepali Congress, who has said he wants to end the "old age" club of revolving veteran leaders.

After casting his ballot, Thapa told AFP that it is "the duty of the leaders" not to let the events of last September occur again.

On social media, voters shared images of their ink-marked thumbs — alongside photographs of the September protests.

India seeks US marine cover for Middle East energy cargoes: source

Reuters
New Delhi

India is in talks with the United States to secure marine cover for vessels shipping oil from the Middle East, as New Delhi seeks to shield buyers from potential supply disruptions caused by the crisis in the Gulf, a government official said yesterday.

"So far we are comfortable," the official, who did not wish to be identified, said, adding that the oil ministry is in discussions with major producers and traders to secure oil, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and liquefied natural gas (LNG).

US President Donald Trump has ordered the US International Development Finance Corporation to provide political risk insurance and financial guarantees for maritime trade in the Gulf.

He also said the US Navy could begin escorting vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow shipping lane between Iran and Oman through which around a fifth of global oil and gas supplies normally pass.

India, the world's third biggest oil importer, relies on the Middle East for about 40% of its oil imports and about 85-90% of LPG imports.

The official said India is looking at buying oil from all sources, including Russia, to replenish crude stocks. Indian refiners had reduced Russian oil intake to help New Delhi clinch a trade deal with Washington.

India has already increased imports of oil and cooking fuel LPG

from the United States.

Washington is willing to work with India to make sure India's energy needs are met "in the short term as well as the long term," said Christopher Landau, US Deputy Secretary of State, at the Raisina Dialogue summit in New Delhi.

"We are an energy-rich country, you know, we want to co-operate with you, that is one of the areas where we can co-operate obviously," he said.

Due to lower energy supplies from the Middle East region, India's Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd has suspended refined fuel exports and shut some units at its refinery.

Several Indian companies have cut gas supplies to industries after production was halted by Qatar, India's largest LNG supplier. The official said the government could "reprioritise" gas allocation to ensure no sector is closed down if the supply situation worsens.

India meets half of its 195 million standard cubic metres per day (mmscmd) of gas consumption through imports. The official said about 60 mmscmd gas is not available due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and force majeure by Qatar.

India is in talks with companies including Algeria's Sonatrach Petroleum, Abu Dhabi National Oil Co, and traders including Total, Vitol, and Trafigura for oil and gas supplies, he said.

Oil minister Hardeep Singh Puri has discussed the current oil market situation with the International Energy Agency and the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Sri Lanka trying to 'safeguard lives' on second Iranian ship after US strike

Reuters
Galle

Sri Lanka said it was trying to "safeguard lives" on a second Iranian ship off its coast yesterday, a day after 87 people were killed in a US submarine strike on an Iranian warship in the same region.

The island's security council, which includes top military officials, met to discuss what steps to take, two government sources told Reuters, without saying whether it was another military ship.

"The President, defence officials, and all other relevant officials are aware and we are addressing the situation," cabinet spokesman Nalinda Jayatissa said in response to questions from an opposition leader.

"We are doing our utmost to safeguard lives," he said, without saying how.

The ship was near the port of Colombo, in the country's exclusive economic zone but outside its maritime boundary, Jayatissa said.



An Iran embassy staff member (right) stands outside the Karapitiya hospital in the southern city of Galle yesterday where the rescued Iranian sailors are being kept for treatment.

The first ship, IRIS Dena, was sunk on Wednesday 19 nautical miles off Sri Lanka's southern port city of Galle and that two freezers had been dispatched to store the 87 bodies recovered from the sea, he added.

Tehran has asked Colombo to help repatriate the bodies, Sri Lanka's deputy minister for health and mass media, Hansaka Wijemuni, told Reuters, adding that a timeframe had not yet been determined.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ab-

bas Araqchi said the warship was struck in international waters without warning thousands of miles from the Gulf, where US and Israeli forces are striking Iran and Tehran is retaliating with missile and drone attacks.

"The US will bitterly regret the precedent it has set," Araqchi said in a post on X, adding that the warship was a guest of India's navy and was carrying almost 130 sailors.

IRIS Dena had taken part in a naval exercise organised by India in the Bay of Bengal from February

18 to 25 and was on its way back, according to the drill's website and Sri Lankan officials.

Sri Lankan military rescuers responded to an early-morning distress call from the frigate on Wednesday and found 32 survivors.

Search and rescue operations would continue for an estimated 10 people who remain unaccounted for, they said.

The Indian Navy said it had also launched a search and rescue operation to "augment" Sri Lanka's efforts.

The attack dramatically widened the scope of the war.

"An American submarine sank an Iranian warship that thought it was safe in international waters," US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said at the Pentagon. "Instead, it was sunk by a torpedo. Quiet death."

A Pentagon video purporting to have captured the attack showed a huge explosion blowing apart the rear of the vessel, lifting it from the water, and causing it to begin sinking from the stern.

UK interior minister insists asylum reforms 'fair' amid blowback

Britain's interior minister doubled down yesterday on her tough stance on immigration despite criticism from charities and unease within the ruling Labour party that it is shedding left-wing voters.

Shabana Mahmood announced that asylum seekers who break the law or work illegally will be thrown out of government-funded accommodation and lose their support payments.

The policy forms part of a major overhaul of migration rules announced late last year and modelled on Denmark's strict asylum system that aims to slash irregular migration to the UK. Mahmood argued in a speech that she was "restoring order and control" to Britain's borders and that her overhaul of the asylum was "firm but fair", adding she would

open new and safe legal routes. But Amnesty International called the latest measure a "punitive blow" that "risks forcing people into destitution, homelessness and exploitation while they wait for their claims to be decided".

Mahmood's reforms are widely seen as an attempt to stem support for the hard-right Reform UK party, led by anti-immigrant firebrand Nigel Farage. It has topped opinion polls for a year, in part because of the government's failure to stop thousands of migrants from arriving in England from northern France on small boats. But her stance has also been credited with contributing to Labour losing support to the progressive Green party, which won a local election in a traditional Labour heartland last week.

Mahmood said there was a middle path between Farage's "nightmare pulling up the drawbridge and shutting out the world" and Green Party leader Zack Polanski's "fairy tale of open borders".

Her reform that makes refugee status temporary, including for accompanied children, came into force this week. The status will be reviewed every 30 months, with refugees forced to return to their home countries once those are deemed safe. They will also need to wait for 20 years, instead of the current five, before they can apply for permanent residency. She also announced earlier this week that the government would stop issuing education visas to nationals from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan. (AFP)

UK MP's husband accused of spying for China released by police

UK police yesterday said they had released three people arrested on suspicion of spying for China, including the husband of a lawmaker from Prime Minister Keir Starmer's ruling Labour party.

The trio, aged 39, 43 and 68, were arrested on Wednesday by counter-terrorism officers in London and Wales on suspicion of assisting a foreign intelligence service. All three had "subsequently been released on bail to a date in May", London's Metropolitan Police said in a statement. Chinese espionage is a politically sensitive subject in Britain and the case could become awkward for Starmer who visited Beijing recently aiming to reset relations with the Asian giant.

Media reported that the husband of Labour lawmaker Joani Reid was among the three. Reid said Wednesday said she had never "seen anything to make me suspect my husband

has broken any law".

Her husband David Taylor, 39, is listed as a "lobbyist" on her list of registered interests. According to his LinkedIn page, he works for Asia House, a think tank.

"I am not part of my husband's business activities and neither I nor my children are part of this investigation," she added. The arrests came amid rising concerns over alleged Chinese espionage in the UK.

A spokeswoman for China's foreign ministry said: "We have always been against the hyping up of the so-called Chinese spy allegations, which tarnish China's image and mislead the public.

Starmer has been criticised by opposition politicians, human rights groups and US President Donald Trump for approving a massive new Chinese embassy in London and for his Beijing visit. (AFP)

Starmer says UK's relationship with US still special after Trump criticism

Reuters
London

The "special relationship" between Britain and the US remains intact and they continue to share intelligence, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday, after Donald Trump rebuked him for hesitating to support US strikes on Iran.

After initially refusing to allow the United States to use British bases for the US-Israeli campaign, Starmer has come under personal attack from the US president, who said the British leader was "not Winston Churchill".

Speaking at a press conference, Starmer defended his decisions both to withhold initial access to bases, and then to participate in "defensive" operations against Iran, once Tehran had responded by attacking its neighbours.

"The special relationship is in operation right now," Starmer said. "We are working together in the region, the US and the British working together to protect both the US and the British in joint bases, where we're jointly located and we're sharing intelligence on a 24/7 basis in the usual way."

As well as the tongue-lashing from Trump, Starmer has also faced criticism for his cautious

response from other allies in the region, including Cyprus where an Iranian-made drone hit one of Britain's military bases on the island.

He has also faced criticism at home, including from Reform UK leader Nigel Farage, a right-wing Trump supporter, who has accused the prime minister of dithering.

"What Keir Starmer has done in alienating the American administration is not to just put that relationship personally at stake, but frankly to risk a relationship with a country without whom we are defenceless," he told Reuters yesterday.

Starmer's government said this week it would deploy a warship, as well as helicopters with counter-drone capabilities, to help blunt Iran's retaliatory strikes, and yesterday he announced he would send four more Typhoon fighter jets to Qatar to provide additional protection.

Britain, like other European countries, is searching for ways to repatriate citizens stranded in the Middle East by a conflict that has shut some of the world's busiest airports.

Starmer said more than 4,000 people had arrived back in the United Kingdom on commercial flights from the UAE, while 140,000 British nationals had registered their presence in the region.



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer gives an update on the situation in the Middle East at Downing Street Briefing Room, in London, yesterday.



The creation is in need of Allah

Man always looks for what benefits him and what protects him from harm. However, to accomplish this, man must be able to realise what is harmful. He must then know whom he should need, trust, and love so that he can attain what is beneficial as well as to feel good about his choice.

He also must know the proper and good approach that would make him achieve this goal. This latter condition requires that man:

1. Know about harm
2. What ways can be used to drive harm away?

Certainly, man can have no better guidance than that which comes from the One Who had perfected everything, and the One who Has no deficiency in Himself and in His Attributes. The One Who is Ever-Living and Who does not die. There can be no One better than the One Who Has no need for anything; the One Who is rich; the Giver; the One who, after all, controls man's soul. Man is so poor to Him. He is Allah, the True and only God. Man can bring harm to himself if he seeks other than Allah for help. Allah is the One Who can help man drive away any harm for it cannot occur without His Will and His Power.

Allah Almighty sent down His Books and chose His Messengers to guide man to:

1. Know his Lord as He Almighty had explained about Himself, and
2. Seek Him Alone while living in accordance with His plan

Knowing Allah's Names and Attributes liberates man from worshipping any form of creation because creation is weak and is in need of The Creator, Allah. The knowledge about Allah leads man to know that he is created to live according to Allah's way as revealed to His Messengers, may Allah exalt their mention, the final of whom was Messenger Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention).

This Revelation contains a complete code of life. Everything that is beneficial or harmful is established so that man can centre his life around this Revelation. If man commits wrong and knows that Allah is Oft-Forgiving he would turn to Him, and to Him alone, seeking His forgiveness; Allah Says (what means): "So know, [O



Muhammad], that there is no deity except Allah and ask forgiveness for your sin." [Qur'an 47:19]

It is wrong to think or believe that Allah created other 'gods' besides Him so that man turns to them for help; loves them or fear them, etc. He is the same God of all nations. He does not order that people should make of stars, sun, fire, 'Eesa (Jesus), Moosa (Moses), Muhammad, may Allah exalt their mention, etc. gods besides Him. He (Most Exalted) cannot be 'contradictory'. He has one way (religion) that calls man to surrender his will only to Him.

He warned that if man (even Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) would take partners with Him, then his work will fail and will be among losers; Allah Says (what means): "And verily, it had been revealed to you (O Muhammad) as has been revealed to those before you. If you join others in worship with Allah (then) surely (all) your deeds will be in vain and you will certainly be among the losers. Nay! But worship Allah and be among grateful."

[Qur'an 39:65-66]

Let us know what Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, the man-Prophet, who knew Allah best, used to say: "O Allah, I seek refuge in You for Your Pleasure and against Your Wrath, and in Your Forgiveness and against Your Punishment and in You from You, I cannot Praise You as You can Praise Yourself." (Muslim, Abu Dawood, At-Tirmithi, Ibn Majah)

He, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, used to say also: "I have surrendered myself to You, I have directed my face to You, I have entrusted my affairs to You, I have compelled my back to You, in want and in fright of You, there is no resort nor survival from You except (in turning) to You. I have faith in Your book (i.e. the Quran) which You brought down and in the Prophet (Muhammad) you have sent." (Al-Bukhari & Muslim)

When we read in the Qur'an (what means): "Whatever of Mercy (i.e. of good), Allah may grant to mankind, none can withhold it, and whatever He may withhold, none can grant it thereafter. And He

is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise." [Qur'an 35:2]

And when we read (what means): "If Allah touches you with hurt, there is none can remove it but He; and if He intends any good for you, there is none who can repel His favor which He causes it to reach whomsoever of His slaves He will, and He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." [Qur'an 10:117]

We should be motivated to return to Him Alone at times of ease and at times of hardship. And when we read (what means): "If Allah helps you none can overcome you, and if He forsakes you, who is there, after Him, that can help you. And in Allah (alone) let believers put their trust." [Qur'an 3:160]

The Qur'an, therefore, leads man to a true liberation from any false attachment. It brings peace to the heart. It helps the believer against hypocrisy and all forms of dishonesty.

Imagine, for example, a believer facing a problem at work. He sees wrong and faces unlawful practices. He does not fear re-

jecting what is wrong. He knows that the job is only a means to gain his sustenance. While he may be unable to correct what is wrong, he knows well that Allah is the One Who provides. If he leaves his job for the sake of Allah, Allah will give him a better one. Allah Almighty Said (what means): "And whoever fears Allah—He will make for him a way out. And will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever relies upon Allah—then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent." [Qur'an 65:2-3]

The above texts necessitate that man must depend upon Allah Almighty asking Him Alone for assistance. It also requires that man must love Allah and worship Him Alone to gain His pleasure and His help. Is it not true that the people who consider this life as the "Final Goal" end up worshipping many things in it? You see them so careful about "having it all". They torture themselves: pain, difficulty, constant worry, keeping their hands in the banks for loan after loan to keep up with the "demands of development". They are under the constant threat of fore-closure. They constantly see poverty in front of their eyes.

The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Allah says: 'Son of Adam: Fill your time with My worship and I will fill your heart with richness, and end off your poverty. But if you do not, I would make your hands fully busy (i.e. in worldly affairs) and I would not end off your poverty.'" (At-Tirmithi)

Our purpose of existence on earth is more meaningful than being slaves to worldly gains. There can be no meaningful life better than that prescribed by our Creator Allah. Every act done according to Allah's way is an act of worship. Man is the beneficiary and Allah is in no need; Allah Says (what means): "O mankind! It is you who stand in need of Allah, but Allah is Rich (Free of all wants and needs), Worthy of All Praise." [Qur'an 35:15]

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



Warning against despair of the Mercy of Allah

One should never despair of the Mercy of Allah because this is a grave major sin. We can see so many verses in the Qur'an that Allah the Almighty remind us about this grave sin. Here, let's see some of it.

Allah the Almighty Says (what means):

{And who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord except for those astray?} [Qur'an 15:56]

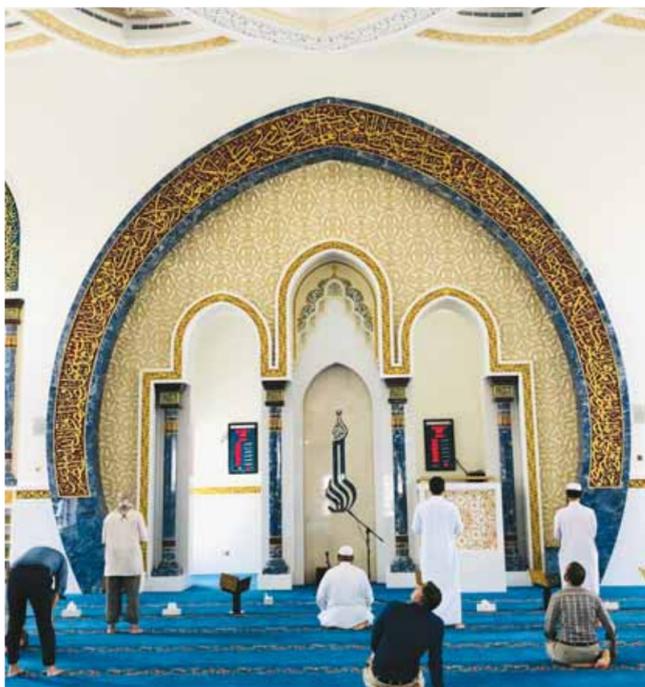
{Indeed, no one despairs of relief from Allah except the disbelieving people.} [Qur'an 12:87]

{And do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction.} [Qur'an 2:195]

Commenting on the verse, some scholars said that when the slave of Allah commits a sin and then thinks that his sin will not be forgiven and, therefore, he abandons seeking forgiveness and repentance to Allah, this is the destruction meant in the verse. We seek refuge in Allah form that.

In a Qudsi Hadith (sacred narration), the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), narrated that Allah the Almighty Said: "A slave committed a sin and he said, 'O Allah, Forgive me my sin.' Allah The Almighty Said, 'My slave committed a sin and came to realise that he has a Lord Who Forgives sins and Calls to account (the sinner) for the sin.' He then again committed a sin and said, 'My Lord, Forgive me my sin.' Allah, The Exalted, Said, 'My slave committed a sin and came to realise that he has a Lord Who Forgives sins and Calls to account for the sin.' He again committed a sin and said, 'My Lord, Forgive me for my sin.' Allah, The Exalted, Said, 'My slave committed a sin and came to realise that he has a Lord Who Forgives sins and Calls to account for the sin. O slave, do what you like. I Have Granted you forgiveness.'" [Muslim]

There is also the example of that man who used to drink alcohol and was brought to the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam. 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated: "During the lifetime of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, there was a man called 'Abdullah whose nickname was Himar (donkey), and he used to make the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, laugh. The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, lashed him because of drinking (alcohol). One day, he was brought to the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, for the same charge and was lashed. On that, a man among the people said, 'O Allah, Curse him! How frequently he is brought (to the Prophet for such a charge)!' The Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said, 'Do not curse him, for by Allah, I know that he loves Allah and His Messenger.'" [Al-Bukhari]



The wording of another narration reads: A man said: "Why does he do so? May Allah Fail him! The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said, 'Do not support the devil against your brother.'" [Al-Bukhari]

Hence, a slave should never despair of the Mercy of Allah, The Almighty. Rather, whenever he commits a sin, he should ask for forgiveness and repent to Allah. None is infallible. Regarding the righteous people who are promised Paradise, Allah the Almighty Says (what means): {And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous.} [Qur'an 3:133]

Indicating the characteristics of the righteous people, Allah Says (what means): {And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except Allah? - And [who] do not persist in what they have done while they know. Those - their reward is forgiveness from their Lord and gardens beneath which rivers flow [in Paradise], wherein they will abide eternally; and excellent is the reward of the [righteous] workers.} [Qur'an 3:135-136]

Even a righteous person may commit a grave major sin or do an immorality. Nevertheless, he immediately gives up

the sin and returns to his Lord, seeking forgiveness and repentance.

Here is also the example of the Messengers, may Allah exalt their mention. Allah the Almighty Says (what means): {Indeed, in My presence the messengers do not fear. Otherwise, he who wrongs, then substitutes good after evil - indeed, I Am Forgiving and Merciful.} [Qur'an 27:10-11]

Moosa (Moses), may Allah exalt his mention, who was directly addressed by Allah, killed a person and then said as Allah The Almighty Says (what means): {My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, so Forgive me,} and He Forgive him. Indeed, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.} [Qur'an 28:16]

Allah the Almighty tells us about the righteous people who made mistakes, Allah Says (what means): {And the one who has brought the truth and [they who] believed in it - those are the righteous. They will have whatever they desire with their Lord. That is the reward of the doers of good. That Allah May Remove from them the worst of what they did and Reward them their due for the best of what they used to do.} [Qur'an 39: 33-35]

The verses stand as evidence that they did bad actions.

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

The vast mercy of Allah

Mercy is one of the attributes of Allah The Almighty. It is from the mercy of Allah The Almighty that calamities and trials expiate one's sins, and a believer is rewarded for showing patience through these calamities. Another aspect that manifests the mercy of Allah The Almighty is that He conceals our sins and faults in this life and forgives them in the Hereafter.

One of the Names of Allah is, the Most Merciful and the ever Merciful. Allah The Almighty created mercy in one hundred parts, but only sent down one part amongst mankind and kept the rest for the pious slaves in the Hereafter. Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention), said: "Allah has divided mercy into 100 parts; and He retained with Him 99 parts, and sent down to earth one part. Through this one part creatures deal with one another with compassion, so much so that an animal lifts its hoof over its young lest it should hurt it." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

In another narration, the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Allah created 100 units of mercy on the Day He created the heavens and the earth. Each one of them can contain all that is between the heaven and the earth. Of them, he put one on earth, through which a mother has compassion for her children and animals and birds have compassion for one another. On the Day of Resurrection, He will perfect and complete His mercy." (That is He will use all the hundred units of mercy for his slaves on that Day.)

Moreover, Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "Were an infidel to know the mercy Allah has, none would despair of His Paradise." [Muslim]

The mercy of Allah The Almighty far exceeds that of the mother for her child. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, reported: "Some prisoners were brought to the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, amongst whom there was a woman who was running (searching for her child). When she saw a child among the captives, she took hold of it, pressed it against her belly and breastfed it. The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: 'Do you think this woman would ever throw her child into fire?' We said, 'By Allah, she would never throw the child into fire!' Thereupon the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: 'Allah is more kind to his slave than this woman is to her child.'" [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, reported: "I heard the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, saying: 'When Allah created the creatures, He wrote in the Book, which is with Him over His Throne: 'Verily, My Mercy prevailed over My Wrath.'" [Al-Bukhari and Muslim] This is the mercy that the



believer's soul resorts to after death, as the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, indicated to the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them.

Allah The Almighty extends His mercy to his disobedient slaves whenever they repent and turn to Him for forgiveness. Allah The Almighty bestows on him His mercy and forgives their sins and conceals them for him. Ibn 'Abbaas, may Allah be pleased with him, reported: "Once a group of the disbelievers came to Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, who had killed many people and committed adultery excessively. They came to him, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, and said, 'What you are saying and calling people to is a good thing, but is there a way to expiate for what we have committed in the past?' Then the following verse was revealed (what means): {And those who do not invoke with Allah another deity or kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed], except by right, and do not commit unlawful sexual intercourse. And whoever should do that will meet a penalty. Multiplied for him is the punishment on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein humiliated. Except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work. For them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful!} [Qur'an, 25: 68-70]

No one can limit this vast mercy of Allah The Almighty nor prevent it from reaching the people. With His mercy, Allah The Almighty guides people, forgives their sins, accepts their good deeds and overlooks their wrongdoings.

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

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Bond markets gripped by inflation fear, prompting rate-cut bets to fall

Government bond markets from the euro zone to the United States and Britain sold off sharply as the war in the Middle East drove oil and gas prices higher and rekindled inflation fears. Sustained higher inflation would likely force central banks to turn more hawkish. Traders lowered their bets on near-term rate cuts from the Bank of England and the Federal Reserve and priced in a small chance of a European Central Bank hike by year-end. Bond yields rose as equities sold off, underscoring that bonds rarely maintain their safe-haven status during episodes of high inflation.

Chief Economist Philip Lane told the 'Financial Times' in an interview that a prolonged Middle East war could cause a substantial spike in euro zone inflation and reduce economic growth. The price of rate-sensitive two-year notes fell globally as their yields surged. Britain's two-year gilt yield rose 15 basis points to 3.80%, bringing the increase since Friday's close to 28 bps, setting it up for its biggest two-day jump since August 2024.

German two-year yields rose 10 bps on Tuesday and are up 18 bps since last Friday, the most in a year. US two-year yields were up 6bps on the day. "Investors are basically going back to the 2022 energy-shock template. That is very fresh in our minds. We saw how large and persistent the inflation shock was," said Rohan Khanna, head of euro rates strategy at Barclays, referring to the initial impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Bond market moves reflected the jump in energy prices, but the selloff was exacerbated because investors had previously been positioned for bonds to rally on worries about AI-driven disruption to the underlying economy.

Brent crude rose to \$84.42 a barrel yesterday. Over the past week, benchmark European wholesale gas prices closed around 35-40% higher on Monday, and were up another 36% on Tuesday. Benchmark 10-year yields also surged, with Britain's up 16 bps to 4.53%, Germany's up 8 bps to 2.79% and the US up nearly 5 bps to 4.10%. The selloff was deepest in Britain, where the BoE is due to meet later this month. Policymakers are divided over whether to prioritise inflation or growth.

Traders see just a 20% chance of a cut, versus 75% last week. Elsewhere, markets no longer fully price in a Federal Reserve rate cut until September. Traders price in around a 40% chance of an ECB hike by year-end, having bet on a similar chance of a cut late last week. Euro zone inflation rose more than expected to 1.9% year-on-year, last month, data on Tuesday showed, while a market gauge of euro zone inflation over the next two years jumped to just over 2% on Tuesday from around 1.8% last Friday.

Analysis by the ECB suggests that a permanent oil price spike of this magnitude could lift inflation by 0.5 percentage points. Monetary policy acts with long lags, so the focus for policymakers will be how long energy prices remain elevated and whether that has second-round effects on wages and prices of other goods.

The ECB is likely to say it is too early to tell what impact the conflict will have when it meets later in March, Pictet Wealth Management's head of macroeconomic research Frederik Ducrozet said.

For now, short-term bonds have taken the brunt of the selloff. But that could change later in the year if governments have to respond to a sustained rise in energy prices with more spending, Ducrozet said.

Another supply shock when fiscal policy remains supportive showed investors should demand more compensation to hold long-term bonds, TS Lombard analysts said. "This episode could easily push up term premium again and today's co-movement in equities and bonds - both down - is further evidence of why that should be the case." - Reuters



Vietnam is booming, but foreign cash is fleeing from equity market

Outflows hit record, top \$5bn in 2025

Investors, brokers cite tariffs, concentration risks

Vingroup and its units account for more than 20% of Vietnam's benchmark

Reuters
Hanoi

Vietnam is on the cusp of joining the emerging-markets club and stocks have notched their biggest rally in years, but foreigners have been sellers and say investing is handicapped by tariff risks, ownership limits and one firm's dominance of the index. That could hold back global capital from Southeast Asia's fastest-growing economy at a time when money is flowing to smaller markets, even after a likely bump from FTSE Russell's upgrade of Vietnam's market from frontier into secondary emerging status, expected to be effective from September.

A confirmation of the upgrade could come in March or April, when FTSE publishes its review of Vietnam's regulatory progress. Another potential boost may follow if index provider MSCI adds Vietnam to its watchlist - a step JP Morgan says could happen as early as June - although an actual upgrade is not expected before the end of the decade.

Vietnam's benchmark index gained 41% in 2025, its strongest rise in eight years, as the export-reliant nation expanded 8%. Flows of overseas capital

can lift Vietnamese companies' stocks and lower their funding costs, supporting economic growth and the currency." But foreign investors are leaning toward other markets, worried that Vietnam's growth, in part due to trade re-routed from China, is at risk from fickle US trade policy and of the contribution that developer-to-carmaker conglomerate Vingroup has made to the market gains.

"Foreign investors were cautious on Vietnam heading into the Trump presidency due to concerns around potential tariffs," said Sean Taylor, chief investment officer at San Francisco-based asset management firm Matthews Asia. "We felt there were many opportunities to make money in more liquid and transparent markets in the index like Taiwan, South Korea and China."

Net equity outflows hit a record \$5.1bn in 2025, according to LSEG data, and extended in January and February to leave foreigners holding roughly 14.5% of the shares on issue in a market worth \$332bn, government figures show. London-listed Vietnam Enterprise Investments Limited, Dragon Capital's flagship closed-end fund, also had a rush for the exits, with more than two-thirds of shareholders voting to

participate in a tender offer to cash out some of their holdings.

The fund, which counts the Gates Foundation Trust and hedge fund manager Boaz Weinstein among investors, has long traded at a discount to the value of its assets - a symptom of the illiquidity of the local market. Vietnam's market regulator told Reuters in a statement that "several of the world's largest global investment institutions ... have actively prepared to invest in Vietnam," but did not name anyone in particular.

Foreign exchange, access and ownership caps have also long tempered overseas interest in Vietnamese stocks, but last year's rally has also bent a lopsided market further out of shape.

A benchmark dominated by banks and developers is being increasingly driven by a single stock, Vingroup, which rose 736% last year. It is Vietnam's most valuable company and together with subsidiaries comprises more than 20% of the benchmark.

"For foreign funds that care about diversification and liquidity, that makes it harder to add exposure without taking on too much single-stock risk," said Tran Thi Mong Tuyen, a researcher at the Hawaii-based Pacific Forum. Owned by Pham Nhat Vuong, a businessman

who made his first fortune selling instant noodles in Ukraine, Vingroup was founded in 1993 and has expanded from real estate into a conglomerate spanning railways, steel, energy, entertainment and space. Now it's almost a \$50bn behemoth despite a recent slide. Vingroup's stock last year drove up the broader market amid government support and a pledge from the ruling Communist Party for "preferential policies" for private domestic firms.

"A few related stocks account for a disproportionate share of the index and exert outsized influence over market movements," said Thu Nguyen, deputy head of Vietnamese fund VinaCapital. Vingroup, which floated loss-making electric vehicle maker VinFast on the Nasdaq in 2023, said last year's stock price gains reflected supportive government policies and its units' achievements. Its net profit doubled last year, however the stratospheric stock price move means it currently trades at a lofty price-to-earnings multiple of 96.

That valuation "is quite challenging for a fundamental investor like ourselves to get comfortable with at the present moment, when there remain significant uncertainties about the timing of the future cash flows from the many projects it is involved with," said Craig Martin, Singapore-based chairman of Dynam Capital, which manages a London-listed Vietnam fund.

Eight brokers and other fund managers contacted by Reuters either said they did not advise clients to buy Vingroup stock or declined to talk about the company, with some citing fears of reprisals. To be sure, Vietnam has loosened funding and trading rules, making access easier and making progress toward a market upgrade.

Global investors aren't wholesale bearish about Vietnam either, with some buying companies listed elsewhere, but doing business in Vietnam, in order to gain exposure.

But with prices for locally-listed firms sometimes at 20-30% premiums for international buyers, due to caps on foreign holdings, few see the value in rushing in just yet. "A lot of managers have mentioned stocks have potential, but the liquidity needs to be there," said Hunter Beauoin from research firm Morningstar. "Foreign ownership limits are creating some constraints."



A marketplace in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. Foreign investors are leaning toward other markets, worried that Vietnam's growth, in part due to trade re-routed from China, is at risk from fickle US trade policy.

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German students rally against military recruitment drive

AFP
Berlin

Thousands of German teenagers skipped school yesterday to join protests against a stepped-up military recruitment drive that many fear may in future involve a form of conscription.

About 3,000 students gathered on Berlin's Potsdamer Platz square, with smaller demonstrations held across Germany as part of a nationwide "school strike".

"I don't see why anyone should have to go to the front lines for politicians," Alex Krzeszka, a 15-year-old student, told AFP at the Berlin rally.

"I don't see it as morally right, and I think war should never be the solution. Problems should be solved diplomatically."

Germany, like other European countries, has sought to build up its armed forces in response to Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the threat of further aggression against Nato members.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz has vowed to turn the Bundeswehr into Europe's largest conventional army, banking initially on a voluntary recruitment drive.

The government this year started requiring all 18-year-old men to fill out questionnaires about their interest and fitness for short-term military service.

Women are also being asked to fill out the forms, but cannot be compelled to do so under current



Demonstrators hold a banner that reads "The rich want war, the youth wants a future" during a protest against the potential return of military conscription in Berlin, Germany, yesterday. (Reuters)

German law. Among the signs being waved by protesters in Berlin was a poster that read "We are not cannon fodder" while another demanded: "Send Friedrich Merz to the front line!"

For now at least, German lawmakers have decided against bringing back mandatory conscription, which Germany suspended in 2011.

But some politicians have expressed doubts about whether ambitious recruiting targets can be achieved without some form of conscription.

Plans call for strengthening the Bundeswehr from about 185,000 active-duty troops now

to 260,000 by 2030, while roughly quadrupling the size of the reserves to 200,000.

The Bundeswehr shrank dramatically after the end of the Cold War as countries across Europe slashed defence budgets.

In the 1980s, West Germany alone had fielded a military of nearly 500,000 troops.

"I think they should definitely advertise for the Bundeswehr, but it absolutely shouldn't be compulsory," Leander Martinez, a 16-year-old student from Berlin, told AFP.

"Reintroducing conscription is nothing other than rearmament," Leon Reinemann, a student who

helped organise the school strike in the western city of Koblenz, told broadcaster NTV.

He defended the fact students were skipping classes, saying that "a single day of absence from school is significantly less serious than six months in the barracks".

Others took a more staunchly pacifist stance at the Berlin demonstration. "I'm against conscription and against war propaganda," Tillmann, a 19-year-old student who declined to give his last name, told AFP.

"And I think murdering someone is always wrong, even if the state says that someone should be murdered. There's nothing more important than human life."

Czech parliament shields PM from trial

The lower house of the Czech parliament voted yesterday to deny a court request for billionaire businessman and Prime Minister Andrej Babis to face trial in long-running prosecution over an alleged fraud in drawing a European Union subsidy.

Babis, head of the populist ANO party, returned to power after winning an election in October last year, despite charges in the case involving a 2m euro subsidy granted in 2008, before he entered politics, for building a hotel and conference centre outside Prague called Stork Nest. Deputies for ANO and ruling coalition partners, the far-right, pro-Russian SPD party and the anti-Green Deal Motorists, voted yesterday not to lift parliamentary immunity from Babis, voting records showed. The vote means Babis is protected from prosecution in the case until the end of the parliament's four-year term in 2029.

Babis has denied any wrongdoing in the case where prosecutors allege he hid his ownership of a firm to qualify for the subsidy,

which was meant for small businesses and not large groups like the one Babis owned. He has argued, without showing evidence, that the case was politically motivated to harm his political activity.

"The system of traditional parties realised that I represent a fundamental danger to them, because I refused to steal and they could not corrupt me," he told parliament yesterday. An appeals court overturned a Babis' acquittal in the case by a lower court last year, sending the case back to the lower court. The parliament's vote prevents the lower court from proceeding with a retrial.

Babis has built a multi-billion dollar empire of farming, chemicals, food processing and other firms, including real estate and fertility clinics across Europe. The parliament yesterday also denied a request to lift the immunity of Babis' ruling coalition ally and SPD chief Tomio Okamura, who has been charged with hate speech.

Okamura called the charges an attempt to criminalise political opposition. (Reuters)

Iceland set for autumn EU referendum

Iceland's government will propose to its parliament to hold a referendum during the autumn on whether to resume European Union accession talks abandoned more than a decade ago, public broadcaster RUV reported yesterday, citing sources.

RUV reported on its website that the government would submit the bill to parliament next week and that the vote, according to sources, looked most likely to take place late September. Reykjavik in 2013 abandoned

EU membership talks after four years of negotiations.

A rise in the cost of living and the war in Ukraine in recent years rekindled the island nation's interest in joining the bloc, polls have shown.

Threats by US President Donald Trump to annex Greenland have also made the question of EU membership more pressing. In February Prime Minister Kristrun Frostadottir said the vote would take place in the coming months. (Reuters)

Snowstorm in Nuuk



Pedestrians hurry down the street during a snowstorm in Nuuk, Greenland. (AFP)

Finland to lift full ban on hosting nuclear arms, says government

Reuters
Helsinki

Finland plans to lift a long-standing ban on having nuclear arms on its territory, the government said yesterday, aligning with Nordic neighbours in a move that could open the door to deploying atomic bombs on Finnish soil during times of war.

Finland's Nuclear Energy Act, passed in 1987, prohibits the import, manufacture, possession and detonation of nuclear explosives on its soil, seen by some Finns as a clause that would benefit only Russia if there ever was a war.

While Finland maintained neutrality during the Cold War era, the country in 2023 joined

the Nato military alliance in response to nuclear-armed Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine the preceding year.

"The amendment is necessary to enable Finland's military defence as part of the alliance and to take full advantage of Nato's deterrence and collective defence," Finnish Defence Minister Antti Häkkinen told a press conference. The proposed change will next go to parliament where the right-wing coalition government holds a majority.

Neighbours Sweden, Denmark and Norway have long-standing policies against nuclear weapons on their territories in peacetime but do not have legislative bans during war.

Nato allies France and Germany announced plans on Mon-

day to deepen co-operation with European partners on nuclear deterrence, marking a policy shift as the continent faces rising threats from Russia and instability linked to the Iran conflict.

Sweden's doctrine is to station no permanent foreign troops or nuclear weapons on its soil in peacetime, Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told reporters last week, when asked about the possibility of his country hosting French nuclear arms.

"If we were to find ourselves in a completely different situation, that particular formulation would not apply," Kristersson said.

Finland shares a 1,340-kilometre border with Russia and in 2024 signed a defence pact with the US, allowing it to use 15 of Finland's military facilities and zones.

Ukraine, Russia free 200 POWs each

AFP
Ukraine

Ukraine and Russia each freed 200 prisoners of war yesterday, the first part of an exchange that will see them swap 500 people each in total, officials said.

The two sides agreed to the exchange during talks in Geneva last month, both sides said. Prisoner swaps are one of the few areas of co-operation between the warring countries.

"Today, 200 Ukrainian families received the most-awaited message - their loved ones are coming home," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on social media.

Video shared by Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lubinets showed servicemen leaving buses, wrapped in Ukrainian flags and shouting "Glory to Ukraine!", as well as embracing those who came to welcome them.

Among those freed were Ukrainian soldiers captured in 2022, including some who fought in the three-month-long Russian siege of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, said Lubinets.

At the site of the exchange in the northern Chernigiv region, Kateryna Movchan, 29, waited for news of her uncle, Valentyn, who went missing on the front in 2024.

"We're hoping that maybe someone will recognise him and there will be at least some kind of feedback," Movchan, from the northwestern Rivne region, told AFP.

"We have absolutely no information at all: how he is, where he is," she added.



A screen grab of Russian service personnel captured by Ukrainian forces and released during the latest exchange of prisoners of war in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict, as they react in a bus at an unknown location in Belarus. (Reuters)



Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) are seen after a swap, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, at an unknown location in Ukraine, yesterday. (Reuters)

The Russian defence ministry published footage showing its soldiers boarding a bus and cheering while draped in Russian flags.

The United Arab Emirates and the United States helped mediate yesterday's exchange, Russia said.

More prisoners will be released today, with the two sides set to exchange 500 each in total, Russian negotiator Vladimir Medinsky said on Telegram.

There have been several prisoner exchanges during the war. The

swaps are among the few tangible results of talks between the two sides, mediated by Washington as it seeks to broker a deal to end the war.

Negotiations appear to have stalled, with the United States now focusing its attention on the Middle East.

Kyiv had said there was a tentative plan to hold talks in Abu Dhabi this week - one of the places being hit by Iranian missiles and drones.

Google opens AI centre as Berlin defends US tech reliance

AFP
Berlin

Google opened an AI centre Berlin yesterday, pledging to step up innovation in the German capital, which boasts a dynamic start-up scene and strong academic and research institutions.

German politicians hailed the move despite growing fears Europe is overly reliant on US tech giants that its own corporate players are struggling to match, particularly in artificial intelligence.

Google - a major AI player alongside US firms such as Anthropic, OpenAI and Microsoft - announced a 5.5bn euro (\$6.4bn) investment drive in Germany last November.

"We have a whole range of outstanding researchers who are working on AI here in Berlin," said Philipp Justus, Google's country manager for Germany and VP Central Europe.

"This centre is intended to enable exchange with the academic community, with policy-makers, and ultimately also with companies that are driving forward the application of AI."

In an expansion of its Berlin site, Google added an "AI demo space" for new innovations, a separate floor for research teams and an area where AI-focused events will be held.

Berlin mayor Kai Wegner said the move "underscores Berlin's international significance as a science and technology hub - with a dynamic start-up scene,



Country Manager Germany and Vice-President of Central Europe at Google Philipp Justus, Governing Mayor of Berlin Kai Wegner, Germany's Vice-President of Government Affairs and Public Policy for Europe Annette Kroeber-Riel, Vice-President of Research at Google DeepMind Slav Petrov, and Germany's Minister for Digitalisation and Government Modernisation Karsten Wildberger, open Google's new Artificial Intelligence (AI) centre in Berlin, yesterday. (Reuters)

strong universities and an open society that enables and promotes innovation?"

Karsten Wildberger, minister for digital transformation, stressed that "digital sovereignty is extremely important for Germany and Europe."

"But that does not mean doing everything alone," he said. "We continue to work in equal partnerships."

He added that it was "important that we become much more active in developing things under our own steam", listing key areas that included IT infrastructure and cloud computing.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz's coalition has signalled it wants to make progress on the AI front as part of efforts to revive the struggling economy.

There have been a flurry of announcements related to AI recently, including from Deutsche Telekom and software company

SAP. But a good number of investments still come from the US, fuelling worries at a time of strained ties under the administration of President Donald Trump.

"Digital sovereignty" has been the goal, with the aim of ensuring that Europeans' data is stored at home and protected under local laws, and reducing a heavy reliance on overseas players in the digital domain.

At a summit dedicated to the topic in November in Berlin, Merz and French President Emmanuel Macron backed the idea of favouring European firms in a bid to develop regional champions.

Despite its ambitions, Germany still faces "enormous" challenges to build up AI infrastructure and data storage capacities, said Janis Hecker of the digital business association Bitkom.



Amir reviews national readiness at MoI Command Center



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani visited yesterday the National Command Center (NCC) of the Ministry of Interior (MoI). At the outset of the visit, His Highness listened to a briefing on the crisis and emergency management system, and the mechanisms for immediate action in response to various developments, including rapid response plans for events and raising the levels of preparedness. His Highness was also briefed on the monitoring, surveillance, and follow-up systems, and the mechanisms for supporting decision-making in exceptional circumstances, which enhances overall national readiness, ensures the continuity of vital services, and maintains security and stability in the country. His Highness the Amir commended the efforts made by the MoI members, appreciating their constant readiness to perform the national duty of preserving the security and safety of the nation. (QNA)

Al Araby 2 strengthens its Ramadan lineup with exclusive standout dramas

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Al Araby 2 continues to present its distinctive lineup of Ramadan series. This season, the channel presents a carefully curated lineup that underscores its commitment to high-calibre storytelling, blending artistic boldness with meaningful human narratives.

The programming reflects a diversity of formats and styles designed to meet the expectations of audiences across the Arab world. Leading the slate is a selection of exclusive titles, foremost among them the third season of the Palestinian series 'Nazif Al-turab', airing exclusively on the channel.

The series remains one of the most prominent dramatic works chronicling stories of resilience and attachment to the land. The drama captures the realities of daily life under occupation, highlighting Palestinian resilience and the convergence of individual struggles with the enduring cause of a homeland that refuses to yield.

Exclusively airing in the Gulf region is the Syrian series *Al Khoruj Ila Albir*, a drama that confronts the wounds of Syria's collective memory and explores politically and socially sensitive themes. Inspired by real events, including the 2008 Sednaya Prison uprising, addressing a complex and painful chapter of Syrian reality.

The Ramadan schedule also features a new season of the comedy series *Ma Ikhtalafna* returning for its third consecutive year. Presented through standalone sketches, the show examines everyday issues. Also among the featured titles is the Egyptian series *Aala Aad El Hub*, a psychological social drama centred on a businesswoman whose life unravels after discovering her husband's cheating. Blending external reality with internal anxieties, the series raises nuanced questions about trust,



doubt, and shifting social dynamics. Meanwhile, the Syrian comedy *Bint Alnoaman*, marks the return of actor Oso after a period of absence. The series traces the transformation of its protagonist's life as she grapples with her father's control and the revelation of her fiancé's cheating, unfolding in a narrative that balances emotional tension with a strong human dimension.

Commenting on the selection, Joseph Hussein, Head of Acquisitions at Al Araby Group, emphasised the channel's commitment to curating productions that combine artistic merit with a clear message. He noted that the strategy focuses on delivering bold, high-impact content that can make a meaningful impression during the Ramadan season. Full broadcast and rerun schedules are available on the official Al Araby 2 website, and all series can also be streamed on demand via the Al Araby Plus application.

France condemns Iranian attacks on Qatar, reiterates solidarity, defence commitments

France has condemned in the strongest possible terms the Iranian attacks targeting Qatar, reaffirming its solidarity with the country and its commitment to supporting regional security. In a press statement issued by the French embassy in Doha, France said it "condemns unreservedly and in the strongest possible terms" the attacks, stressing that it immediately expressed solidarity with Qatar at the highest level in line with the strategic partnership that binds the two countries.

According to the statement, French President Emmanuel Macron spoke with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani on Saturday morning to convey France's full support. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Noel Barrot, also held talks with HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani. The embassy said further high-level contacts have taken place and will continue as the situation develops.



The embassy noted that France's solidarity with Qatar is active, emphasising that it stands alongside its partners and friends in the region, including Qatar, to help ensure their security and territorial integrity.

France and Qatar are bound by a defence agreement, and France, described as a trusted partner, said it honours its commitments during this difficult period. As part of this support, France has

deployed Rafale fighter jets, air defence systems and airborne radar capabilities in the region, and will continue to do so for as long as the situation requires.

France also reiterated that, like Qatar, it believes diplomacy and dialogue should prevail. It has called for an emergency meeting of the Security Council in the first hours of the conflict and will spare no effort to facilitate, as soon as possible, a way out of the crisis in conjunction with regional partners.

"Amid the unacceptable attacks targeting them, I wish to reaffirm to our Qatari friends France's unwavering solidarity and assure them of our full commitment to stand by their side. I would also like to express our deep gratitude for the remarkable effectiveness of the military means deployed in support of our collective security," stated Arnaud Pescheux, ambassador of France to Qatar. "Our embassy is fully mobilised in support of its nationals and in close liaison with the Qatari authorities."

Painting reflects Ramadan inner peace



A painting by artist Lina al-Ali reflects the feeling of inner peace and harmony during the month of Ramadan. The subject depicts individuals holding a Ramadan lantern, symbolising light and guidance; a crescent moon, representing spirituality; and a bird, symbolising peace and freedom. The background, adorned with arches and windows, evokes a sense of tranquillity and serenity in the spiritual atmosphere of the holy month of Ramadan. The style relies on simplified hand-drawn sketches with soft lines and symbolic details that express family and harmony. The serene faces add to the feeling of peace. Warm colours such as red, orange, and earthy tones reflect emotional warmth, in contrast to the blue in the background, which symbolises calmness and inner peace. This creates a visual and spiritual balance between the prevailing Ramadan security and serenity.

A Ramadan story: When ears are deaf to the truth

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Among the Ramadan tales told in Majlis (gatherings), there is a story of a man nicknamed al-Asam (Arabic for "deaf") who worried about his wife's hearing, believing it had deteriorated and that she was no longer hearing as she once did. He didn't know how to approach the subject with her, so he consulted a wise hearing specialist. The wise man advised him to test her hearing by standing 10 metres away and ask her in a normal voice about dinner. If she didn't answer, he should move two metres closer, then another two metres, decreasing this distance by two metres each time until he heard a reply.

That evening, the wife was busy in the kitchen preparing food for Iftar (meal for breaking the fast), and the man, standing 10 metres



away, began the test. He said to her, "What is our dinner tonight, my love?" The wife remained silent and didn't answer.

The man moved two metres closer and asked again, "What is

our dinner tonight, my love?" Silence prevailed, and he received no answer from her. He continued to move closer to the kitchen food preparation platform and asked her again, but still no answer. Then he moved even closer inside the kitchen, but the silence remained. Finally, he stood directly behind her and asked for the fifth time, "What's for Iftar tonight, darling?" His wife replied clearly, "My dear, I'm telling you for the fifth time, we're having soup and Machboos!"

The man finally understood: the problem wasn't with his wife's ears, but with his own! He needed to see a doctor, but he didn't need to test his wife; he needed to test himself. We often hear this saying about one of the teachings of patience in the holy Ramadan: "Sometimes the problem isn't with others, but with us. What we sometimes need is to examine ourselves before blaming others."

Family cohesion builds sustainable society, promotes mental health to face situations

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Family cohesion promotes positive mental health among family members, offering comfort, stability, and inner strength, and helping them cope with life's hardships and face difficult situations with courage and confidence, noted a Qatar University (QU) researcher.

"Research in Qatar supports that specific family behaviours can either worsen or ease stress, emphasising the vital role family plays in strengthening children's well-being and enabling them to develop effective coping skills. Right approaches provide comfort and guidance, help children obtain appropriate care, and ensure their needs are addressed within the healthcare system,"

says Aldana Alsulaiti from the College of Arts and Sciences, QU.

In the latest edition of the research magazine of the university, Alsulaiti notes that family cohesion is not only crucial for supporting children with mental health disorders but also for promoting mental health across society, reinforcing the vital role families play in building a cohesive and resilient community. According to the writer, another important aspect of family cohesion is its role in promoting education.

"There is no denying that family support can significantly enhance the individual's motivation towards achievement, engagement, and overall performance in the academic context. Families are the closest influence an individual is exposed to, shaping multiple aspects of their life, academics being one," the researcher explained.



Alsulaiti says that family cohesion, in its roles in education and mental health, is important for passing down societal values and for building a prosperous and cohesive society. "The key role of family cohesion in transmitting core societal values illustrates how families serve as the backbone of a prosperous and cohesive society in Qatar.

Individuals learn core values and moral principles through the family they grew up in, often through shared experiences, and cultural traditions that are practised in daily life," she highlighted.

According to her, the strong family structure provides comfort, stability, and emotional support, helping individuals cope with life difficulties and become responsible members of society.

"By nurturing these aspects, families in Qatar create a foundation for positive mental well-being, ensuring that children and adolescents grow up confident, resilient, and capable of contributing to their communities. In addition, family involvement in education strengthens academic motivation and engagement, allowing individuals to develop essential skills, knowledge, and a sense of purpose that benefits both

personal growth and societal progress," she pointed out. Alsulaiti underlined that families serve as the primary outlet for transmitting cultural, ethical, and moral values, enabling communities to function harmoniously and collectively work towards shared goals. "Initiatives in Qatar, such as educational workshops and programmes promoting family cohesion, demonstrate the nation's commitment to supporting families in these roles.

"Therefore, reinforcing family cohesion remains important to societal development. Government officials, educators, and community leaders need to maintain environments that strengthen and empower families, so that future generations are raised in a society built on resilience, learning, cultural heritage, and common values," she concluded.