



## Qatar Insurance Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written  
Premiums (GWP)

9% ▲  
QAR 9.9B

Net Profit  
Before the Impact of  
Pillar Two Taxes

19% ▲  
QAR 874M

Net Profit  
Attributable to  
QIC Shareholders

9% ▲  
QAR 791M

Earnings  
Per Share:

10% ▲  
QAR 0.188

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## Qatar intercepts missile attacks

The Ministry of Defence announced that the Qatari armed forces intercepted two missile attacks which targeted the country yesterday. (QNA)

## Qatar Airways in limited flights for repatriation

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Qatar Airways yesterday operated a limited number of special repatriation flights following temporary authorisation from the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA), which confirmed a safe operating corridor through Qatari airspace. The national carrier said the exceptional flights were arranged to assist stranded passengers in urgent need of travel and do not signal the resumption of regular commercial operations, which remain suspended due to the ongoing closure of Qatari airspace. Flights departed from Hamad International Airport to key destinations including London, Paris, Madrid, Rome, and Frankfurt. Industry sources and flight-tracking data confirmed the departures, marking the first outbound Qatar Airways services since late February. The airline said priority on these flights was given to families, elderly passengers, and those with medical or compassionate travel requirements, with seats pre-allocated directly to eligible travellers. Qatar Airways announced that today, it also intends to operate inbound flights to Doha from London Heathrow, Paris Charles de Gaulle, Madrid Barajas, Rome Fiumicino, Frankfurt, and Bangkok – again using the safe corridor temporarily approved by the QCAA. **To Page 2**

## Iranian embassy in Doha denies expulsion order

The embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Qatar has moved to quash circulating rumours that its diplomatic staff were given a one-week deadline to leave the country, flatly rejecting the claim as entirely without basis. In a tweet posted to its official X account, the embassy said the reports were false and called their spread a deliberate attempt to mislead public opinion and damage the longstanding ties between the two brotherly states. The tweet implicitly echoed warnings issued separately by Qatar's own Ministry of Interior, which earlier urged the public to disregard misleading content – and to rely only on verified official sources.

## RAMADAN THOUGHT

Verily, those who disbelieved, and died while they were disbelievers, the (whole) earth full of gold will not be accepted from anyone of them even if they offered it as a ransom. For them is a painful torment and they will have no helpers. (Qur'an 3:91)

Prayer times	
Fajr...	4:34
Zuhr...	11:45
Asr...	3:08
Maghrib...	5:42
Isha...	7:12
Fasting times	
Iftar today	5:42pm
Imsak tomorrow	4:23am

# Resilient Qatar feeds stability against odds

## The Food Security Strategy 2030 is paying dividends

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

With the regional political turbulence continuing for more than a week, Qatar's food security strategy has shown great resilience with no disruption for major food items in the country. This proves that the Qatar National Food Security Strategy 2030 is well aligned with the country's preparedness and is paying great rewards especially during the crisis. The supermarkets in the country are well stocked and there has been no disruption so far in the essential provisions. Except for the

panic buying on the first few hours on the day the tensions broke out, the supermarkets have seen no rush and almost all the food items are well supplied in the country. The Ministry of Commerce and Industries in a statement a few days back said: "The industrial sector includes more than 138 national food manufacturing plants, producing a diverse range of high-quality products and operating at full capacity to ensure that the needs of the local market are met." These plants include 20 water production companies, 24 dairy product companies, 16 meat and fish processing companies, 15 bakery and pasta producing factories, and 10 packaging and milling factories. In addition, there are nine vegetable factories, nine juice factories, nine edible oil factories, seven food industries and ready-made meal factories five biscuits and con-

fectionary factories, five date processing factories, five coffee and nut processing factories, and four spice and sauce factories, as well as two sugar factories - all of which are operating in full swing across the country. Hamad Hadi al-Hajri, assistant director of Food Security Department, at the Ministry of Municipality told *Gulf Times* in an earlier interview that the Qatar National Food Security Strategy 2030 was visualised with the aim of ensuring sustainable food access and maintaining a strategic reserve of essential food items for two to eight months. He said: "We are establishing a strategic reserve of select commodities so that we can cater for the needs of the community. The strategic reserve has been designed very carefully so that we can have enough supply that can cover for a specific period." **To Page 2**



Well-stocked stalls of a supermarket on Saturday. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen

# Will Iran president's vow stand the test?

## Qatar endures missile, drone attacks on the very day of Tehran's pledge

By Kamran Rehmat  
Doha

Qatar spent weeks working the phones, dispatching envoys, and maintaining direct channels with Tehran in a concerted effort to prevent a regional war. Yesterday morning, the reward for that diplomacy arrived in the form of more missile and drone attacks over its territory that were successfully thwarted. The Ministry of Defence confirmed the interception in a brief statement, the latest in a series of aerial engagements that have seen Doha's integrated air defence network scrambled

## SITUATIONER

repeatedly since the conflict erupted. "Our policy is clear: Iran will not strike neighbouring countries unless attacks against Iran originate from their territory," Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said in a tele-



Masoud Pezeshkian

vised address yesterday. Pezeshkian, who now heads a three-man interim leadership council until a new supreme leader is named, also apologised to neighbouring states affected by Iranian strikes and signalled a halt to attacks on Gulf countries – provided their territory was not used to launch strikes against the Islamic Republic. The statement was notable as much for what it revealed as for what it promised: that Iranian military units had been acting on their own authority, doing what they deemed necessary after their commanders were killed, apparently without direct sanction from Tehran's political leadership. **To Page 2**

# Where heritage meets technology

## Sector redefining preservation with 3D printing

By Peter Alagos  
Business Editor

Qatar's heritage sector is redefining preservation by embracing advanced fabrication technologies, with 3D printing now positioned as a strategic tool rather than an experimental curiosity, according to a Doha-based advanced fabrication and experiential production studio. "A decade ago, additive manufacturing

was experimental. Today, it is integrated into advanced fabrication ecosystems across architecture, engineering, industry, and cultural institutions," Khalid al-Saegh, co-founder and chairman of Vectorize, told *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview. The shift has been most visible in cultural and museum environments, where replicas and installations are enabling wider public access to fragile artefacts, stated al-Saegh, citing a recent collaboration between Vectorize and the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA). Demand is also rising in high-impact public installations, institutional architectural models, and industrial prototyping, al-Saegh noted, adding that

"cultural heritage and experiential spaces are among the fastest growing sectors." According to al-Saegh, Qatar's sustained investment in culture, education, and innovation has created fertile ground for studios like Vectorize to deliver institutional-grade work. By piloting advanced fabrication methodologies, al-Saegh explained that institutions are blending heritage with technology to expand accessibility while safeguarding authenticity "Institutions are willing to pilot advanced fabrication methodologies, creating opportunities for studios like ours to deliver high-level, institutional-grade work," al-Saegh said. **To Page 2**



Vectorize co-founder and chairman Khalid al-Saegh (left) and co-founder and CEO Farid Mahfouz.

# Amir urges diplomacy in call with Trump



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held a conversation via telephone yesterday with US President Donald Trump. They discussed the latest developments in light of the continued and unjustified Iranian attacks on Qatar and countries in the region, in addition to efforts made to contain the current escalation. His Highness the Amir stressed during the call that the current escalation seen in the region will have dangerous repercussions on international security and peace, stressing



the importance of containing the crisis and intensifying diplomacy to end it. His Highness also stressed that Qatar will not hesitate to defend its sovereignty, security, and national interests in line with the UN Charter and the provisions of international law. The two sides agreed on the importance of working together to maintain regional and international stability and to support political avenues that could address current tensions and avoid further escalation in the region. (QNA)

## Amir, UAE president discuss situation

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a telephone call yesterday from UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. At the beginning of the call, the UAE president followed up on the situation in Qatar following the Iranian attacks, reiterating his country's solidarity with Qatar in all measures it takes to protect its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity. The Amir expressed his appreciation for this fraternal stance, affirming Qatar's solidarity with the UAE in safeguarding its sovereignty, security, and stability. The call dealt with the latest developments in the region in light of the continued Iranian aggression and its repercussions on regional and international stability. Both sides stressed the importance of continuing coordination and joint consultation between the two countries, and strengthening joint work and cooperation in order to address the current challenges. Both sides stressed the need for an immediate halt to the military escalation and to prevent its expansion, calling for intensified regional and international efforts to reduce tension and stop the attacks, and to prioritise dialogue and the diplomatic path in order to contain the crisis and preserve regional and international peace and security. (QNA)

## New attacks after apology

Gulf nations yesterday reported new missile and drone attacks, while Iran vowed to press on with its strikes against neighbouring countries. Loud explosions were heard in Dubai, Doha and Bahrain, while attacks were later reported in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, where the national oil company announced a "precautionary" cut to production. It came despite Iran's president earlier apologising to Gulf countries for prior strikes, saying they would no longer be targeted unless strikes were launched from their territory. Hours later, Iran said it would continue conducting strikes on sites in Gulf countries which were "at the disposal of the enemy". UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan said in a rare televised address that the Emirates were in "a period of war" and "will emerge stronger" from the war, which has entered its second week. Earlier in the day, Dubai closed its main airport after authorities said an unidentified object was intercepted nearby. (AFP)



# PM, ministers discuss latest developments with leaders

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received telephone calls yesterday from Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates Dr Badr Abdelatty and Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs Maria Malmher Stenergard.

On Friday HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received phone calls from Lebanon's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants Youssef Raji, Djibouti's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation Abdoukader Houssein Omar, Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Marko Duric, Kyrgyzstan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeenbek Kulubaev, Cuba's Minister of Foreign Affairs Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, and Cote d'Ivoire's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation Niale Kaba.

Also on Friday HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi re-



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

ceived phone calls from Lebanon's Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tarek Mitri and Afghanistan's Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi.

Discussion during the calls focused on the escalating military situation in the region and its serious repercussions on regional and international security and stabil-



HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi

ity, as well as ways to resolve all disputes peacefully.

During the calls, the Iranian attacks on Qatar's territory were condemned as unacceptable under any pretext or justification.

It was noted that Qatar has always been keen to distance itself from regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue be-



HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi

tween Iran and the international community.

The need for an immediate cessation of all escalatory actions, a return to the negotiating table, and the prioritisation of reason and wisdom in order to contain the crisis and preserve the region's security, were emphasised during the calls. - QNA

## Justice ministry explains submission of letters to UNSC on Iranian attacks

The Ministry of Justice discussed yesterday that the objectives and legal procedures associated with the letters sent by Qatar to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) regarding developments related to the Iranian attack on the country's territory, affirming that these letters fall within the framework of compliance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter and the preservation of international peace and security.

In a series of posts on its official X account, the ministry said that Qatar had sent several letters to the United Nations and the UNSC to inform them of developments related to the attack on its territory, noting that Qatar requested that these messages be circulated as official documents of the Security Council.

The ministry noted that the sending of such letters is aimed at formally notifying the international community of the attacks.

A message is submitted to the Security Council, which is responsible for maintaining international peace and security under Article 24 of the UN Charter, and the notification is recorded among the official documents of the UN.

The ministry noted that this step carries important legal and diplomatic implications within the framework of the UN, as it contributes to formally recording and documenting the armed attacks against Qatar in the organisation's records, informing members of the Security Council of the state's position and its account of events, and allowing the letter to be relied upon later in legal or diplomatic proceedings.

It also helps establish the state's legal position and record its official protest, while

strengthening political and diplomatic support for its stance at the international level.

The ministry also noted that one of the legal aspects associated with such letters is the invocation of the right of self-defence.

A state often refers in its letter to Article 51 of the UN Charter, which recognises the right of states to self-defence in the event of an armed attack, provided that the Security Council is immediately informed of the measures taken in exercising this right.

The letter may therefore notify the Security Council of the state's intention to exercise its right to self-defence or indicate that defensive measures have already been taken in response to the attack.

With regards to requesting action from the UNSC, the ministry said that the letters may call on the Council to assume its responsibilities in accordance with the provisions of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, particularly Articles 39, 41, and 42.

Such action could include convening an emergency meeting, condemning the attack, or taking measures aimed at preventing escalation or holding the aggressor accountable.

The ministry further also said that these letters were not confined to their legal aspects but also served as an important diplomatic tool for presenting and managing the state's political narrative before the international community.

They typically identify the party responsible for the attack, outline the extent of the damage and its consequences, and clarify the state's position regarding escalation or the defensive measures it may be compelled to take. - QNA

## General Tax Authority confirms continued provision of services

The General Tax Authority has affirmed the continued provision of its services to taxpayers without interruption through a modern and advanced tax system that ensures business continuity and operational efficiency.

In a statement, the authority said that a range of tax services is available electronically through the Dhareeba platform, enabling taxpayers to complete their transactions and fulfill their tax obligations easily and conven-

iently around the clock, seven days a week.

The authority also called on taxpayers to follow its official channels to stay informed about the latest updates and announcements, and to contact the authority to submit inquiries and obtain support and assistance.

The authority reiterated its ongoing commitment to developing its tax system and enhancing the digitalisation of its services, while working to make them fully available through electronic channels. - QNA

## CCQ postpones Spring 2026 midterm exams

The Community College of Qatar (CCQ) has announced the postponement of the Spring 2026 midterm examinations, which were scheduled to take place during the current period, until further notice.

In a post on its official X platform account, the CCQ said that the decision was made in the public interest, in response to current circumstances, and out of concern for the safety of its students and all staff members.

The college urged students to regularly monitor their e-mail and official CCQ platforms for the latest updates and relevant instructions, including the alternative exam dates that will be announced at a later time. - QNA

## Resilient Qatar feeds stability against odds

From Page 1

According to al-Hajri, the Qatar National Food Security Strategy 2030 is based on 17 initiatives across three pillars.

The three pillars are domestic production and markets, strategic storage reserve and alert system, and international trade and investment.

"We have the basic commodity basket, which includes wheat, rice, sugar, edible oils and other stuff," he said. "The storage range for them is between 2-8 months, depending on the commodity, as this can serve as an insurance against supply chain shocks."

"We are also enhancing the scope of the strategic reserve," al-Hajri added.

He also said the main objective of the reserve is to ensure that the food supply chain is not affected due to any external reasons.

The current scenario truly reflects his views as Qatar so far is not affected by the escalating tensions in the region.

"We know that we live in a very dynamic world and environment," al-Hajri said. "There can be situations such as geopolitical tensions, biosecurity issues, disruption in the supply chain in the market that could affect the food system."

"We are making sure that the food supply chain can sustain with the strategic storage," he continued. "The basic idea within the strategy is whatever we can store that has an extended shelf life, we will create a reserve."

## Limited QA repatriation flights

From Page 1

The airline emphasised that these flights are strictly for passengers whose final destination is Doha and urged customers not to proceed to departure airports unless they hold valid confirmed tickets.

Travelers were advised to keep their contact details updated through the airline's website or mobile app.

The airline confirmed that passengers holding bookings for travel between February 28 and March 15 can modify their travel dates or request refunds without penalties.

Qatar Airways said it will resume regular operations only after the QCAA officially declares the full reopening of Qatari airspace.

## Will Iran president's vow stand the test?

From Page 1

Shortly after the Iranian president spoke, the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters - Iran's military command centre - announced that its armed forces would press on with targeting American and Israeli installations throughout the region.

"Following the remarks of the president, the armed forces once again declare that they respect the national sovereignty of neighbouring states," it said.

However, the statement warned that if prior hostile conduct did not cease, all military bases and interests of the US and Israel "on land, sea, and in air" across the region would become "primary targets".

Regardless, strikes on Gulf nations extended into yesterday, with missiles and drones directed at Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

Notably, Pezeshkian's word was drowned out by a missile and drone attack on the very same day of his assurances.

Qatar's engagement in the crisis has been extensive and, by any measure, early.

As tensions escalated in the weeks before the conflict broke out, it was among the first regional capitals to sound the alarm, warning publicly that military confrontation would destabilise the Gulf and threaten global energy security.

Top Qatari leadership also interacted with Iranian counterparts in a bid to create off-ramps from the escalatory spiral.

Those efforts continued even after the first shots were fired. Qatar's foreign ministry held its counsel publicly, stressing dialogue and restraint, while its officials stayed in contact with partners across the region and in Washington.

That counsel was ignored.

### The scale of the aerial assault

Qatar's air defences have intercepted more than 60 ballistic missiles fired in several waves since the conflict began.

At least 11 drones launched toward Qatar's territory have been destroyed.

In one concentrated barrage last week alone, Qatari forces intercepted 13 missiles and four drones.

In another large attack, 66 missiles were launched toward the country in a single wave; most were intercepted, though falling debris caused injuries on the ground.

The air force has also been drawn into direct aerial combat.

Qatari fighter aircraft shot down two Iranian Su-24 bomber jets that approached the country's airspace - a rare air-to-air engagement over the Gulf that underlined how close to the edge of open warfare the situation has come.

In a more recent episode, Qatar reported

a wave of 10 drones launched from Iran, nine of which were intercepted.

Taken together, the figures describe a country that has been subjected to a sustained aerial campaign of a scale and intensity usually associated with active combatants - not a state that has consistently called for peace negotiations.

### The command-and-control question

The Iranian president's acknowledgement that military units acted independently appears to be significant.

It suggests that at least some of the strikes on Qatar may not have reflected a deliberate strategic decision by Iran's political leadership, but rather battlefield escalation by commanders operating under their own authority.

For Qatar, this is cold comfort - the missiles land regardless of who ordered them - but it does affect how the diplomatic response should be calibrated.

Pezeshkian's address represents an attempt by Tehran to contain the spread of the war before it provokes a broader Gulf coalition.

The conditional halt to strikes on neighbouring states is a form of deterrence diplomacy.

However, Qatar is clearly the aggrieved party here, with a long history of

non-interference let alone betraying any kind of offensive posturing.

Even setting aside the question of intentions, the interception of another missile on the same day as Pezeshkian's conciliatory speech illustrates the implementation problem.

Declared policy in Tehran and operational reality in the field have diverged sharply throughout this conflict.

Gulf states have no way to rely on political assurances when command and control remains fractured.

Qatar finds itself in the most challenging position of any Gulf state in this conflict: publicly committed to peace, privately engaged in diplomacy at the highest levels, and yet directly subjected to the war's worst aerial violence.

Pezeshkian's apology - and his conditional pledge to stop - suggests Tehran has recognised that alienating the Gulf entirely carries strategic costs it cannot afford.

However, recognition and restraint are not the same thing, as the same day interception in Doha's skies illustrated.

Whether Iran's political leadership can reassert control over its military and translate declared restraint into operational reality remains to be seen and will determine the direction the ongoing crisis takes.

## Public warned against rumours and misinformation

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has issued a firm public warning against the spread of rumours and misleading content circulating on social media and digital platforms, with particular concern raised over the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to fabricate and disseminate false information.

The ministry stressed that such content poses a direct threat to public order and community stability.

In a series of posts on its official X account, the MoI urged the public to obtain news and updates exclusively from authorised official sources, cautioning against the sharing or amplification of unverified material that could create unnecessary alarm.

The authorities made clear that they would not hesitate to pursue legal action against those found to be spreading misinformation, defaming Qatar, or using online platforms to incite unrest.

The ministry also called on citizens, residents, and visitors alike to play an active role in safeguarding public security by reporting any unusual or suspicious behaviour - whether

encountered in person or spotted across digital platforms - that could be linked to current regional developments.

Reports can be made by calling the emergency number 999, through the Metrash application, via the Security Window under the Economic and Cyber Crimes Combating Department, or by e-mailing ccccmoi@moi.gov.qa

The authorities have pledged to act swiftly on all reports received.

The warning reflects Qatar's broader effort to maintain calm and social cohesion at a time of heightened regional tensions, reinforcing that the rule of law applies fully in the digital space as much as it does on the ground.

## Quietly welcoming at Souq Waqif



Vendors stand by stalls selling traditional snacks, lanterns, and souvenirs while waiting for customers in one of Qatar's most popular tourist markets. The usually lively corridors of the historic Souq Waqif have seen quieter moments in recent days, reflecting the cautious mood across the region. PICTURE: Thajudheen

## Where heritage meets technology

From Page 1

This approach distinguishes Qatar's heritage strategy from others in the region.

Rather than isolating conservation from technology, the country integrates preservation with innovation, said al-Saegh, who added: "Institutions here actively explore how digital fabrication can enhance accessibility while respecting authenticity."

Asked how 3D printing contributes to the knowledge economy, co-founder and chief executive Farid Mahfouz pointed out that the implications extend beyond cultural preservation into the knowledge economy.

He emphasised that advanced fabrication supports localised production, reduces import dependency, and enables on-demand manufacturing.

It also fosters engineering and technical skill development and sustainable material workflows, Mahfouz stated, emphasising that "it directly aligns with knowledge-based economic growth".

Regionally, he noted, museums are increasingly open to technology as a complement to conservation.

Mahfouz said that successful collaborations in Qatar have boosted confidence across the Middle East, encouraging institutions to view replication projects as heritage experiences rather than mere reproductions.

"The key lesson is structured collaboration," he said. "When historians, engineers, designers, and institutional leaders align early in the process, the outcome elevates from replication to heritage experience."

Mahfouz said that Vectorize positions itself internationally through a blend of regional cultural literacy and technical expertise.

The studio's distinction, he explained, lies in combining deep knowledge of Islamic geometric art with advanced hybrid fabrication capabilities and institutional-level production standards.

"We translate heritage into precise physical experiences," Mahfouz stressed. "That is the Qatar advantage."

He said the studio is anticipating opportunities in immersive museum installations, tactile accessibility projects, and experiential learning environments.

Large-scale cultural fabrication in Qatar and Saudi Arabia is also on the horizon, he said, adding: "The future of heritage is not only preservation - it is experience."

# UK stands with Qatar, says British envoy

By Neerav Patel  
British Ambassador to Qatar

This is a difficult and uncertain time for us all. Qataris, Brits, and people of all nationalities have been taking shelter with their families as Iran has been launching attacks from above. The safety and well-being of our nationals is my top priority. During moments like these, strong partnerships and steady leadership matter. I would like to thank His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani for his strong leadership during this time, and to express my deep appreciation to the Armed Forces and all Qatari authorities for their effective response to these challenges. They are doing an outstanding job of keeping us all informed and safe, and we are working with them very closely. I would also like to praise Qatar Airways for its continued assistance. It was encouraging to see the first Qatar Airways flight to London yesterday morning, taking several British nationals home to their families. Any additional flights will depend

on the ongoing security situation, and I encourage all British nationals to follow the advice of the airline and Qatari authorities, as well as sign up to the British government travel advice. The British embassy is in close touch with them. The UK stands firmly alongside and in full solidarity with Qatar. Our leaders and ministers are in close contact at all levels. The UK is providing practical support. For example, the unique joint Royal Air Force-Qatari Emiri Air Force squadron has been deployed to Qatar since January. We have British and Qatari pilots jointly patrolling the skies above us, shooting down Iranian drones in Qatari airspace. These defensive operations against incoming attacks are helping to keep us all safe. The relationship between our countries is deep and enduring. As His Majesty The King, Charles III, said during the State Visit of His Highness the Amir to the UK: "At times of uncertainty and upheaval, old friendships assume even greater importance." Today, that sentiment resonates more strongly than ever: friends show up. The UK will continue to work closely with Qatar in the spirit of friendship, partnership, and solidarity.

# Sustainable peace 'needs investment in human awareness'

HE Secretary-General of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) Sultan bin Hassan al-Jamali affirmed that achieving sustainable peace cannot rely on laws alone, but requires real investment in human awareness and addressing the roots of violence through awareness approaches, education on human rights, and the culture of tolerance and acceptance of others. This came during a recorded intervention by al-Jamali at the sixty-first regular session of the UN Human Rights Council. He called for strengthening the role of national institutions in developing innovative educational and awareness programmes targeting various segments of society and instilling the values of peace from the earliest stages, based on the belief that peace begins in awareness and in a person's



understanding of themselves. He highlighted the fundamental role of national human rights institutions in consolidating the culture of peace through spreading awareness and education on the values of tolerance, dialogue and coexistence, and promoting the understanding of human rights as a unifying discourse of human dignity among different

religious, ideological, cultural and political identities. HE the NHRC Secretary-General said the discussion as the fundamental pillar for safeguarding human dignity comes at a time when the culture of peace appears more urgent than ever, in a world witnessing escalating conflicts, the commission of genocides, declining trust, and the continued suffering of human beings at the hands of other humans. He added that the reality of the world today compels us to be more courageous and influential, and to think beyond traditional frameworks, including within the UN system itself. Al-Jamali explained that it is no longer possible to ignore failure to achieve peace despite the development of international law, and the continued killing of humans by humans within a legal system that is supposed to protect life and dignity. (QNA)

# Ramadan celebrates traditions, unites communities: Somalia envoy

Ramadan in Somalia is more than a month of worship, as it is a rich spiritual and cultural experience deeply rooted in religious and social traditions, Somalia's ambassador to Qatar, Dr Mohamed Ahmed Sheikh Ali, has pointed out. He noted that Ramadan holds a special place within the Somali society, combining worship, social responsibility, and community solidarity. Families begin preparations early by setting the budget for the month, preparing homes and mosques, and organising religious programmes in the media. Night prayers such as Tarawih and Tahajjud are widely attended in a calm and spiritual atmosphere. One distinctive Somali tradition is the 'Sabaa Sawm' gatherings, where groups of Qur'an memorisers take turns completing the recitation of the Qur'an throughout the month. These gatherings rotate among homes in the neighbourhood, combining worship with hospitality and strengthening community ties. Neighbourhoods also become lively at night with social, cultural,

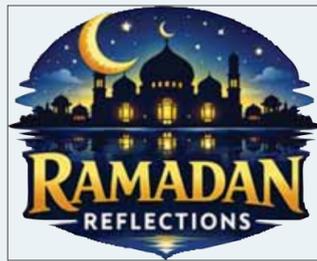


and sports activities. In the past, local youth often revive the musaharati tradition - the person who wakes residents up for the pre-dawn meal. He noted that the Somali Ramadan table features a variety of traditional dishes. Families gather shortly before sunset, breaking the fast with water, dates, and coffee before performing the Maghrib prayer. Community solidarity is also reflected in the exchange of dishes among neighbours, charitable support for families in need, and frequent social visits during the month. Ambassador Sheikh Ali noted that the Somali community in Qatar is keen to preserve its Ramadan traditions, especially

through traditional foods at Iftar and Suhoor. The community also organises an annual collective Iftar that brings Somali residents together and strengthens social bonds. At the same time, Somali residents actively participate in Ramadan events organised by Qatari institutions, reflecting the strong historical and cultural ties between the countries. The ambassador praised Ramadan in Qatar for its high level of organisation and institutional support. Work schedules are adjusted, streets are decorated, and numerous collective iftars are hosted by public and private institutions. Cultural and media activities also flourish during the month. Traditional markets, such as Souq Waqif become particularly vibrant during Ramadan nights, adding a heritage and social dimension to the experience. Ramadan in Qatar reflects strong values of coexistence, tolerance, and cultural diversity. The wide range of expatriate communities create diverse culinary traditions and customs.

# The Qur'an is a food for the soul

The Glorious Qur'an is the everlasting miracle of our Prophet - Muhammad, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam - that addresses all human generations and shall continue to do so till the end of time. It convinces the human intellect with various proofs in order to subject it to the truth and make it surrender to Allah willingly or turn away from the truth after it has recognised it out of arrogance. The Messenger, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "No Prophet was sent by Allah except that he was given what would make people believe in him, and what I was given is Revelation and I hope to be the greatest of all the Prophets in (terms of) followers." [Al-Bukhari]. The Qur'an is the everlasting miracle given by Allah to His Messenger, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, which no human being or Jinn is able to produce a book like it. Even if all mankind and jinn were to collaborate to produce something like it, they would not be able to do so. Allah says (what means): "Say (O Muhammad): 'If mankind and the jinn gathered in order to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like of it, even if they were to each other assistants.'" [Qur'an 17: 88]



The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The similitude of the guidance and knowledge with which I was sent, is like a rain that falls on a land of which there was a good part that accepted the water and produced therefrom many plants and grass. There is also a barren part that holds water and Allah made it beneficial to people as they drank thereof, fed their animals and irrigate their farms. It also affected some parts that are just lowland that could neither hold the water nor produce grass. The first two are the example of him that acquired the knowledge of the religion of Allah, benefited from that which I am sent with and taught it to others. The third is the example of him who never paid attention to the Qur'an and did not accept the guidance of Allah with which I am sent." [Al-Bukhari & Muslim]

We must seize the opportunity of the remaining days of Ramadan to read the Glorious Qur'an with reflection and understanding of its meanings and try our best to put its injunctions into practice. Our righteous predecessors, may Allah be pleased with them, used to preoccupy themselves in Ramadan, with the recitation of the Glorious Qur'an and they always used to mention Allah. We have to know that any one who puts the injunctions of the Qur'an in practice is among the people of the Qur'an (who are dear to Allah) even if he has not memorised it. Also, he who does not work by the injunctions of the Qur'an is not among its people even if he memorises it.

We have to do good deeds in this excellent month, be kind to the poor and needy as a sign of emulating the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam. It is narrated that Jibreel (Angel Gabriel) used to review the Qur'an with the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, once in a year and that was during Ramadhan. In the year that the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, died, Jibreel reviewed it with him twice. Whenever Jibreel came to meet him, the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, used to be more generous and faster in spending charity than a dispatched wind."

Article source: <http://www.islambweb.net/mainpage/>

# Ministry urges Muslims to intensify worship in last 10 days of Ramadan

The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (Awqaf) called on Muslims to make the most of the last ten days of Ramadan through increased prayer, Qur'an recitation, supplication, seeking forgiveness, charity, and maintaining family ties, following the Sunnah of the Prophet, who would devote himself and awaken his household during these nights. The ministry highlighted that Laylat Al Qadr, occurring on one of these nights, is the greatest night of the year, with deeds rewarded as if performed for a thousand months. Its timing was concealed by God to inspire believers to strive in worship and good deeds. Muslims were encouraged to approach these days with sincere devotion, perform prayers in mosques,



and persist in remembrance of God and supplication for mercy and forgiveness, seizing the opportunity to attain the unparalleled blessings of the last ten nights. (QNA)

# Parliamentary Assembly of Francophonie sends message of solidarity with Qatar

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie (APF) has expressed its deep solidarity with Qatar following the Iranian attacks. This came in a message received by HE Speaker of the Shura Council Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim, from APF general delegate Amelia Lakrafi, in which she said they have followed with deep emotion the reports of explosions occurring in Qatar, which has led to a profound sense of insecurity among the civilian population, and expressed their sympathy with all the families affected by the tragic events. She stressed that this situation has a lasting impact on regional stability and the security of many countries, which confirms how precious peace and stability are. Lakrafi noted that APF, which brings together French-speaking parliamentarians from diverse backgrounds, remains strongly committed to the values of political dialogue, peaceful co-operation and respect.



She added that being aware of responsibilities is incumbent upon everyone in this highly tense context, and reaffirmed the importance of prioritising dialogue, de-escalation and political negotiations as a fundamental means to prevent any escalation of the conflict and to preserve the lives of civilian populations. She also affirmed the Assembly's readiness to support any initiative aimed at returning to a peaceful solution and for strengthening regional and international dialogue mechanisms. (QNA)

# Qatar's private schools 'record 70% attendance for remote learning'

Assistant Undersecretary for Private Education Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), Omar Abdulaziz al-Naama affirmed that the educational process in private schools continues to run smoothly through electronic learning platforms. He revealed that student attendance in remote learning classes reached 70% during the first week, describing the figure as a positive indicator of students' commitment and the active engagement of parents. Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Naama explained that the ministry held virtual meetings with the administrations of more than 120 private schools repre-

senting a variety of educational curricula. The meetings aimed to assess schools' readiness, address any potential technical or organisational challenges, and to ensure that such issues are resolved promptly to maintain the stability of the educational process. The meetings also provided an opportunity for private schools to exchange expertise and share successful experiences. Al-Naama noted that the ministry issued regulations and guidelines to organise the educational process in line with approved academic schedules. Private schools and kindergartens were granted flexibility in organising the school day during the period from March

8 to 12 through two options: either following the official school hours adopted in government schools, or implementing a customised schedule of no less than three and a half hours and no more than five hours per day, allowing each school to choose the arrangement most suitable for completing curriculum requirements. Regarding psychological and social support, the Assistant Undersecretary stated that special guidance had been issued for student counselling during exceptional circumstances. These directives aim to enhance psychological stability within the school community and to instruct schools to develop comprehensive support plans for both students and educational staff.



In this context, al-Naama announced the release of a guide titled "The Family as the Pillar of

Psychological Stability for Building Children's Mental Well-Being in Changing Circumstances". The guide provides awareness and guidance materials in both Arabic and English to ensure accessibility for all parents, while strengthening the role of families as strategic partners in supporting their children and helping them adapt positively to changing conditions. Concerning the operations of private educational and training centres, al-Naama affirmed that the ministry is closely monitoring the progress of training programmes offered by these centres. He added that the flexibility granted, allows centres with programmes scheduled during the

holy month of Ramadan to continue delivering their services through appropriate online platforms, ensuring participants can benefit without interruption while fully complying with the ministry's approved regulations. Concluding his remarks, al-Naama praised the high level of readiness demonstrated by private schools in activating digital learning platforms, expressing appreciation for the efforts of educational staff and the co-operation of parents. He emphasised that the Ministry of Education and Higher Education will continue its close monitoring to ensure a stable and safe learning environment for all students in Qatar. (QNA)



Iranian medical staff chant slogans and hold posters of slain Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, during their protest in front of the destroyed Gandhi Hospital in Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)

## Iran fires at neighbours as Trump threatens more strikes

AFP  
Tehran

Iran launched waves of missile and drone attacks on its Gulf neighbours hosting US forces yesterday and vowed no surrender despite threats from President Donald Trump to widen the conflict.

Israel and the US pounded Iran again, with one air strike setting a Tehran airport ablaze, but Iran demonstrated that it retained the capacity to riposte militarily.

There were air raid warnings and blasts in Jerusalem in Israel and another Gulf state, and two waves of attacks on the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in the early morning and again in the afternoon.

The UAE said its air defences intercepted 15 missiles and 119 drones on Saturday morning and video footage showed one projectile crashing into Dubai airport, the world's busiest for international traffic.

An explosion took place near planes parked in front of an airport building and close to a passing train, mobile phone footage authenticated by AFP showed.

"Evidence from Iran's armed forces shows that the geography of some countries in the region is openly and covertly at the disposal of the enemy," said Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, Iran's hardline judiciary chief.

"The heavy attacks on these targets will continue," he said.



A man donates blood, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Tehran, yesterday. (Reuters)

Earlier, President Masoud Pezeshkian had issued an apology to Iran's neighbours, which host major US military bases, while US media reports suggested Russia might be providing the Islamic republic with targeting intelligence.

Saudi Arabia said yesterday it had intercepted a missile fired at an airbase housing US personnel, while Jordan accused Iran of "targeting vital installations" inside the country over the last week.

Pezeshkian struck a defiant tone

in a speech broadcast on state TV in which he also appeared to address Trump's demand on Friday for "unconditional surrender".

Iran's enemies "must take their wish for the unconditional surrender of the Iranian people to their graves", Pezeshkian said.

Israel launched some of its biggest raids since the bombardment began last Saturday, with a military academy, an underground command centre and a missile storage facility named as targets.

Fire and smoke billowed from Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport after a predawn attack in which Israel said it had destroyed 16 aircraft and fighter jets used by the security forces and military.

"Today Iran will be hit very hard!" Trump posted on his Truth Social media platform.

"Under serious consideration for complete destruction and certain death, because of Iran's bad behaviour, are areas and groups of people that were not considered



Smoke rises following reported explosions, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in this screengrab obtained from a social media video released yesterday. (Reuters)

for targeting up until this moment in time."

Now in a second week, the war was sparked by joint Israeli and US air strikes last Saturday that killed Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei. The conflict has since widened to Lebanon, as well as Cyprus, Türkiye and Azerbaijan, and reached as far as waters off Sri Lanka where US forces sank an Iranian warship with a torpedo.

Inside Iran, damage to infrastructure and residential buildings is mounting, while residents of the capital report growing anxiety and a heavy presence of security forces on the streets.

"I don't think anyone who hasn't experienced war would understand it," a terrified 26-year-old teacher said on condition of anonymity. "When you hear the bombs, you have no idea where they will hit."

The Iranian health ministry put the civilian death toll at 926 on Friday, with around 6,000 injured — numbers that AFP could not independently verify.

Israel has also intensified its air strikes on Lebanon, repeatedly bombing and ordering the evacuation of Beirut's southern suburbs, where the fighter group Hezbollah holds sway.

With memories still fresh of Israel's devastation of Gaza, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz warned Lebanese President Joseph Aoun yesterday that his country would pay a "very heavy price" if it failed to disarm Hezbollah.

The consequences of the conflict reach far beyond those in the immediate firing line, however.

Global stock markets have slumped, while crude oil prices have surged, with analysts warning that there appears to be no clear path to ending a conflict that US and Israeli officials have suggested could last a month or more.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had hit two oil tankers with exploding drones in the Gulf yesterday as they continue to paralyse oil and gas traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a key chokepoint for global shipping.

### DEFIANCE

Trump has promised to help rebuild Iran's economy if Tehran installs someone "acceptable" to him to replace its late supreme leader.

Amir Saeid Iravani, Iran's ambassador to the UN, said the US would have no role in selecting Khamenei's successor.

"The selection of Iran's leadership will take place strictly in accordance with our constitutional procedures and solely by the will of the Iranian people, without any foreign interference," he added. US rivals China and Russia have so far stayed largely out of the fray despite their ties to the Islamic republic, but there are reports that Moscow is providing intelligence to Iran on US troop positions and movements.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said the US is "not concerned" about the reports.

The war has killed six US service members and Trump is to attend the return of their bodies at a transfer ceremony at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware on Saturday.



President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan meets an injured patient receiving treatment at a hospital in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. (Reuters)

## Missile targeting Saudi base falls 'in uninhabited area': defence ministry

AFP  
Riyadh

Saudi Arabia said a missile that had targeted one of its air bases fell "in an uninhabited area" yesterday as Iran continued its strikes across the Gulf.

"A ballistic missile fell in an uninhabited area after being launched towards Prince Sultan Air Base," the defence ministry said.

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates will emerge "stronger" after the Middle East war, the president told Abu Dhabi TV in a rare address yesterday, as Iran continued its strikes across the region.

The UAE "is in a period of war", Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan told the TV channel, but "we will emerge stronger".

The Kuwait National Guard announced that its forces successfully intercepted and downed a drone at one of the sites under its responsibility, where it provides support to the Ministry of Defence, QNA reported.

In a statement, the National Guard said that the action forms part of ongoing efforts to strengthen security measures, safeguard vital facilities, and address potential threats.

An Iranian attack yesterday caused a fire in Bahrain's capital of Manama, damaging a house and other buildings, the interior ministry said without specifying if there were casualties.

"The Iranian aggression caused a fire and material damage to a house and several surrounding buildings in Manama," the ministry said. "Civil Defence is taking the necessary measures to extinguish the fire."

## Dubai airport briefly closed as Iran barrage hits region

AFP  
Dubai

Dubai's main airport, a key global transport hub, was forced to briefly close yesterday as Iran launched missiles and drones at targets across the Gulf.

The barrage came despite Iran's president apologising to neighbouring countries for its attacks, saying they would no longer be targeted unless strikes were launched from their territory.

Attacks were reported yesterday in the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where the national oil company announced a "precautionary" cut to production.

The Emirates said it was targeted with 16 ballistic missiles and more than 120 drones.

One unidentified object was intercepted near Dubai airport, the world's busiest for international traffic, forcing it to briefly suspend operations.

A witness told AFP of a loud explosion in the area followed by a cloud of smoke, while footage authenticated by AFP recorded the sound of a drone followed by a loud explosion and plumes of smoke close to an airport concourse.

The government said there had been "a minor incident resulting from the fall of debris after an interception", without directly mentioning the airport. It said there were no injuries.

The Flightradar24 tracking website earlier showed planes circling above the airport in an apparent holding pattern.

In a statement since deleted from X, Emirates, the largest airline in the Middle East, had announced it was suspending all flights to and from Dubai until further notice, but later said it had resumed operations.

The UAE, a US ally and home to American



This video grab taken from UGC images posted on social media yesterday shows smoke rising from the Dubai International Airport. (AFP)

military installations, has been the most heavily targeted nation in the region during the war.

The Ministry of Defence said that of the 16 ballistic missiles fired at the country yesterday, all but one had been intercepted, with that missile falling into the sea.

Of the 121 drones detected, 119 were brought down, while two fell within Emirati territory.

The barrage brings the number of ballistic missiles detected by the UAE since the start of the war last Saturday to 221, the defence ministry said, with the number of drones surpassing 1,300. Flights from Dubai's main airport

had partially resumed on Monday despite daily drone attacks targeting sites in the UAE.

Last Saturday, four employees were injured and an airport terminal damaged as the war broke out following US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

Operator Dubai Airports said at the time that the incident had been "quickly brought under control", without providing details.

Iranian attacks have also hit Abu Dhabi airport, the upmarket Palm Jumeirah development and the Burj Al Arab luxury hotel over the past week, while drone debris caused a fire at the US consulate in Dubai on Tuesday.

## Arab League to meet today over Iranian attacks

AFP  
Cairo

The foreign ministers of the Arab League will hold an emergency meeting today to discuss Iranian attacks on several of the group's members, the bloc's assistant secretary-general said.

The meeting, which will be held via videoconference, was requested by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Jordan and Egypt, Hossam Zaki said. US and Israeli forces launched a massive

air campaign against Iran on February 28. Iran has retaliated with strikes against Israel and Gulf countries. Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit had earlier condemned the Iranian attacks, saying they are "fully reprehensible" and "not only a blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter, but also an assault on the principles of good neighbourliness".

He added that the attacks "create an unprecedented state of hostility between Iran and its Arab neighbours". "This is a grave Iranian strategic mistake, which I hope they will rectify by halting these attacks immediately."

## Turkiye may deploy F-16s to north Cyprus amid Mideast war

AFP  
Ankara

Turkiye is considering the possibility of sending F-16 fighter jets to Northern Cyprus as a security measure, a Turkish defence ministry source said yesterday, days after the island was targeted by a drone attack.

"In light of recent developments, phased planning is being carried out to ensure the security of the TRNC," the source said, referring to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), a territory which is only recognised by Ankara.

"The deployment of F-16 aircraft to the island is among the options being considered."

Cyprus, a European Union member that currently holds the bloc's rotating presidency, has been directly affected by retaliatory attacks following the US-Israeli strikes on Iran, with an Iranian-made drone hitting a British base on the island on Monday.

Nicosia said the drone was probably fired by the Hezbollah group in Lebanon, and not from Iran itself.

Following the incident, several European countries pledged assistance to Cyprus, sending air defences and other military assets.

With the conflict raging across the Middle East, Turkiye's Defence Minister Yaser Guler said there was a "very low" chance of any direct conflict between Turkiye, a Nato member, and Israel, one of Washington's closest allies. Turkiye has frequently clashed with Israel over a range of issues, notably the Gaza war and Israeli intervention in Syria, but Guler played down fears of any confrontation between the two regional powers.

"Mounting tensions in the Middle East and the Mediterranean have significantly affected relations between Turkiye and Israel in recent years," he told Turkiye's Posta newspaper on Friday.

"Although there is a risk of direct military conflict, we cur-

rently see the likelihood of this as very low. To prevent undesirable situations, communication channels have been set up to reduce misunderstandings on the ground."

He also reiterated calls for Turkiye to be readmitted to Washington's F-35 fighter jet programme, saying it was important "for strengthening Turkiye-US ties and Nato security".

Washington removed Ankara from its F-35 programme over its purchase of an S-400 Russian surface-to-air missile defence system, saying the system could allow the Russians to spy on the stealth jet's capabilities. Both Nato allies appear keen to end the dispute, but Washington wants Turkiye to get rid of the system.

"The S-400 is a system we procured to meet our air defence needs at the time.. we informed our US counterparts of our intention to use it as a self-contained system, without integrating it into Nato systems," he said.

"For this reason, we still consider this option to be the most reasonable solution."



Rubble of destroyed buildings is seen at the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted Beirut's southern suburbs Burj al-Barajneh neighbourhood, yesterday. (AFP)

## Failed Israeli operation to find airman remains kills 41 in Lebanon

AFP  
Nabi Sheet

An Israeli special forces operation that failed to find the remains of airman Ron Arad, captured in Lebanon in 1986, killed 41 people and wounded 40 in eastern Lebanon.

Gutted buildings, torn-off roofs, munitions scattered on the ground surrounded a large crater in Nabi Sheet, the town that witnessed the operation which involved air strikes and clashes.

"The sounds of the explosions were like something out of a movie," Nabi Sheet resident Mohammed Mussa, 55, said during a media tour organised by the Hezbollah group.

"We later understood that there was a commando operation underway."

The operation was met with "resistance", he said, referring to Hezbollah fighters in the area, adding that it had "escalated into clashes and attacks against the Israelis".

The explosions were powerful enough to send a car onto a building's second floor.

Another damaged home showed the shredded remains of posters of Hezbollah leaders.

The strikes on Nabi Sheet and its surroundings killed 41 people and wounded 40, Lebanon's health ministry said.

The Israeli military had issued evacuation warnings for the area at noon on Friday.

"With this warning, we prepared and evacuated the children from the town to protect them," Nabi Sheet mayor Hani Moussawi said.

Israel's military said yesterday it had carried out an operation overnight in Lebanon to find Arad's remains but had failed to uncover any trace of the navigator missing since 1986.

"No findings related to him were located... No IDF (military) injuries were reported," the army said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said later that while the operation did not yield any traces of Arad, Israel's commitment to tracking down all its



A man sets up a tent for displaced people, following an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, inside a stadium in Beirut, yesterday. (Reuters)

missing servicemen remained "absolute and permanent".

Lebanese military chief Rodolphe Haykal said the Israeli soldiers wore military uniforms similar to those of the Lebanese army and used military vehicles and ambulances similar to those of the Hezbollah-linked Islamic Health Authority.

Haykal added that Israeli attacks targeting Lebanon were hindering the implementation of the army's plan to disarm Hezbollah.

Hezbollah said earlier yesterday it had confronted Israeli troops that infiltrated an east Lebanon town overnight by helicopter.

The group said its fighters had "observed the infiltration of four Israeli enemy army helicopters from the Syrian direction".

After landing and disembarking, the advancing troops "were engaged" by Hezbollah fighters as they reached a cemetery in Nabi Sheet, it added.

"The clash escalated after the enemy force was exposed," Hezbollah said, adding that Israeli troops launched strikes before evacuating. An AFP correspondent in eastern Lebanon, where Hezbollah holds sway, heard warplanes and intense gunfire throughout the night.

Lebanon's military said it witnessed a commando operation by Israeli forces, adding that "three soldiers and a number of civilians were killed as a result of the violent

enemy shelling" that accompanied the attack.

Arad has been missing since he was captured after he ejected from his combat jet over Lebanon in 1986 as the aircraft went down.

He is presumed dead, though his remains have never been returned.

Arad's wife Tami thanked the military but said the lives of soldiers should not be put "at risk" in the hunt for traces of her husband, Israeli media reported.

In the town's cemetery, an AFP journalist saw a hole that looked like a dug-up grave, surrounded by other tombstones.

Earlier yesterday, a Hezbollah official in the Bekaa region, where Nabi Sheet is located, told AFP that the cemetery the Israelis raided belonged to the Shukur family.

Last month, Lebanese authorities charged four people with kidnapping Ahmad Shukur — whose brother Hassan is suspected of involvement in Arad's capture — on behalf of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency.

As the Israelis withdrew after the failed operation, mayor Moussawi said "the bombing became indiscriminate and very heavy, resulting in destruction in dozens of locations".

"It cost a great deal: infrastructure, destruction and the blood of our sons," he added, insisting however that "as long as Israel exists, we will continue to resist it".

## Palestinians say Israeli settlers kill one in West Bank attack

AFP  
Jerusalem

Israeli settlers yesterday shot dead a Palestinian man and wounded his brother in an attack on a village in the occupied West Bank, the Ramallah-based health ministry and a local mayor said.

"Amir Mohammad Shnaran (27) was killed after being shot by settlers in the Wadi al-Rakhim area," the health ministry said.

Mohammad Rabai, head of the nearby Tuwani village council, said that settlers had entered homes in the area and attacked the family. Shnaran's brother Khaled was also shot in the abdomen during the incident, he said.

Israel's military said soldiers and police were dis-

patched to the scene after reports of a "violent confrontation" between Israelis and Palestinians.

"According to an initial review of the incident, an IDF reserve soldier who arrived to the scene after receiving the report of an attack opened fire," the military said. It said it was "aware of reports" that two Palestinians were wounded by the gunfire, one of whom died. It said an investigation was underway. Violence in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, has soared since the Hamas storming of Israel triggered the Gaza war in October 2023. It has continued despite the ceasefire.

Israeli troops or settlers have killed at least 1,040 Palestinians, many of them fighters, but also scores of civilians, in the West Bank since the start of the Gaza war, according to an AFP tally based on Palestinian health ministry figures.

## Nigerian army kills 45 in Katsina clash

Reuters  
Abuja

At least 45 "bandits" were killed in a clash with Nigerian troops in the Danmusa area of Katsina state in northern Nigeria, according

to a statement from the Katsina State Government yesterday.

The violence followed an attack by armed gangs of men from neighboring Zamfara state who rode into Alhazawa village in Musawa on March 5 and attempted to steal cattle, the statement said. The attackers

returned the following day and encountered troops stationed at the army's Forward Operating Base in Dan Ali near Maidabino ward, leading to a clash in which the army killed 45 of the attackers, the statement said.

A captain and two soldiers died in the encounter.

## Flash floods in Nairobi kill 23

AFP  
Nairobi

At least 23 people have been killed in flash flooding in Nairobi, police said yesterday, as search and rescue operations continued amid widespread devastation.

Torrential rains lashed the Kenyan capital late Friday, turning major streets into rivers and flooding thousands of homes and businesses.

Rescue teams were still pulling out bodies and rescuing trapped residents yesterday, while AFP reporters saw heavily damaged roads and infrastructure from the city's vast slums to upmarket areas like Parklands.

"The river banks broke as the rains continued and cars were swept off and water flowed into our shops destroying property for many people," said Frederick Wasonga, who sells car accessories in the city centre.



People walk around damaged property looking for salvageables in downtown Nairobi following a night of heavy rainfall which resulted in heavy flooding, yesterday. (AFP)

Derrick Juma, a panel beater in the same area, said two of his neighbours had died.

"One person was electrocuted... Another one was heavily rained on and as he took cover outside a restaurant, he died out in the cold," Juma said.

Police said they had rescued at least 29 people overnight and

"remain fully deployed, actively responding to distress calls and continuing with search and rescue missions" as more rain started to fall late Saturday.

"We are seeing devastation... A huge number of areas in the city were affected, but also counties all over the country," Kenyan Red Cross spokesman Munir Ahmed

said. President William Ruto said he had ordered the deployment of an emergency response team to co-ordinate rescue efforts.

"We recognise that these floods once again highlight the urgent need for lasting solutions to the perennial challenge of flooding in our urban areas," he said on X.

There was widespread anger at Nairobi governor Johnson Sakaja, who had vowed to deal with drainage and road infrastructure when he took office in 2022.

"Sakaja should be in jail not in office," said well-known activist Nelson Ameyia on X.

"There's no storm water drainage system... I haven't seen any active flood management or even preparation for it by the county of Nairobi," he said.

Multiple studies have tracked the increasing frequency of extreme wet and dry periods in east Africa in the last 20 years, including one on rainfall variability published by Scientific Reports in 2024.

## Guinea govt dissolves 40 political parties including main opposition

AFP  
Conakry

Guinea has dissolved 40 political parties, including its three main opposition groups, via a late-night decree, in the latest crackdown on civil liberties under longtime strongman Mamady Doumbouya.

Doumbouya, who came to power in a 2021 coup, was elected president in late December in a vote in which all major opposition leaders were barred. As junta leader he has ruled Guinea with an iron fist.

Political opponents have been arrested, put on trial or driven into exile, while enforced disappearances and kidnappings have multiplied. Guinea's minister of territorial administration and decentralisation ordered the dissolution of the parties late on Friday for "failure to fulfil their obligations".

The decree also stripped them of control of their assets. Guinea's

three main political parties are among those dissolved: the UFDG led by its exiled leader Cellou Dalein Diallo, the RPG led by exiled president Alpha Conde, and the UFR.

"This dissolution entails the immediate loss of the legal personality and status of the parties concerned," the order said. That includes "all political activities" as well as the use of "acronyms, logos (and) emblems" associated with the groups, it added. The parties' assets have been placed under "sequestration" with a curator appointed to oversee their transfer, the decree said, without specifying to whom or to what entity. Parties and civil society movements condemned the dissolution yesterday, slamming it as dictatorial.

UFDG communications co-ordinator Souleymane de Souza Konate said that "all red lines" had been crossed in "the final act of a true political farce whose objective is the establishment of a single-party state".



# Trump, Latin American leaders form anti-drug cartel coalition

Reuters/AFP  
Miami

US President Donald Trump welcomed Latin American leaders to Florida yesterday to announce the formation of a military coalition against drug cartels, in line with an argument that he has been making throughout his second term in office.

Trump has cited drug cartels as a primary reason for ramping up his administration's involvement in Latin America, pressuring Venezuela over the past several months and seizing Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro in January.

At least a dozen leaders from Central America, South America and the Caribbean joined the "Shield of the Americas" summit convened by Trump, who signed a proclamation launching the coalition.

"It's a great part of the world, but to fill that tremendous potential, we must smash the grip of the cartels and criminal gangs and horrible organisations run by, in some cases, absolute animals and truly liberate our people," Trump said.

Kristi Noem will be special envoy for the "Shield of the Americas", Trump posted on Thursday.

Noem was Homeland Security secretary until Trump removed her from that post this week after mounting criticism of her from Congress.

Yesterday's gathering gives Trump a chance to project strength closer to home even as the conflict in the Middle East leads to consequences he may not fully control, such as rising prices for oil and gas.

However, the Trump administration also has been looking for ways to counter growing Chinese influence in the region.

The summit took place as Trump prepares for talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing at the end of March.

The Trump administration hopes to pull Latin America closer to Washington after years of growing Chinese trade, lending and infrastructure investment in the region.

The summit brings together conservative leaders aligned with Trump on security, migration and economics.

Among those attending are Argentine President Javier Milei, Chile's president-elect Jose Antonio Kast and Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, whose gang crackdown, criticised by human rights groups, has become a model for parts of Latin America's right.

Politicians from across the region have toured Bukele's sprawling "mega-prison", where the United States last year deported more than 200 Venezuelans without trial.



US President Donald Trump with (from left) Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Paraguay's President Santiago Peña, Dominican Republic's President Luis Abinader, Bolivia's President Rodrigo Paz Pereira, El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele, Argentina's President Javier Milei, Panama's President José Raúl Mulino Quintero, Guyana's President Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Honduras's President Nasry Asfura, Costa Rica's President Rodrigo Chaves Robles, Chile's President-elect José Antonio Kast, and Ecuador's President Daniel Roy Gilchrist Noboa Azin, during a group photograph at the start of the 'Shield of the Americas' Summit at Trump National Doral in Miami. -AFP

Also joining the gathering are Honduran President Nasry Asfura, who narrowly won a disputed election with Trump's backing, and Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa, who has echoed parts of Trump's economic agenda and recently announced joint operations with the US in a military crackdown on drug trafficking (see report on Page 7).

Most of the right-wing heads of state share concerns about the rising power of drug cartels, even hitting countries that until recently were considered fairly safe such as Ecuador and Chile, said Irene Mia, a Latin America expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"All those countries used to be quite secure and didn't really have an issue with organised crime, but they've seen increasing levels of organised crime because of the reconfiguration of the drug trade," Mia told AFP.

The strained security situation, which has contributed to the Latin American right-wing's recent string of electoral victories, means the trend of US intervention has received less pushback than in the past, she added.

Many of the leaders share Trump's hard-line view of crime and migration, favouring crackdowns over deeper social fixes and

private business over the state.

Their rise reflects a broader rightward turn in parts of Latin America at a time when the region is being pulled between Washington and Beijing.

Ryan Berg, who heads the Americas Programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, said that China's trade with the region hit a record \$518bn in 2024, with Beijing loaning more than \$120bn to governments across the Western Hemisphere.

China's increased involvement in Latin America - from satellite tracking stations in Argentina and a port in Peru to economic support for Venezuela - has been an irritant for successive US administrations.

China has expanded its reach through trade, loans and infrastructure, while the Trump administration has pushed governments in the region to curb Beijing's role in ports, energy projects and other strategic assets.

That pressure was on display recently when Panamanian authorities moved against a Hong Kong-based firm tied to operations in the Panama Canal, a key global freight channel.

Washington has also taken more direct steps in the region.

The United States captured Maduro on January 3 and moved to seize control of the country's oil exports, and has tightened enforcement of the decades-long US embargo on Cuba.

Several Trump administration officials have told Reuters that Trump's move against Maduro was intended in part to counter China's ambitions, and that Beijing's days of leveraging debt to get cheap oil from Venezuela were "over".

The durability of such the coalition remains to be seen, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies's Mia.

"It's entirely a negative agenda," she said. "It's all about the threats coming to the region for US security: migration, organised crime."

She also pointed at the glaring absences from the summit, Mexico and Brazil, which are currently lead by leftists Claudia Sheinbaum and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

"Without Mexico and Brazil, it's not going to be very successful in tackling those issues" of narcotrafficking and counterterrorism, she said, given that Mexican cartels play a key role in the trafficking supply chain and Brazil's ports are critical narcotrafficking routes to Europe.

## Footage shows shooting of US citizen by immigration agent last year

AFP  
Washington

Authorities in Texas released police footage on Friday showing the moment a US citizen was shot dead by a federal immigration agent in the state last year, months before the high-profile killings of two Americans in Minneapolis.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) did not publicly acknowledge its involvement in the March 2025 shooting death of 23-year-old Ruben Ray Martinez until last month, after a public records request from a nonprofit revealed an internal department memo indicating a federal agent fired the fatal shots.

Martinez is believed to be the first of three US citizens known to have been shot and killed by federal immigration agents during President Donald Trump's second term.

DHS officials have described the shooting in South Padre Island as a defensive action.

The internal agency memo, reviewed by AFP, alleged that Martinez ignored commands from officers to stop his car and instead accelerated, "striking a (Homeland Security Investigations) special agent who wound up on the hood of the vehicle".

The memo said a DHS agent shot "multiple rounds at the driver through the open driver's side window".

An incident report filed by the South Padre Island Police Department said that Martinez's vehicle "intentionally collided with a Federal Agent".

Body camera footage released on Friday by the Texas Department of Public Safety did not clearly show Martinez striking an officer with his car.

In one video, the car's brake lights appear to be on when three shots are heard.

The footage shows police pulling Martinez from the car after he was shot, placing him on the ground and handcuffing him.

Another video shows the car's passenger Joshua Orta telling investigators that he believed his friend Martinez "panicked" when the pair drove up to the officers at the scene of a traffic accident, noting that they had been drinking that night.

Orta said the vehicle was "barely moving" moments before the shots were fired, adding the vehicle "caught (the agent's) feet".

"I know he didn't mean to hurt no officer. He wouldn't do nothing like that," Orta said of Martinez.

Orta died in an unrelated car accident in San Antonio on February 21, US media reported.

Attorneys for Martinez's mother told media this week that the newly released videos "confirm that Ruben's car was barely moving when he was shot".

Last month, a Texas grand jury declined to indict the agent who shot Martinez.

Details about the federal involvement in Martinez's death were revealed as part of a records request by American Oversight, a nonprofit government watchdog group.

The shooting came about 10 months before immigration agents shot dead Renee Good and Alex Pretti, both US citizens, during Trump's sweeping immigration crackdown in Minneapolis.

Those killings sparked weeks of nationwide protest, and the Trump administration later said it was ending its operation in the Midwestern city.

Trump on Thursday fired his DHS secretary Kristi Noem, amid US media reports that he was upset with her handling of the Minneapolis crackdown.

## DOJ seeks to revive executive orders targeting law firms

President Donald Trump's administration asked a federal appeals court on Friday to revive his executive orders that sought to punish four major US law firms, arguing that federal judges overstepped their authority by blocking directives that rest within core presidential powers.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) told the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that the four judges "bent over backwards" to invalidate Trump's orders against the firms Perkins Coie, WilmerHale, Jenner & Block and Susman Godfrey "without considering their plainly constitutional aspects and applications".

The law firms in lawsuits challenging the directives said the Republican president illegally retaliated against them for representing his political adversaries or clients who challenged his policies in court, or had employed lawyers who took part in past government investigations aimed at the president.

Trump's executive orders sought to restrict access to federal buildings for lawyers working for the firms and to end US government contracts held by clients of the firms.

The judges found that Trump violated the US Constitution's First Amendment protections against government abridgment of free speech and Fifth Amendment promise of due process, and issued orders permanently blocking the directives.

The administration's filing with the DC Circuit came after the Justice Department on Monday moved to abandon its appeals of the judicial rulings, then reversed that stance the following day.

The filing marked the administration's first explanation of its legal rationale for seeking to reinstate Trump's orders. - Reuters

## Eight dead as tornadoes surge across central US

AFP  
Washington

Tornadoes tore through the central United States in a series of storms that continued into the weekend, leaving eight people dead and at least a dozen others injured, authorities said.

Four people were reported killed in Oklahoma, where the twisters gained strength, and four others died further north in the Midwestern state of Michigan.

The Branch County Sheriff's Office said a tornado touched down near Union City in southern Michigan on Friday, killing three people and injuring 12.

About 50 miles (80km) west, officials in Cass County said one person was killed and "several injuries" were reported after a tornado hit the area.

"Our thoughts are with those who have lost family, friends, and property during this incident," the Branch County Sheriff's Office said in a statement.

Authorities in Cass County said a number of trees had fallen onto roads and buildings, and more than 500 people were reported to be without power.

"Emergency Management personnel will be conducting damage assessments in the affected area as required by the State of Michigan," the local sheriff's office said.

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer said on Friday evening that she was activating a state emergency operations centre "to



Debris is left behind in Union City following a tornado that hit several cities in rural southwest Michigan. -AFP

co-ordinate an all-hands-on-deck response to severe weather in southwestern Michigan".

In Oklahoma, the extreme weather led to fourth deaths late on Thursday and Friday, and people were waking up yesterday to scenes of destruction and loss in several towns across the state.

"Severe weather struck Major County last night and tragically claimed the lives of a mother and daughter," Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt posted on X.

Oklmulgee County Sheriff Eddy Rice said in a statement that two people died in a tornado that hit the town of Beggs on Friday night.

## National Symphony Orchestra executive director quits, leaving Kennedy Centre

National Symphony Orchestra executive director Jean Davidson has announced that she is stepping down from the ensemble that primarily performs at the John F Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts in Washington.

"It's no secret that this has been a really hard year," Davidson told the *New York Times*, while noting that she started looking for a new opportunity several months ago.

She will head the Wallis Annenberg Centre for the Performing Arts in California.

The National Symphony Orchestra did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Davidson's departure follows months of turmoil at the Kennedy Centre, a national cultural centre that was named after former president John F Kennedy months after his assassination.

President Donald Trump has appointed himself as chairman, pushed to change the organisation's focus and named a board that voted last year to add his name to the institution.

Last month, Trump announced that the

Kennedy Centre would close for two years, for reconstruction work.

US Representative Joyce Beatty, a Democrat and ex-officio Kennedy Centre board member, last year filed a court challenge over the name change.

On Friday, she amended that lawsuit to also ask the court to halt moves to "shutter and gut" the facility.

Roma Daravi, vice-president of public relations for the centre, said in a statement: "We're confident the court will uphold the board's decision on the name change and the desperately needed renovations which will continue as scheduled."

Beatty said in her lawsuit that board members appointed by Trump, a Republican, also had unlawfully stripped voting rights from her and other ex-officio board members who serve under an act of Congress.

Ex-officio members come from both political parties.

Dozens of artists have canceled performances at the centre since Trump returned to the White House last year. - Reuters

## Top vaccine official steps down

Top official who oversaw vaccines at the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will leave his post at the end of April, the agency's chief confirmed on Friday.

Vinay Prasad was appointed as the FDA's chief medical officer in 2025 but had since drawn criticism from scientists and former health officials over decisions related to health policy, particularly surrounding the efficacy of the coronavirus (Covid-19) vaccine.

FDA Commissioner Marty Makary said on Friday that Prasad "will be returning back to his academic home later next month" and praised Prasad for getting "a tremendous amount accomplished" during his one-year sabbatical from the University of California, San Francisco.

"I want to thank him for his service and personal sacrifice to take time away from his family," Makary wrote on X, noting the agency will name Prasad's successor before his departure.

Prasad's exit follows a string of controversies, including an instance last month in which he refused to review Moderna's application for a new mRNA flu vaccine.

The FDA later reversed course and agreed to review the request. Prasad has also raised doubts about the safety of the Covid-19 vaccine despite global health authorities saying that the vaccines are considered safe and effective.

In a memo last year, Prasad alleged the Covid-19 vaccines were linked to the deaths of at least 10 children - a position that drew public condemnation from a dozen former FDA officials. - AFP

# US faces assaults on democracy, says Obama

Reuters/AFP  
Chicago

The US is facing daily assaults on democracy, former president Barack Obama warned on Friday as he lauded Jesse Jackson for fighting abuses of power at a memorial service for the long-time civil rights activist.

He joined former presidents Joe Biden and Bill Clinton, along with former vice-president Kamala Harris, at the public event in Chicago for Jackson, who died last month at the age of 84.

President Donald Trump did not attend because of his schedule, a White House official said.

"Each day we wake up to some new assault on our democratic institutions, another setback to the idea of the rule of law, an offence to common decency," Obama said after receiving a rapturous welcome at the event in Chicago.

"Every day, you wake up to things you just didn't think were possible," he added. "It may be tempting to get discouraged, to

give into cynicism... (but) this man, Reverend Jesse Lewis Jackson, inspires us to take a harder path."

Obama, other Democratic dignitaries and religious leaders urged hundreds of attendees to honour Jackson, an advocate for voting rights and desegregation, by continuing his fight for equality and justice.

"Each day, we're told by those in high office to fear each other and to turn on each other and that some Americans count more than others and that some don't even count at all," Obama said to applause. "We see science and expertise denigrated while ignorance and dishonesty and cruelty and corruption are reaping untold rewards."

The White House criticised Obama when asked for a comment on his remarks.

"He is a total disgrace for all the hurt he has caused this country and history will not judge him well," White House spokesman Steven Cheung said.

The memorial at the House of Hope, a 10,000-seat venue on Chicago's South Side, celebrated Jackson with a choir performing gospel songs while attendees stood, clapped and sang along.

Some attendees arrived hours before the service and waited outside in a line that wrapped around the arena.

"This man here paved the way for so many other people to be able to make a difference in this world," said Robert Holmes, who was waiting in line.

In addition to the former presidents, former first ladies Jill Biden and Hillary Clinton, who also served as US secretary of state, were present, along with basketball great Isiah Thomas and the Rev Al Sharpton, a prominent civil rights activist.

Speakers called to continue Jackson's fight for racial equality as the Trump administration curbs diversity programmes and targets museum and educational content on slavery that it deems "anti-American".

Trump's declarations have also led to the restoration of monuments honouring the Confederate South.

"We're in a tough spot," Joe Biden said. "We've got an administration that doesn't share the values that we have."

Memorial events for Jackson began in Chicago last week, drawing elected offi-



Obama: Each day we wake up to some new assault on our democratic institutions.

cial, advocates and community members. Jackson's body also lay in state in South Carolina, where he was born.

An inspirational orator and longtime Chicagoan, Jackson helped lead the nation's civil rights movement after the 1968

assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

For more than half a century, Jackson worked to dismantle segregationist systems and broaden political participation for black Americans and other marginalised communities.

"While some proclaim Make America Great Again, Jesse Louis Jackson fought to make America achieve the greatness that she promised but always fell short of," said Father Michael Pfleger, a Catholic priest in Chicago known for political activism.

Jackson's two presidential campaigns mobilised millions of new voters under the banner of the "Rainbow Coalition", pushing the Democratic Party to address issues affecting working-class Americans, farmers and communities of colour.

Bill Clinton urged attendees to ask what they can do that would match Jackson's accomplishments, while Sharpton criticised efforts to weaken diversity initiatives.

"We've beaten people bigger than Trump," Sharpton told the crowd. "Leave here with some Jackson fire in you, not just a programme book."

## US, Ecuador carry out joint anti-drug strikes

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

US and Ecuadorian forces conducted joint strikes inside Ecuador as part of ongoing operations to combat drug trafficking in the South American country, according to a statement by US Southern Command (Southcom).

The statement posted to X said that Southcom Commander General Francis Donovan, at the order of Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth, "directed the joint force to support Ecuadorian forces conducting lethal kinetic operations against Designated Terrorist Organisations within Ecuador March 6".

Neither the US Southern Command, a branch of its military that oversees forces in Latin America, nor Ecuador's defence ministry, said if anyone was killed or captured in the strike, which Ecuador dubbed operation "Total Extermination".

The operations used helicopters, aircraft, riverboats and drones to locate and bomb a drug

traffickers' training camp in northeast Ecuador near the Colombian border, Ecuador's defence ministry said in a statement.

Ecuador's right-wing President Daniel Noboa said in an Instagram post that the training camp belonged to a dissident faction of the Farc guerilla group.

The operation was carried out in the north-eastern province of Sucumbios near the border with Colombia.

"We destroyed the hideout of Mono Tole, the leader of the CDF (Border Commandos), and a training area for drug traffickers," the 38-year-old leader wrote in the post, which was accompanied by a video of a house exploding in a forested area.

"I congratulate our joint forces and the Ecuadorian armed forces for the successful operation against narcoterrorists in Ecuador," Donovan said in a statement. "This collaborative and decisive action is a strategic success for all nations in the Western Hemisphere committed to disrupting and defeating narcoterrorism."

Noboa, a close ally of US President Donald

Trump, previously said that Washington was among "regional allies" taking part in the operation against drug cartels, which use Ecuador's ports to smuggle cocaine to international markets.

Noboa earlier this week held talks in Quito with Donovan and Mark Schafer, head of US Special Operations in Central and South America and the Caribbean.

During the meeting, they discussed plans for information sharing and operational coordination at airports and seaports, Noboa's office said in a statement.

Around 70% of the drugs produced by Colombia and Peru, the world's largest and second-largest cocaine producers, respectively, are shipped through neighbouring Ecuador.

The drug trade has unleashed a bloody turf war that has turned one of Latin America's safest countries into one of its deadliest in the space of a few years.

The United States and Ecuador have boosted their security co-operation since the right-wing Noboa came to power in 2023.

## Trump cannot terminate protections for 350,000 Haitians: appeals court

Reuters  
Washington

A divided US appeals court has refused to let the Trump administration revoke legal protections that allow more than 350,000 Haitians to live and work in the US and avoid being returned to their gang-violence-stricken country.

A 2-1 panel of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit late on Friday rejected the administration's bid to pause a February 2 ruling that blocked the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from ending Haiti's Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

TPS is a humanitarian programme that shields eligible migrants from deportation and allows them to work.

Under outgoing Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, the department has moved to end TPS for a dozen countries as part of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown, arguing that the programme was never intended to serve as a "de facto amnesty".

The administration had asked the DC Circuit to stay US District Judge Ana Reyes's February order while it appeals.

Her decision came in a class-action lawsuit brought by Hai-

tians seeking to prevent the DHS from exposing them to deportation.

Reyes found that Noem's November move to end the Haitians' legal protections likely violated TPS termination procedures and the US Constitution's Fifth Amendment guarantee of equal protection under the law.

The administration on appeal noted that the US Supreme Court had twice allowed it to end TPS for Venezuelans.

However, US Circuit Judges Florence Pan and Brad Garcia, both appointed by Democratic president Joe Biden, distinguished the cases and said that Haitians sent home would "be vulnerable to violence amid a 'collapsing rule of law' and lack access to life-sustaining medical care".

US Circuit Judge Justin Walker, a Trump appointee, dissented, saying that the case and the earlier Supreme Court litigation involving Venezuelans were "the legal equivalent of fraternal, if not identical, twins".

The DHS did not respond to a request for comment.

Haitians were first granted TPS in 2010 after a devastating earthquake.

The US has repeatedly renewed the designation, most recently under the Biden administration in July 2024.

## Cuba reports fifth death from US speedboat shootout

Cuban authorities have said that a fifth crew member of a US-flagged speedboat involved in a shootout with the coast guard last week has died of his wounds.

Prosecutors have filed terrorism charges against the surviving crew members of the boat, suspected of trying to bring weapons to Cuba in hopes of destabilizing the communist government in Havana.

One of the six survivors, identified as Roberto Alvarez Avila, "died on March 4 from wounds he received", the interior ministry said in a statement on state TV.

The shootout occurred on February 25 when a coast guard boat approached the vessel to demand identification, and the crew responded by opening fire.

The Cuban coast guard shot and killed four other people aboard the boat, which came within one nautical mile of the Caribbean island's shores.

Cuban officials say the speedboat, registered in the United States, was carrying firearms of various calibers, including 14 rifles, 11 pistols and nearly 13,000 rounds of ammunition.

The interior ministry added the investigation into the incident was advancing with the co-operation of US authorities, "including evidence sharing and other joint actions".

At least two of those aboard the speedboat were US citizens, one



Gear and weapons seized from a Florida-registered speedboat are displayed for the media, as Cuban authorities confirmed that a fifth casualty died on March 4 from injuries sustained after Cuban forces confronted armed Cuban nationals who entered Cuban waters from the US on February 25. - Reuters



of whom was killed.

US President Donald Trump's administration has made no secret

of its desire for regime change in Cuba, imposing an energy blockade after the ouster of leftist auto-

crat Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, which was the communist island's top supplier of oil.

## Man convicted of plotting to kill Trump, US officials

Reuters/AFP  
Washington

A Pakistani man was convicted on Friday of planning to kill President Donald Trump and other prominent US politicians two years ago at the behest of Iran, the Department of Justice (DOJ) said.

Asif Raza Merchant was accused of trying to recruit people in the US in a plan targeting Trump and others in retaliation for Washington's killing of Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in 2020, when Trump was in his first term.

Soleimani, the head of Iran's foreign military operations, was killed in a US drone strike in Baghdad in January 2020.

Iranian officials have repeatedly vowed to avenge his killing.

Targets in the 2024 plot included then-presi-

dent Joe Biden and Nikki Haley, who ran against Trump that year for the Republican presidential nomination, federal prosecutors said.

Merchant was convicted of "murder for hire and attempting to commit an act of terrorism transcending national boundaries", directed by the Iranian authorities, the DOJ said in a statement.

The trial in the New York City borough of Brooklyn started last week, days before Trump ordered an assault on Iran, carried out with Israel, that has expanded into the region's biggest war in years.

Merchant admitted to joining the plot with Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps but testified that he did so unwillingly.

During his trial on Wednesday, Merchant testified that he was forced into the plot to protect his family in the Iranian capital Tehran from the Guards, adding that he thought he would get caught before anyone was killed,

multiple media outlets reported.

Merchant said he was never ordered to kill a specific person but that his Iranian handler named three people in the course of conversations in the Iranian capital.

Law enforcement thwarted the plan before any attack occurred.

A person Merchant contacted in April 2024 to help with the plot reported his activities and became a confidential informant, the DOJ said.

Merchant was arrested and pleaded not guilty that year.

The Revolutionary Guards have a central role in Iran, with a combination of military and economic power and an intelligence network.

Tehran has denied accusations that it targeted Trump or other US officials.

Since February 28, US and Israeli attacks have killed at least 1,332 Iranian civilians and wounded thousands, according to Iran's UN ambassador.

Reuters  
Washington

The Pentagon has named as Chief Data Officer Gavin Klinger, a computer scientist who aided billionaire Elon Musk's efforts to overhaul the government last year and who has boosted white supremacists and misogynists online.

Reuters reported last year that Klinger had reposted content from white supremacist Nick Fuentes and self-described misogynist Andrew Tate and made some controversial comments.

Klinger said in an e-mail that he was honoured to take on the new role and disputed allegations about his social media posts.

"The suggestion that I support 'bigots', 'extremists', or white supremacists is categorically untrue," he said.

In a social media post, the Pentagon said that Klinger's new role "places him at the centre of the Department's most ambitious AI efforts", focusing on "day-to-day alignment and execution of the Department's AI projects, working directly with America's frontier AI labs to support the warfighter".

The Pentagon did not imme-

diately respond to a Reuters request for more comment.

The Pentagon's use of artificial intelligence (AI) has taken centre-stage after a heated weeks-long dispute with Anthropic over guardrails on how the military can use its AI tools led to last week's decision by the Trump administration to drop the company and replace it with OpenAI.

On Thursday, the Pentagon gave Anthropic a formal supply-chain risk designation - an extraordinary rebuke by the administration against a US tech company that began working with the Pentagon earlier than its competitors and was more aggressive in courting US national-security officials.

However, the company and the Pentagon have been at odds for months over how the military can use its technology on the battlefield.

This conflict erupted into public view earlier this year.

Anthropic has refused to back down on bans for its Claude AI to power autonomous weapons and mass US surveillance.

The Pentagon has pushed back, saying that it should be able to use this technology as needed, so long as it complies with US law.

## Over 30 hurt in Peru club blast

An explosion inside a nightclub in northern Peru injured 33 people early yesterday, according to authorities investigating the incident in a region plagued by organised crime.

The blast, described as a suspected "attack" in a statement by the regional government of La Libertad department, occurred before dawn at the Dali discotheque near Trujillo, a coastal city some 500km (310 miles) north of the capital Lima.

"We have 33 injuries reported so far, including five in serious condition," regional health manager Alberto Florian told the Latina Noticias television broadcast. - AFP



## Indonesia seeks suspension of concessions in palm oil dispute

AFP  
Jakarta

Indonesia will file for a suspension of concessions against the European Union (EU) at the World Trade Organisation (WTO)'s dispute settlement body over a palm oil case, the trade minister said yesterday.

The move was taken after the 27-member bloc failed to meet a deadline to adjust its policy based on the WTO body's ruling and recommendation in a palm oil dispute case, the trade ministry said in a statement.

WTO experts in January 2025 largely upheld EU restrictions on the use of palm oil in biofuels fol-

lowing complaints by Indonesia.

Trade Minister Budi Santoso said the suspension of concessions would be focused on goods, but added Indonesia was "open" to asking the dispute settlement body permission to apply the measure to other sectors.

"We will ensure that the losses are accurately calculated and the case is handled effectively while simultaneously maintaining bilateral relations with the EU," Budi said in a statement.

The dispute concerns the EU Renewable Energy Directive of 2018 (RED II), which limited the eligibility of crop-based biofuels to count towards member states' renewable energy targets, and phased out the eligibility of palm

oil-based biofuels altogether by 2030.

The EU has deemed that the production of palm oil is not sustainable.

Indonesia took the move to safeguard its rights in the future if the EU could not adhere to the WTO panel's ruling, Budi said. He did not specify which obligations the EU had failed to comply with.

Suspension of concessions is a temporary trade sanction which, under the WTO dispute settlement body, can be filed against another WTO member to enforce compliance with a dispute ruling.

Indonesia, the world's leading producer of palm oil, in 2019 requested an expert panel review of the EU restrictions.

## Ramadan in Banda Aceh



A man cooks a traditional curry dish called "kuah beulangong" in cauldrons to be shared at iftar, the breaking of fast, at the Baiturrahman grand mosque during the holy month of Ramadan in Banda Aceh yesterday. (AFP)

## Sri Lanka to treat Iranian crew in line with 'international law'

AFP  
New Delhi

Sri Lanka will treat Iranian sailors rescued from a torpedoed frigate according to international law, a minister said Saturday, following reports Washington was pressuring Colombo to not repatriate them.

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath told a conference in New Delhi that Sri Lanka was caring for 32 sailors from the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena under Colombo's international treaty obligations.

The frigate was sunk by a US submarine on Wednesday just off Sri Lanka's southern coast.

Sri Lanka sent its navy to rescue survivors and recover 84 bodies.

Asked if Colombo was under pressure from the US to not repatriate the Iranians, Herath did not answer directly.

"We have taken all the steps according to international laws," Herath said.

Sri Lanka also provided safe haven to a second Iranian war-

ship, the IRIS Bushehr, and evacuated its 219 crew a day after the Dena was torpedoed.

The ship was taken to Trincomalee on Sri Lanka's northeast coast after reporting engine problems.

India, meanwhile, said yesterday it had allowed a third Iranian warship, the IRIS Lavan, to dock in one of its ports on "humane" grounds after it too reported operational problems.

The three ships were part of a multi-national fleet review held by India before the war in the Middle East started last Saturday.

"I think it was the humane thing to do and I think we were guided by that principle," Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said.

The Lavan docked in the southwest Indian port of Kochi on Wednesday.

"A lot of the people on board were young cadets. They have disembarked and are in a nearby facility," said Jaishankar.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said this week that Colombo would follow

the Hague Convention, which requires a neutral state to hold combatants of a warring state until hostilities end.

A senior administration official said Colombo was in talks with the International Committee of the Red Cross to deal with the survivors of the torpedoed

ship. International humanitarian law applied to the survivors from the Dena, an official said, and the wounded could be repatriated at their request.

Iranian diplomats in Colombo said they have asked for the remains of 84 sailors killed in the US attack to be taken back to Iran.



Injured Iranian sailors rescued from their frigate IRIS Dena after a US submarine torpedoed it off Sri Lanka's coast amid the Middle East war, receive treatment at the Karapitiya hospital in Galle on Thursday. (AFP)

## Indonesian activists acquitted of 'incitement'

AFP  
Jakarta

An Indonesian court yesterday acquitted a prominent rights activist held for several months on "incitement" charges after calling on social media for young people to join massive anti-government protests last year.

Delpedro Marhaen Rismansyah, director of the Lokataru Foundation, was arrested last September and held until last month "on suspicion of making provocative incitement to commit anarchic actions," according to police. The 26-year-old was acquitted with three co-defendants in Jakarta Friday, with judge Harika Nova Yeri ruling that "they have not been proven guilty as accused by the prosecutors" — who had sought two years imprisonment for each of them.

Delpedro told reporters at the court afterwards: "This victory is not just for us, but for all Indonesian youths. We appreciate the judges' bravery."

Dozens of supporters had packed the courtroom for the

sentencing hearing, shouting "freedom!" before the verdict was read.

The four young men were prosecuted for uploading "inciting content" online "with the aim of stirring up hatred against the government" and encouraging people to oppose public authorities. Muzaffar Salim, a colleague of Delpedro at the Lokataru Foundation was also in the dock, as were university student Khariq Anhar and activist Syahdan Hussein, who both used social media to organise demonstrations.

The Foundation had provided legal aid to high school protests detained during the protests.

Protests nationwide rocked the archipelago in late August and early September last year, sparked by lavish perks for lawmakers but broadening into an outburst of anger against the security forces after a police vehicle ran over a delivery driver, killing him.

The biggest unrest since President Prabowo Subianto took office in late 2024 claimed at least 10 lives and resulted in thousands of arrests.

Most have since been released, but hundreds still face charges.

## Chinese New Year celebrations in Macau



A firework display lights up the sky near the Macau Tower shorefront to mark the official end of the traditional Chinese New Year celebrations in Macau yesterday. (AFP)

## China warns of global chip shortages

Reuters  
Beijing

China's commerce ministry yesterday raised the possibility of another global semiconductor supply chain crisis due to "new conflicts" between Dutch chipmaker Nexperia and its Chinese subsidiary.

Production across the global auto industry was disrupted in October when Beijing imposed export controls on Chinese-made Nexperia chips after The Hague seized the company from its Chinese parent Wingtech. Nexperia's chips are widely used in cars' electronic systems.

While the chip shortage has eased after diplomatic negotiations, the conflict between Nexperia's Dutch headquarters and its China-based unit has only intensified, with the former supporting the removal of Wingtech's control and the latter demanding this be restored.

Beijing's warning yesterday came a day after Nexperia's Chinese packaging arm accused Netherlands-based headquarters of disabling office accounts for all employees in China.

"(This has) provoked new conflicts and created new difficulties and obstacles for (company-to-company) negotiations," China's commerce ministry said in a statement published on its official website.

"Nexperia Netherlands has seriously disrupted the company's normal production and operation, and if this triggers a global semiconductor production and supply chain crisis again, the Netherlands must bear full responsibility for this," the ministry

added. In a statement on Friday Nexperia's Dutch entity did not deny the IT action, but disputed the Chinese subsidiary's allegation that this had affected production at the company's assembly and testing facility in China's Guangdong province.

Nexperia's Chinese subsidiary responded to the removal of Wingtech's control in September by declaring itself independent of its Dutch parent. Both entities have since traded accusations of bad-faith negotiating, while the Dutch headquarters has suspended wafer supply to the Guangdong plant.

Efforts from Beijing, The Hague, and Brussels to push both to a mediated resolution have done little to resolve the impasse.

Beijing has accused The Hague of not doing enough to force compromise from Nexperia's Netherlands headquarters, or end court proceedings in Amsterdam that transferred Wingtech's shares to a Dutch lawyer in October.



Global semiconductor company Nexperia in Hamburg. (Reuters/File photo)

## Myanmar, Afghan hopeful scholars mourn UK study visa ban

AFP  
Yangon

Aspiring students are lamenting Britain's ban on education visas for their war-weary countries — dashing dreams of bettering themselves and their home nations.

Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sudan and Cameroon citizens will be barred from obtaining university visas, London announced this week, saying asylum applications by visiting students had "rocketed" nearly 500% from 2021-2025.

"It's like the country is punishing the weak, the most vulnerable people," said one woman from Myanmar.

She was preparing for a scholarship interview for a master's in climate change finance when her

plans were upended by Downing Street's decree on Wednesday.

"I could not focus the whole morning," the 28-year-old told AFP from Yangon, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons in a country riven by civil war since a 2021 military coup. "I can't picture my future."

Like in much of the developed world, immigration has become a divisive issue in Britain.

Efforts to beat back arrivals mirror the sweeping travel bans issued by US President Donald Trump which have shut out citizens of Myanmar, Sudan and Afghanistan.

Since the chaotic military withdrawal of Britain, the US and other Nato nations in 2021, Afghanistan has been ruled by a resurgent Taliban government which has banned women over age 12 from attending school.

**Efforts to beat back arrivals mirror the sweeping travel bans issued by US President Donald Trump which have shut out citizens of Myanmar, Sudan and Afghanistan**

Britain's travel block is "really painful" for Afghan women hoping to escape to an education abroad, said one female child social worker in Ghazni province, who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons.

She has now cancelled her plans to study for a master's in both the US and the UK.

"Now I am trying to be hopeful, but I think it would also be a mistake," said the 27-year-old.

In the summer of 2024, Arefa Mohammadi fled to neighbouring Pakistan, living in limbo as she ap-

plied to universities.

She got an offer to study public health in England but now cannot accept it.

"It was truly shocking for me," said the 24-year-old.

"This situation put me in a place where I haven't any goals, because all my goals and all my futures are unpredictable."

'Cruel and short-sighted'  
In Kabul, a 39-year-old man faces similar heartbreak.

He was accepted to study specialist subjects related to water management at three universities in England and Scotland.

"When I was a child I witnessed several challenges like flash floods, water scarcity, environmental neglect, inefficient irrigation systems," he said, asking to remain anonymous for security reasons.

"To address these challenges I

made my application."

"I hoped to acquire modern knowledge. It's impossible to acquire in Afghanistan," he added.

Some 33mn people in the country face severe water shortages, aid agencies say, a result of compounding multi-year droughts, climate change and infrastructure battered by decades of war.

Britain's Labour government made the decision to curb visas as the right-wing Reform UK party surges in opinion polls with its hardline stance against immigration.

The UK Home Office said almost 135,000 asylum seekers had entered the country through legal routes since 2021.

Activist organisation Burma Campaign UK called the visa ban "exceptionally cruel and short-sighted".

"The opportunity to come to the UK to study is life-changing for the individual student but also an investment in the future of Myanmar," said programme director Zoya Phan in a statement.

One exiled Myanmar journalist has been living over the border in Thailand after escaping the military rule which has clamped down on press freedoms.

"When the military coup happened I was just 22, so I had a lot of dreams," she said. "But over the past five years there have been a lot of struggles — I couldn't complete my dreams." Every year since the junta takeover she applied for further education to buoy her spirits.

But she received an e-mail Thursday morning cancelling her place to study for a master's at a London university.

"Everything is gone," she said.

## Fashion garments pile up in South Asia as Mideast conflict grounds planes

Reuters  
Dhaka

Shipments of garments for Zara owner Inditex and other major clothing retailers are stranded at airports in Bangladesh and India, according to three manufacturers, as the conflict in the Middle East forces airlines such as Emirates and Qatar Airways to cancel flights.

South Asia is a clothes manufacturing powerhouse and fast fashion brands around the world rely on factories in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan for a constant stream of new T-shirts, dresses and jeans.

"Some of my apparel consignments are currently stuck at Dhaka airport," said Shovon Islam, managing director of manufacturer Sparrow Group, whose European clients include Inditex, M&S, Next, and Primark.

"They were supposed to be flown to the UK via Dubai, but with operations at Dubai airport suspended, we are now in a very difficult position. We're trying to figure out alternative routes, but none of them are simple or cost-effective," Islam added.

Most airspace in the Middle East is still closed since the conflict began last Saturday, forcing the world's busiest airport, Dubai,

### Bangladesh, India, Pakistan are key manufacturing hubs; South Asia relies on Gulf airlines for cargo shipments

to shut down for several days with airlines including Qatar Airways, Emirates, and Etihad cancelling many flights.

Much of South Asia relies on Gulf airlines to send cargo, usually in commercial flights with some cargo-only aircraft, said Frederic Horst, managing director at Trade and Transport Group in Sydney.

More than half of Bangladesh's air cargo travels via the Gulf, he said, and 41% of India's, with Emirates and Qatar Airways the

most important carriers.

Inditex has 150 suppliers in Bangladesh, 122 in India and 69 in Pakistan, according to its 2023 annual report. Its most recent annual report does not disclose country-specific supplier numbers. The company did not reply to Reuters' questions about the disruption.

As air capacity has reduced sharply, prices have shot up.

Alexander Nathani, managing partner at Mumbai-based Kira Leder, which produces leather

jackets for Inditex and for Austrian retailers Cigno Nero, Fussl and Wiedner, said freight charges to fly his products from Mumbai to Austria have doubled because of the cancellations.

"The whole freight capacity is being blocked now on the airlines that are flying, so prices are increasing," Nathani said. "One consignment in Pakistan is stuck in the factory, and the other consignment from Mumbai is being accepted for Swiss Air on Monday — let's hope they're also flying and that it all goes."

Asked about the disruption to shipments from South Asia, Primark, H&M and M&S said

the majority of their shipments is made by sea. Next did not immediately reply to Reuters' questions. "The suspension of cargo flights due to airspace closures in the Middle East is already disrupting air shipments," said Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, adding that if the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping channel separating Iran from Oman and the UAE, remains closed it will drive up the cost of sea transport, too.

"All in all, we are worried — we can see another major crisis ahead."

## Rapper-turned-politician Shah unseats former Nepal PM Oli in own constituency

AFP  
Nepal

Nepal's rapper-turned-mayor Balendra Shah won a dramatic parliamentary contest yesterday, defeating veteran leader K P Sharma Oli in the former prime minister's own constituency after staking his political future on the challenge.

Shah's victory over the veteran Marxist leader marks one of the most symbolic results of Nepal's high-stakes parliamentary election, held six months after mass anti-corruption protests toppled the government.

His win caps a bold gamble by the 35-year-old reformist, who resigned as Kathmandu mayor to challenge Oli, the 74-year-old four-time premier, in his own stronghold.

Shah had taken an unassailable lead on Saturday, according to Election Commission figures.

He will become prime minister if his Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) party secures a parliamentary majority, as Election Commission trends on Saturday put it on course to do.

Better known as Balen, the sharply dressed 35-year-old has emerged as a symbol of youth-driven political change.

Born in Kathmandu in 1990, he was a schoolboy during Nepal's 1996-2006 Maoist civil war, which killed thousands and eventually ended the monarchy.

Shah trained as a civil engineer but first gained national attention through Nepal's



Supporters of the Rastriya Swatantra Party celebrate outside the counting centre at Damak in Jhapa district yesterday. (AFP)

underground hip-hop scene, releasing songs that railed against corruption and inequality.

Those themes, he says, still guide his politics.

"If a person involved in politics also engages in literature or music, it becomes emotionally driven," Shah told AFP during his campaign for Thursday's elections in the Himalayan nation of 30 mn people.

"We also need to nurture the emotional aspect of our lives, and a politician should possess that sensitivity."

His music, which has drawn millions of views online, helped him cultivate a devoted following on social media — a platform he continues to favour over traditional outlets for communicating with supporters.

That popularity translated into a political shock in 2022, when Shah became the first independent candidate elected mayor of Kathmandu, stunning Nepal's entrenched political establishment.

He built a reputation as a blunt, often confrontational reformer as mayor, launching campaigns against tax evasion, traffic congestion and mismanagement.

However, his tenure also attracted criticism for heavy-handed enforcement and for bypassing journalists in favour of broadcasting directly to millions of followers online.

Shah resigned as mayor in January to run in the general elections, the first since mass protests in September overthrew Oli. Rather than running from his Kathmandu



Rastriya Swatantra Party election candidate Balendra Shah shows a victory sign after collecting a certificate following his win in parliamentary elections at the counting centre in Damak in Nepal's Jhapa district yesterday. (AFP)

base, Shah chose to challenge Oli directly in Jhapa-5, a largely rural constituency around 300km (185 miles) southeast of the capital.

He said that "contesting against a major figure" signalled that he was "not taking the easy way out" to win a seat.

"It demonstrates that, despite the problems or betrayals that have affected the country, we are moving towards addressing them," he said.

Shah joined the centrist RSP, led by television host Rabi Lamichhane, which became parliament's fourth-largest force in the last elections in 2022 after challenging parties that had dominated Nepal since the end of the civil war. "We share the same ideology," Shah said, describing a vision of "a liberal economic system with

social justice", including free education and healthcare for the poor.

Shah emerged as a central figure during the September protests, which were initially sparked by anger over a brief ban on social media platforms under a loose "Gen Z" banner. They quickly grew into a broader movement against corruption and economic stagnation. At least 77 people were killed during the unrest.

"Gen Z's number one demand is good governance, because there is a high level of corruption in the country," Shah said.

He insists music will remain part of his identity, despite his political ambitions. "Music is a medium to express oneself," he said. "I will continue it, even if I am elected as prime minister."

## India let Iran warship dock the day US sank another off Sri Lanka, officials say

Reuters  
New Delhi

India has allowed an Iranian warship to dock as a humanitarian gesture, Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said yesterday, after the US sank another Iranian navy vessel off neighbouring Sri Lanka.

The Lavan docked at India's southern port of Kochi on Wednesday, the same day the US submarine struck Iranian navy frigate Dena, after an urgent request from Tehran, an Indian government source told Reuters.

US President Donald Trump has said destroying the Iranian navy is one aim of the war he and Israel

launched against the Islamic Republic a week ago.

The Lavan — an amphibious landing vessel, according to the US Naval Institute's online news site — and two other ships "were coming in for a fleet review and then they got, in a way, caught on the wrong side of the events," Jaishankar told the annual Raisina Dialogue event.

"I think we really approached it from the point of view of humanity, of other than whatever the legal issues were," he said. "I think we did the right thing."

At least 87 people were killed in the US attack on the Dena in Sri Lanka's exclusive economic zone 19 nautical miles off the coast, outside its maritime boundaries.

India received the docking re-

quest for the Lavan on February 28, the day the Iran war started, the source said late on Friday, adding that the request "was urgent as the vessel had developed technical issues".

Its 183 crew members have been accommodated at naval facilities in Kochi, said the source, who asked not to be identified citing confidentiality.

The Dena was on its way back from a naval exercise organised by India, according to the drill's website and Sri Lankan officials.

Sri Lankan authorities said on Friday that they were escorting the Iranian naval ship Booshehr to a harbour on the eastern coast and moving most of its crew to a navy camp near Colombo.

## India raises LPG prices

Indian companies have raised the prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), mostly used as a cooking fuel, for the first time in about a year, as global prices surge with the US-Israel war on Iran disrupting supplies from the Middle East. Indian Oil Corp, the country's top refiner and LPG seller, has increased the prices of a 14.2kg LPG cylinder in Delhi by 7% to 913 rupees (\$9.93), according to its website. State refiners IOC, Bharat Petroleum Corp and Hindustan Petroleum Corp raised prices in tandem. India is the world's second-biggest importer of LPG. Middle Eastern LPG accounts for 85-90% of those imports. Indian companies have also raised the prices of 19kg commercial LPG cylinders, mainly used by hotels and restaurants, to 1,883 rupees from 1,768.50 rupees. (Reuters)

## Britain 'ready to support' Saudi defence: Starmer

Britain is ready to help defend Saudi Arabia, Prime Minister Keir Starmer told the kingdom's de facto leader in a call on Friday as the Middle East war escalates.

The conflict that began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran, killing the Islamic republic's supreme leader, is now in its seventh day, drawing in nations beyond the region and causing havoc in the energy and transport sectors.

Countries around the Gulf have been hit by strikes, with Saudi Arabia reporting it had intercepted a cruise missile and three drones on Friday.

Starmer spoke to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and assured him "the UK stood ready to support the defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia should it be needed," the PM's

spokeswoman said. "The leaders also discussed stepping up intelligence cooperation to support defensive operations and protect civilians," the spokeswoman said.

Britain is sending four extra Typhoon fighter jets to Qatar to strengthen "defensive operations" and will also deploy HMS Dragon, an air defence destroyer, though it is not expected to sail until next week.

A British air force base in Cyprus came under attack from an Iranian-made drone on Monday — probably launched from Lebanon by the pro-Iranian group Hezbollah, according to the Cypriot government.

Starmer has come under fire from some opposition voices at home who accuse him of being too slow to respond to the Middle East war. (AFP)

## UK discloses 4 maintenance facilities operating in Ukraine

Reuters  
London

Britain disclosed yesterday that it had four facilities operating in Ukraine to carry out repair and maintenance work for armoured vehicles and other military equipment being used in the war with Russia.

The facilities, which had not previously been divulged, were set up using both British and Ukrainian workers, operated under contracts issued by Britain's defence ministry.

"From the factory floor to the frontline, the UK is standing with Ukraine," Luke Pollard, Britain's Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry, said in a statement.

"Our pioneering facilities are helping keep Ukraine's defiant armed forces in the fight against (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's brutal attacks, and British firms are boosting long-term industrial production in Ukraine and partnering with Ukrainian companies to benefit both our nations."

Britain has been one of Ukraine's closest allies since Russia invaded its neighbour in February 2022, having committed more than 21.8bn pounds (\$29.2bn) of support to Kyiv.

The British defence ministry said that as part of their work the four facilities in Ukraine were repairing CVR-T armoured vehicles, Husky support vehicles, L119 light guns and AS-90 artillery systems, which Britain had donated. A fifth facility was also being planned, it said.

## US starts using UK bases for 'defensive' Iran operations

AFP  
Fairford

The United States has started using British bases for certain operations against Iran during the Middle East war, the UK government announced yesterday.

Britain's defence ministry said the US had begun using the military sites for "specific defensive operations to prevent Iran firing missiles into the region".

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer annoyed US President Donald Trump for initially refusing to have any role in the US-Israeli war with Iran, which started a week ago, on February 28.

He later agreed to a US request to use two British military bases for a "specific and limited defensive purpose".

Those bases are Fairford in Gloucestershire, western England, and the UK-US Diego Garcia base on the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean.

A US Air Force B-1 Lancer bomber landed at Fairford yesterday, an AFP photographer saw.

An American C-5 Galaxy plane could also be seen on the runway of the base, as anti-war protesters demonstrated outside.

Trump had said he was "not happy with the UK" and mocked Starmer by saying "this is not Winston Churchill that we're dealing with".

Starmer, a former human rights lawyer, has defended his initial decision by saying any UK "must always have a lawful basis and a viable thought-through plan".

He has also insisted that he was right to change his position because Iran's retaliation with missiles and drones to the US-Israeli strikes have threatened British interests and allies in the region.



Anti-war protesters leave placards at an entrance to RAF Fairford in south west England yesterday. (AFP)

Lawmakers in Starmer's ruling Labour party remain haunted by former prime minister Tony Blair's disastrous support for the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

A Survation poll of 1,045 Britons published on Friday found that 56 percent of respondents believed Starmer was right not to involve Britain in the initial strikes. Only 27% said he was wrong.



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# How will the next UN chief be chosen and who wants the job?

A new United Nations secretary-general will be elected this year for a five-year term starting on January 1, 2027. The race formally started when Sierra Leone, then-president of the 15-member UN Security Council, and Annalena Baerbock, president of the 193-member General Assembly, sent a joint letter soliciting nominations on November 25. A candidate has to be nominated by a UN member state.

The job traditionally rotates among regions, but when current UN chief Antonio Guterres -- who is from Portugal -- was elected in 2016, it was supposed to be Eastern Europe's turn. Next on the list is Latin America. However, some diplomats expect candidates from other regions. Baerbock has asked countries to nominate candidates by April 1 so they are able to take part in so-called interactive dialogues in the week of April 20, which will be broadcast online. At these meetings candidates will be able to present their vision statement and UN member states will be able to ask questions.

**Rafael Grossi - Argentina:** When asked by Reuters on September 3, Grossi said he was definitely going to run: "Yes, I am going to do that, yes." A veteran Argentine diplomat, Grossi is director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, a role he has held since 2019. Argentina formally nominated him on November 26, 2025.

**Michelle Bachelet - Chile:** The former Chilean president was formally nominated for the post by Chile, Brazil and Mexico on February 2. Bachelet was Chile's first female head of state and twice served as president of the South American nation. Bachelet was UN high commissioner for human rights from 2018-22 and executive director of UN Women from 2010-13.

## The United Nations has been working to improve the transparency of the historically opaque selection process

In her statement for the post, she said she was confident her experience had prepared her "to confront a moment in which the international system faces challenges unprecedented in scale, urgency, and complexity"; and she pledged a focus on "rebuilding trust in the United Nations."

Rebeca Grynspan - Costa Rica: Costa Rica has nominated

former Vice President Rebeca Grynspan, a UN spokesperson said this week. President Rodrigo Chaves announced plans for the nomination on October 8. Grynspan, a politician and economist, currently serves as Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

**Macky Sall - Senegal:** A UN spokesperson said on March 2 that Sall, the former president of Senegal, had been nominated by Burundi. In his vision statement for the role, Sall said the world was going through a deep crisis in which the UN faced growing mistrust and an unprecedented risk of weakening. He said the organization needed to be reformed, streamlined, and modernized to address 21st-century challenges.

The UN Security Council will formally recommend a candidate to the General Assembly for election as the 10th UN secretary-general later this year. The Security Council will hold secret ballots - referred to as straw polls - until a consensus is reached on a candidate. The choices council members are given for each candidate in the straw poll are: encourage, discourage, or no opinion.

Ultimately, the five permanent veto-wielding council members - the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France - must agree on a candidate. The ballots for the veto powers in the straw poll are traditionally a different colour to those of the 10 elected members. When Guterres was chosen in 2016 to be recommended to the General Assembly, it took six straw polls for the Security Council to reach agreement.

The Council then adopts a resolution, traditionally behind closed doors, recommending an appointment to the Assembly. The resolution needs nine votes in favour and no vetoes to pass. The General Assembly's approval of the appointment of a secretary-general has long been seen as a rubber stamp.

The United Nations has been working to improve the transparency of the historically opaque selection process.

In a resolution adopted in September 2025, the General Assembly said each candidate should provide a vision statement when they are formally nominated and be given the opportunity to present it. The statement should also be published on a dedicated United Nations web page. — Reuters

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# Ultimately, it's Iran's choice



By Jamil K Mroue

Iran is in a war it did not choose in full, yet one it helped to script in part. Iran is also in a leadership rupture that no missile can resolve. Outsiders will claim authorship of the outcome - Washington by force, Israel by daring, Russia or China by opportunism, Europe by handwringing. But Iran's future, in the end, can only be decided by Iranians: by what they consent to build, and what they refuse to tolerate.

That is not romantic nationalism. It is strategic realism. Military campaigns can shatter infrastructure; sanctions can starve investment; covert action can decapitate elites. None of that produces legitimacy. And legitimacy - more than centrifuges, proxies, or slogans - is what decides whether a country regenerates after trauma or sinks into permanent siege.

Iran has been living through a leadership crisis for more than a century, and it keeps reappearing in different costumes. The Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11 produced a Majles and a constitutional framework that many Iranians still cite as the origin of modern political legitimacy - only to be battered by internal factionalism and foreign pressure. The Pahlavis modernised at speed - schools, infrastructure, law codes - while relying on top-down social engineering that treated citizens less like partners than like raw material. The Islamic Revolution promised dignity, authenticity, and justice; it delivered a hybrid system where popular politics exist, but ultimate sovereignty is anchored in the doctrine of velayat-e faqih (guardianship of the jurist), embedded in the post-revolution constitution.

**The Iran-Iraq war**

Then came the trauma that hardened everything: the Iran-Iraq war, eight years of mass death and insecurity. The Islamic Republic's strategic reflex - building buffers, cultivating proxies, distrusting the West - has always drawn energy from that wound, as well as from an older one: the 1953 coup that removed Mohammad Mosaddegh and restored the Shah, funded by America and Britain. When nations feel repeatedly violated, paranoia becomes policy. Sometimes it is even rational paranoia.

What makes this moment so dangerous is not only the violence, but the direction it is taking. Today's war is widening in the wrong direction. Iranian strikes that spill into the Gulf - dragging the GCC into the line of fire - are not "clever escalation." They are the opposite: a masterclass in turning potential neutrals into motivated adversaries. Analysts have long warned that attacks

on Gulf states risk collapsing Gulf neutrality and hardening alignment with the United States, widening the anti-Iran coalition rather than splitting it.

This is not merely a diplomatic error. It is an economic own-goal. When shipping in the Strait of Hormuz is imperilled, the Gulf is not just a bystander; Iran is clogging the artery. The disruption hits energy markets, logistics, and - often overlooked - strategic inputs like helium supply that matters for chipmaking and the AI buildout. Qatar is a major helium exporter; disruption there ripples into semiconductor production and the broader technology economy. If Iran's goal is to "turn the war into a quagmire for America," widening the theatre to the GCC is a poor way to do it. Quagmires are built by isolating your enemy, not by recruiting friends for them.

There is a second strategic danger: escalation into the Gulf accelerates Israel's "day after" vision - an approach that treats fragmentation in neighbouring states as a form of security. In Syria, Israel's leadership has publicly framed policy around demilitarising swathes of territory and "protecting" specific communities, notably the Druze, in a way that signals comfort with the weakening of central authority. In parallel, Israel's political imagination for the region increasingly flirts with the idea that semi-autonomous enclaves - ethnic, sectarian, tribal - can substitute for coherent states.

Meanwhile, credible reporting has described Israeli efforts in the Palestinian arena to arm or empower local militias or clan-based groups as alternative power structures - tactics that can create semi-autonomous pockets and complicate any future reconstitution of credible governance. Whatever one thinks of Hamas, building politics out of armed local fiefdoms is not a blueprint for stability. It is a blueprint for permanent instability, a transaction whose costs are paid in blood and aid convoys.

For Israel the assumption behind fragmentation-as-security is seductive and mistaken. Seductive because it promises a neighbour too divided to coordinate. Mistaken because it produces chronic instability, border volatility, radicalisation, and endless micro-conflicts that spill outward. A shattered neighbourhood does not become safe; it becomes permanently flammable.

Iran should recognise the trap. A strategy of making the war painful for America and its partners can end up validating Israel's most short-sighted instincts - more fragmentation, more local proxies,

more "community-based" buffers - and locking the region into a decades-long contest of centrifugal forces. If Tehran's idea is to turn this war into a quagmire for the United States, it may find it is accelerating the very Israeli approach that ensures the region never exits the cycle of insecurity.

There is a better option, and it requires an Iranian policy pivot that many in Tehran will instinctively resist because it feels like concession. It is not concession. It is the oldest form of statecraft: regrouping.

Iran's strongest move is not to widen the war. It is to narrow the battlefield and widen the coalition for stability. That means an inclusion diplomacy that rebuilds functional alignment with the GCC and Turkey around three interests that are fundamental, civilised, and therefore revolutionary in this region: stability of borders and shipping routes; economic development and investment confidence; and insulation of domestic pluralism from external manipulation.

This is not a utopian "regional harmony" pitch. It is a hard-nosed way to create a strategic incentive for America - still the dominant superpower - to prefer a stable, investable region rather than a permanent crisis theatre that bleeds resources while China expands influence through trade, infrastructure, and technology. Even American strategists who love hard power understand bandwidth. If Washington is forced to prioritise continuous Middle East firefighting, it reduces its ability to compete with China elsewhere. An Iran that repositions itself as part of a stability bloc - rather than the engine of perpetual disruption - changes the cost-benefit calculus in Washington in a way missiles never will.

Iran's dilemma is not new. It is written into its civilisational self-understanding - most famously in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. The epic is not just myth; it is a long meditation on legitimacy, kingship, and the ruin that comes when power confuses itself with the nation.

In the tragedy of Rostam and Esfandiyar, a paranoid king - Goshtasp - turns Iran's two noblest forces against each other. Rostam is the heroic vitality of the realm: independent strength, rooted confidence, national endurance. Esfandiyar is disciplined legitimacy: duty, mission, order, the serious idea of the state. Goshtasp, fearing his own son's stature, commands Esfandiyar to bring Rostam in chains - manufacturing a conflict within Iran. The result is a duel that destroys a prince, poisons the victor, and weakens the realm.

That is the model of besieged leadership: insecure, divisive,

jealous, willing to sacrifice national cohesion to preserve personal dominance. Many Iranians would recognise the pattern in modern clothing. It is not hard to see how a leadership that lives by siege can become addicted to siege, needing external enemies to justify internal control.

What the region hopes - quietly, pragmatically, selfishly - is that Iran will choose a different archetype of leadership: one that harnesses Rostam's energy and Esfandiyar's steadfastness without weaponising them against each other; one that is closer to the Shahnameh ideal of just rule - often associated with Kay Khosrow, the king who embodies justice, restraint, and legitimacy rooted in moral order rather than fear. That ideal is not a fairy tale; it is a cultural argument about what authority is for.

**Civilisational opportunity**

History is cruel but occasionally generous: civilisational opportunity often springs from war. Countries have turned defeat into renewal when the shock forces institutional reform, resets corrupt bargains, and makes real competence politically irresistible. But this only happens when leadership stops behaving like a besieged Goshtasp - lashing out, widening enemies, tightening the internal corral - and starts behaving like a Kay Khosrow: restraining ego, privileging justice, and aligning strength to rebuilding.

For Iran, that means three immediate strategic corrections. First, stop treating the GCC as a pressure point. It is a strategic bridge. Attacking Gulf states invites exactly the coalition Tehran fears, while poisoning the economic environment Iran itself will need for recovery. Second, deny Israel the fragmentation narrative. The region's answer to partition logic is not counter-partition; it is coordinated support for intact states and accountable governance, so that "minority protection" is not weaponised into permanent dismemberment.

Third, convert "resistance" from a militarised brand into a diplomatic architecture: stabilise borders, de-escalate proxy theatres, and make investment and growth the new national prestige project. That, far more than theatrical escalation, creates strategic interest for the United States - because it lowers America's regional policing bill while freeing attention for its competition with China.

Iran can continue to fight like a cornered state and become the justification for every hardliner's fantasy map. Or it can fight - politically, economically, institutionally - for a post-war settlement that restores its dignity through competence and stability. The region, including the Gulf, does not need an Iran that wins by making everyone lose. It needs an Iran that wins by making normal life possible again.

Ferdowsi's lesson is brutally modern: when leadership is insecure, it turns heroes into enemies. When leadership is just, it turns strength into a future.

(Jamil K Mroue is a Lebanese writer and previous editor of Al Hayat newspaper in London and The Daily Star in Beirut)



Smoke rises following an explosion in Tehran. (Reuters)

# 'Significant' acceleration of global warming since 2015: study

AFP  
Paris

Global warming has accelerated in a "statistically significant" way since 2015, according to a study published by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK).

"Over the past 10 years, the estimated warming rate has been around 0.35C per decade, depending on the dataset, compared with just under 0.2C per decade on average from 1970 to 2015," the study found.

"This recent rate is higher than in any previous decade since the beginning of instrumental records in 1880," it added.

The study relied on observational data on climate change from Nasa, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Berkeley Earth, a California-based non-profit research organisation.

Study co-author Grant Foster said that the researchers had "filtered out" natural influences likely to obscure the underlying temperature trend, such as the El Nino phenomenon, volcanic eruptions, and variations in solar activity.

In this way, "the 'noise' is reduced, making the underlying long-term warming signal more clearly visible," Foster added.

"The adjusted data show an acceleration of global warming since 2015 with a statistical certainty of over 98%," said Stefan Rahmstorf,

## Study says the last 11 years have been the warmest ever recorded, with 2024 topping the podium, 2023 in second place

PIK researcher and lead author of the study.

"If the warming rate of the past 10 years continues, it would lead to a long-term exceedance of the 1.5C limit of the Paris Agreement before 2030," Rahmstorf added.

Scientists say the last 11 years have been the warmest ever recorded, with 2024 topping the podium and 2023 in second place.

"After correcting for the effects of El Nino and the solar maximum, 2023 and 2024, which were exceptionally warm years, become somewhat cooler, but remain the two

warmest years since the beginning of instrumental records," the PIK study says.

The question of a potential increase in the rate of planetary warming has sparked debate within the scientific community.

Zeke Hausfather, a climatologist at Berkeley Earth, told AFP that "there is now pretty widespread (if not quite universal) agreement that there has been a detectable acceleration in warming in recent years".

But the methods used in the PIK study to remove natural variability are "decidedly imperfect and will

likely leave some remaining effects", he added.

In 2024, a study published in the Communications Earth & Environment journal argued that the available data do not show a statistically robust recent acceleration of warming above and beyond the increase already observed since the 1970s.

Interviewed in 2025 by AFP, Robert Vautard, co-chair of the IPCC working group on the scientific basis of climate change, said the recent records were "surprising" but not "aberrant" in light of earlier scientific estimates.

Beyond natural fluctuations, he particularly stressed the need to study the influence of global declines in aerosol emissions.

These particles, emitted by hu-

man activity, tend to cool the planet and partially offset warming by reflecting part of the sun's radiation and altering cloud formation.

According to Hausfather, "it remains unclear how much of the additional warming over the past decade in particular is a forced response" — in other words, due to external factors that alter the climate in a lasting way, for example the continued increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

Hausfather also pointed to the "rapid reduction" in global emissions of sulphur dioxide, which "have been masking a portion of historical warming". That "unforced variability" was also a possible factor in the warming trend over the past decade, he added.



Rescuers evacuate a body retrieved from under the rubble of a five-story residential building which was hit by a ballistic missile in Kharkiv yesterday. (AFP)



Firefighters extinguish a blaze and clear rubble at a five-story residential building in Kharkiv yesterday. (AFP)

## Macron condemns 'unacceptable attack' on UN peacekeepers

AFP  
Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday condemned an "unacceptable attack" on UN peacekeeping forces in southern Lebanon, after speaking with his Lebanese and Syrian counterparts.

"France is working with its partners to prevent the conflict from spreading further in the region," Macron said on X, highlighting the "key stabilising role" played by the UN Interim force in Lebanon (Unifil).

"The sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and Lebanon, as for every country in the region, must be respected," he said.

Two UN peacekeepers from Ghana were critically wounded in the missile attack on their position in the town of Qawzah, according to Lebanese state media and the Ghanaian military.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun accused Israel of targeting them, as the war unleashed by US-Israeli strikes on Iran last Saturday engulfed Lebanon.

Macron said France would remain "engaged" in Unifil, which includes around 700 French troops.

Unifil has acted as a buffer between Israel and Lebanon for decades and was assisting the Lebanese army while it was dismantling Hezbollah infrastructure near the Israeli border after the last war opposing the Iran-backed group and Israel in 2024.

The peacekeeping mission plans to withdraw all troops from Lebanon by mid-2027.

# Strikes kill 12 across Ukraine

AFP  
Kyiv

Russia fired a volley of missiles and drones across Ukraine overnight on Friday to Saturday, killing 12 people and wounding more than a dozen, including children.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had launched 29 missiles and 480 drones, several of which targeted energy and railway infrastructure.

Authorities in Kharkiv, the second-largest city, said a ballistic missile strike destroyed a five-storey apartment block, killing 10 people.

AFP reporters saw rescuers sifting through the debris, where several people were believed to be trapped.

"Since last night, the rubble of a residential building in Kharkiv is being cleared following a Russian ballistic missile strike," Ze-

lensky said on social media. The victims included two women and their two children, mayor Igor Terekhov said.

"Russia has not abandoned its attempts to destroy Ukraine's residential and critical infrastructure," Zelensky added, urging the country's allies to continue providing military support.

The Ukrainian leader said he informed French President Emmanuel Macron about the consequences of the attacks during a phone conversation.

During the call, Zelensky said it was important that a 90 billion euro (\$105-billion) EU aid package as well as the next round of sanctions against Russia, currently blocked by Hungary, "are implemented".

Russia said it had carried out a "massive high-precision strike" against military targets in Ukraine. It routinely denies targeting civilian infrastructure.

The Russian army said earlier it

had intercepted over 120 Ukrainian drones overnight.

The Moscow-installed authorities of Ukraine's occupied Kherson region said one person was killed and four were wounded in a Ukrainian drone strike.

An air raid alert was triggered during the night across the entire country. The Polish air force said on X it had scrambled military aircraft to protect its airspace in regions bordering Ukraine, as it usually does in the event of large-scale Russian strikes.

One person died in Ukraine's eastern region of Dnipropetrovsk and three were wounded in the capital Kyiv, authorities said.

In the Sumy region bordering Russia, a 24-year-old man died in his car when it was hit by a Russian drone, according to local officials.

The drone barrages from either side follow on the heels of an exchange between Moscow and Kyiv of 500 prisoners of war each, in line with accords reached during

the latest round of peace talks in Geneva.

Negotiations appeared to have stalled amid a lack of progress and since the eruption of war in the Middle East.

Zelensky earlier warned that a prolonged Middle East conflict could hinder deliveries of US-made air defence missiles.

Ukraine is facing a shortage of expensive US PAC-3 air defence ammunition.

Zelensky has offered to the United States an exchange of Ukraine's drone interceptors for the missiles.

He has also suggested sending drone specialists to help shield Washington's Gulf allies from Iranian drones.

A delay in US missile supplies during winter made Ukraine's civil infrastructure more vulnerable to widespread Russian air strikes that left hundreds of thousands without heating in freezing temperatures.

## Sweden seizes false-flagged ship with suspected stolen Ukrainian grain

AFP  
Stockholm

Police in Sweden have seized a false-flagged cargo ship off its southern coast believed to belong to Russia's shadow fleet and suspected of transporting stolen Ukrainian grain, authorities said yesterday.

The 96m (315-foot) Caffa left Casablanca in Morocco on February 24 and was headed for Saint Petersburg, Russia when armed Swedish police boarded it on Friday off the southern town of Trelleborg.

"The vessel is on the Ukraine sanctions list. Information indicates that it has essentially been

used to transport grain that is stolen, as we understand it, from Ukraine," the coast guard's acting head of operations, Daniel Stenling, told a press conference.

"We have been able to establish that the vessel is sailing under a false flag. She is registered in Guinea, but that registration is in fact false," he added.

"A majority" of the 11 crew members were Russian, Stenling said.

The Russian embassy in Stockholm said it had been informed by the Swedish coast guard that 10 of the crew were Russian citizens.

"The Russian embassy in Sweden is in contact with the competent Swedish authorities and is ready, if necessary, to provide

consular assistance to the Russian nationals among the crew," it wrote on Telegram.

One crew member was under investigation for violation of the maritime code on seaworthiness and on ship safety, Stenling said, refusing to disclose the suspect's identity or crew role.

"The investigative measures we have taken so far reinforce our suspicions and our view that there are extensive maritime safety deficiencies on this vessel," he said.

The Swedish Transport Agency was to inspect the ship and determine whether it was seaworthy and authorised to continue its journey.

Moscow's "shadow fleet" consists of vessels with opaque own-

ership used to skirt Western sanctions.

"It's a problem for us that we are seeing more ships that don't respect the law of the sea," Stenling said, noting that "the risk of accidents increases when ships are not certified."

"We might not even know what kind of crew is on board, what kind of skills they have, what certifications they hold, and they often lack insurance if something were to happen," he added.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga yesterday thanked Sweden.

"Collective action against such vessels is gaining momentum. This is a welcome development," he wrote on X.



People queue at a gas station amid spikes in petrol prices in Karachi yesterday. (AFP)

## Pakistan raises fuel prices due to Mideast tensions

Pakistan on Friday raised consumer prices for diesel and petrol about 20%, citing higher oil prices driven by conflict in Iran. In a televised video message, Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik announced a historically large 55-rupee (\$0.20 a litre) increase to 321.17 rupees for petrol and 335.86 rupees for diesel.

"We have taken this decision under compulsion because of a sharp surge in petroleum prices globally," the minister said.

The decision is likely to ripple through to higher inflation and hit Pakistan's impoverished population.

Before the announcement, fuel stations in major cities like Lahore and Karachi had long

lines of people waiting to fill up. Queuing at a Lahore station, business owner Imran Hussain said he wanted to be prepared in case of a shortage. "I have been waiting for my turn for the last 70 minutes," he said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday warned against fuel hoarding and said hoarders would be punished.

"We have sufficient petrol reserves. But we are planning to stretch them because we don't know when the Middle East crises will end," said the minister.

Pakistan imports oil mainly from Saudi Arabia and the UAE through the Strait of Hormuz.

The government will reassess prices weekly, the oil minister said. (Reuters)

## Women rule the roost atop the Gdansk shipyard cranes

AFP  
Gdansk

For the past 30 years, Halina Krauze has sat atop a 15m (49-foot) crane surveying the Gdansk shipyard, the birthplace of the Solidarnosc trade union.

For eight hours, the 65-year-old displaces tonnes of steel that will become ship hulls and wind turbine components.

She is one of dozens of crane operators at the huge yard, the largest in Central Europe.

Far below the cabin, hundreds of workers in overalls, helmets and protective goggles are busy at work.

The noise is constant, sparks fly and the air is full of welding fumes. Around 70 percent of Poland's

construction site crane operators are women, a tradition inherited from the Communist era.

In the Soviet period, "women had to be employed somewhere and since they couldn't do hard labour, they were integrated into other professions", explained Agnieszka Pyrzanowska, spokeswoman for the state-owned Baltic Industrial Group, which now operates part of the shipyard.

"Entire families worked for the same company."

Indeed, Krauze met her husband Stanislaw at the yard and today they work in the same unit.

"He's up there!" she exclaimed, waving energetically at another crane cabin in the sky.

Krauze joined what was then called the Vladimir Lenin shipyard in 1983, first in a coal-fired boiler room and later operating a crane.

"In the beginning, it was a shipyard. We built a good dozen ships a year. Now we build dozens of wind turbine towers. It's quite different," she said.

She is proud to have worked on the same crane as Anna Walentynowicz, one of the founders of Solidarnosc.

It was Walentynowicz's dismissal in 1980 that triggered the huge shipyard strike and the creation of the first free trade union in the Communist bloc.

Walentynowicz was "a kind of legend, especially among the older generation", Krauze remembered.

With a steady hand, she manoeuvred a huge wind turbine section, five metres in diameter, across the yard.

"There are people below you so you have to be careful nothing happens to them," said Lesia Ko-

vachuk, a 48-year-old Ukrainian colleague.

Kovalchuk was a crane operator in Ukraine for 15 years before moving to Poland as a refugee when Russia invaded her country in 2022.

Now she teaches young apprentices on Gdansk construction sites.

"In Ukraine, it's completely normal for women to operate cranes. No-one is surprised," she shrugged.

Both women agreed their male colleagues preferred to work with them than with other men.

"Women are calmer and more precise," Hrauze opined.

"Blokes try to get things done as fast as they can. Girls are all about finesse," Kovalchuk grinned.

One thing has changed though, since the Communist era.



Ukrainian overhead crane operator Nadia Bogomal works from the cabin of her crane in the production hall of the Gdansk Shipyard in Gdansk, Poland, on Friday. (AFP)

At those days, women workers used to receive small gifts on International Women's Day -- "those famous tights, chocolates,

carnations...," Krauze recalled. "There's nothing any more," she said ruefully. "The unions have all forgotten about women."

## Why Qatar will emerge stronger from the current Gulf crisis

By Dr Mohamed Althaf  
LuLu Group Global director

Whenever tensions rise in the Gulf, predictions about Qatar's vulnerability tend to appear quickly. Some commentators warn that crises in the region could weaken the country's economy, undermine its stability, or cast doubt on its long-term future. Such assessments, however, often overlook the historical resilience that has defined Qatar's rise.

Qatar did not become one of the safest, most prosperous, and most influential countries in the region by accident. Its progress has been shaped by decades of challenges, strategic decisions, and careful nation-building. Those who assume that the current crisis will derail Qatar's trajectory either forget—or perhaps never fully understood—the difficult path the country has traveled to reach its present position.

The history of the Gulf is marked by wars, shifting alliances, economic fluctuations, and geopolitical tensions. Qatar has lived through all of these realities. At various moments, the country has faced pressure and political challenges that might have destabilised less resilient states.

Yet time and again, Qatar has shown an ability not only to withstand such pressures but also to turn them into opportunities for strengthening its institutions and diversifying its economy.

Today's Qatar reflects the lessons learned from those experiences. The country has invested heavily in infrastructure, education, diplomacy, and economic diversification. Its energy resources provide a strong economic foundation, while strategic global investments have expanded its international influence.

Critics observing events from afar often underestimate how the country functions during difficult moments. I write this from my of-

fice in a country that I have called home for most of my life. Over the years, I have witnessed how Qatar responds to crises—with calm, organisation, and a clear priority on protecting the stability of the nation and the welfare of the people who live here.

Crises like this also repeatedly demonstrate the strength of Qatar's social contract with its residents, who significantly outnumber the citizens of the country. In moments of uncertainty, the state makes it clear that it will take care of everyone living here, ensuring their safety and well-being.

I witnessed this firsthand. A full residential compound where some of my colleagues were living had to be evacuated for safety reasons. Within just a few hours, they were relocated to fully furnished accommodation in Madinatna. Moving dozens of families quickly and safely into prepared housing is a complex logistical task anywhere in the world. To accomplish it within hours, at a

time when the region was facing the possibility of an aerial threat, speaks volumes about the country's preparedness and efficiency.

Another factor frequently overlooked by outside observers is Qatar's defence capability. While relatively small compared with the armed forces of larger states, Qatar's military is equipped with advanced technologies and modern defence systems. Through strategic partnerships and sustained investment, the country has developed a defence structure designed to safeguard its sovereignty and contribute to regional stability.

Beyond military readiness, the government has also invested heavily in crisis management systems, early-warning capabilities, and robust business continuity planning. These measures ensure that essential services, businesses, and daily life can continue to function even during periods of uncertainty.

To those who are genuinely

worried about our safety, it is important to understand that Qatar has prepared for situations like this with careful planning and modern resources. And to those who sit far away and pontificate about Qatar's future, the message is simple: We have been here before.

The country has faced pressure and challenges many times in its history. Each time, it adapted, strengthened its institutions, and moved forward with greater confidence.

Nations are not defined by the crises they face but by the resilience they demonstrate in overcoming them. If Qatar's history is any guide, the current moment will not weaken the country's trajectory.

On the contrary, it may well become another chapter in a story that has consistently shown one thing: when confronted with adversity, Qatar does not retreat—it adapts, endures, and ultimately emerges stronger.



Dr Mohamed Althaf

## Qatar's effective supply chain ensures easy availability of consumer goods

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

The country has a comprehensive and effective food security system that ensures the continuous availability of essential goods in sufficient quantities, several experts in economics, health, and religious guidance have affirmed. They stressed that local markets remain stable, with adequate supply levels and no indications that would justify any potential panic buying or stockpiling.

Further, they explained that the longstanding strategic plans have strengthened national food security by building safe reserve stocks, expanding storage capacities, improving logistics infrastructure, and diversifying trade partners. These measures have enhanced the country's ability to respond effectively to regional developments or possible disruptions in global supply chains. They have also called on the public to remain calm and maintain moderate purchasing behaviour, stressing that relying on information issued by official authorities helps maintain public confidence, market stability, and reflects social responsibility and solidarity within the community.

Dr Ayesha al-Qahtani, Islamic Scholar, pointed out the importance of moderation in purchasing food and essential goods, warning against excessive buying and hoarding during times of crisis. He noted that fear in exceptional circumstances is natural but this should not lead to harmful behaviours, such as over-stocking beyond actual needs. He stressed that Islamic teachings encourage faith, patience, and social solidarity, reminding people to consider the needs of others and avoid selfish behaviour.

Dr Batoul Khalifa, associate professor of Mental Health at Qatar University, explained that panic buying is often driven by psychological reactions to uncertainty and anxiety during times of crisis. Individuals may attempt to regain a sense of control by purchasing large quantities of goods. She added that such behaviour can spread

**Experts confirm that the country's stock of essential commodities is sufficient for several months, stressing that there is no reason for concern or for consumers to rush into excessive purchasing or stockpiling**



through "collective anxiety contagion," where people imitate others' actions or react to social media discussions about potential shortages. She stressed the importance of relying on verified information from official sources and acting rationally to avoid unnecessary pressure on supply chains.

Dr Reda el-Sheikh, head of Clinical Nutrition at Al-Ahli Hospital, warned against storing large quantities of food without proper storage conditions. Improper storage can lead to food spoilage, which may cause health risks or food poisoning. He noted that many food items require specific storage conditions related to temperature, humidity, and packaging. Proper food storage includes keeping items in dry, cool places, observing recommended refrigeration or freezing temperatures, monitoring expiration dates, and consuming older products first. He also advised checking stored canned foods for signs of spoilage such as rust inside the container or swelling of the can.

Dr Abdullah al-Khater, an economic expert, confirmed that the country's stock of essential commodities is sufficient for several months, stressing that there is no reason for concern or for consumers to rush into excessive purchasing or stockpiling. He noted that local markets remain highly stable

and fully capable of meeting residents' needs under normal conditions.

He further explained that the state has been implementing comprehensive strategic plans for years to strengthen the national food security system. These plans focus on maintaining secure reserve stocks of essential goods sufficient for several months, ensuring continuous availability in the market even in the event of exceptional circumstances or regional developments that might affect trade or global supply chains.

Dr al-Khater added that authorities have also expanded the country's storage capacity for food and essential commodities by developing logistics infrastructure and strengthening storage and distribution capabilities. These improvements have created a robust system capable of responding to sudden increases in demand or unexpected market changes.

He noted that past experiences have demonstrated the country's ability to efficiently manage global supply chain challenges. Qatar maintains extensive trade relations with multiple exporting countries, allowing it to diversify import sources and secure alternative suppliers when necessary, ensuring the uninterrupted flow of goods to the local markets, he added.

## Clear communication from authorities helps residents stay calm amid regional tensions

By Shaima Sherif  
Staff Reporter

As regional tensions echo across the Gulf, journalist and digital storyteller Yusuf Omar says Qatar's clear communication and responsible messaging have helped reassure residents, even as families grapple with explaining the frightening sounds of interceptions to children. As tensions continue to ripple across the Middle East, Omar says Qatar's measured communication and steady flow of information have played a key role in maintaining calm among residents during an uncertain period.

Omar, who is currently in Doha with his family, described the past few days as emotionally challenging, particularly as a parent trying to explain the situation to his young child. "My three-year-old son is asking me, 'Daddy, what is that outside? What are those explosions?' And I don't have a good answer for him," Omar said.

Residents across parts of the country have reported hearing loud explosions linked to missile interceptions, with vibrations sometimes felt in buildings. For Omar, those moments brought the reality of the situation closer to home. "The entire building felt like it was shaking today. If you're not slightly worried or concerned, then there might be something wrong with you," he said.

Despite the anxiety felt by many families, Omar praised Qatar's approach to communicating with the public, saying authorities have struck a careful balance between transparency and reassurance. "I think Qatar has been very cool, calm, and collected. It hasn't claimed to the world that everything is fine, but it also hasn't created panic," he said.

According to Omar, regular SMS alerts and detailed updates from authorities have helped residents understand what is happening and how to respond safely. "We get various SMS messages throughout the day. They tell you when there is a threat and what you should do, for example, to remain indoors or move away from windows," he explained.

Beyond immediate safety alerts, he said, the government has also provided detailed follow-up information through official social media channels, helping the public better understand the events unfolding in the region. "They are also putting out PDFs and explanations afterwards, telling people what actually happened. More information is actually more reassuring right now," Omar said. Authorities have also focused on reassuring residents about daily life,



Journalist and digital storyteller Yusuf Omar.

including the availability of essential supplies. "They are communicating about logistics on the ground as well, letting people know grocery stores are stocked and that there are sufficient water reserves," he noted.

As a former war correspondent with more than a decade of experience in journalism, Omar also stressed the importance of responsible communication online during times of crisis. "Every influencer in the region has suddenly become a war journalist overnight. But journalism comes with ethics and principles, it's about getting as close as possible to the truth," he said.

He warned that misinformation and AI-generated content circulating on social media could create unnecessary panic if shared without verification. "This is not the time for spreading rumours or unverified information. People need to think before they share," Omar said. Even amid the uncertainty, Omar said the transparency shown by authorities has helped many residents remain calm. "People feel reassured because they understand what is going on. That communication makes a real difference," he said.

## Ramadan story: A lesson, a moral, the invitation of love

By Tawfik Lamari  
Staff Reporter

One morning, a woman went out of her house and was surprised to find three elderly men with long white beards sitting in her courtyard. She didn't know them, but she felt a strange affinity for them.

She said to them gently, "I don't think I know you, but you must be hungry. Please come in I will prepare you some food." One of them asked, "Is the master of the house home?" She replied, "No, he's out." They said calmly, "Then we cannot come in." In the evening, her husband returned, and she told him what had happened. He said to her, "Go to them and invite them in." The woman went out again to invite them, but they said, "We don't enter the house together." She was surprised and asked, "Why?" One of them pointed to his companion and said, "He is called wealth," and to the second, "He is success." Then he said, smiling, "And I am love. Go back and consult with your husband: which of us would you



like to enter your home?" The woman went in and told her husband. He said enthusiastically, "What a wonderful opportunity!" "Let's invite wealth, and our house will be filled with money," said his wife. "And why not invite success?" Their daughter-in-law, who was listening from afar, said, "wouldn't it be better to invite love? If our house is filled with love, everything will be alright." The husband thought for a moment, then said, "You're right. Invite love." The woman went out and asked, "I ask love to come in?"

The old man called love got up and headed toward the house, but to her surprise, the other two old men got up and followed him. The woman asked in astonishment, "I invited love alone, so why are you coming in with him?" The two old men smiled and said, "if you had invited wealth or success, the other two would have stayed outside. But if love comes in, we will go with him wherever he goes. Where there is love, there is wealth and there is success."

Until the next Majlis reunites us, stay safe.

## A Ramadan tableau by Khawla al-Mannai

Khawla al-Mannai's painting bears a distinct Ramadan imprint, combining religious and decorative elements within a contemporary artistic framework. The central theme is the supplication "Subhan Allah wa bihamdih" (Glory be to Allah and praise be to Him), written in Thuluth script, interwoven in a decorative style that adorns the central space and directs the eye straight towards the spiritual message, reflecting a contemplative dimension. The style blends Arabic calligraphy with double floral motifs, giving the painting a sense of movement and depth, with interwoven gradations between the background and text. The decorations resemble traditional visions of Islamic art. The colours used are diverse and complementary: green symbolises fertility and growth, orange represents energy and life, and blue signifies tranquility and peace. Furthermore, the colour gradations enhance



the sense of depth and contrast between the elements of the painting, while maintaining a visual balance that captivates the eye.