



Qatar Insurance

Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

9% ▲

QAR 9.9B

Net Profit Before the Impact of P/L: Two Taxes

19% ▲

QAR 874M

Net Profit Profit attributable to QIC shareholders

9% ▲

QAR 791M

Earnings Per Share:

10% ▲

QAR 0.188

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GULF TIMES



0 668039 136499

MONDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13674

March 9, 2026
Ramadan 20, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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PM accuses Iran of betrayal, but calls for de-escalation

Monitoring Report

HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani has accused Iran of a “dangerous miscalculation” in attacking Gulf countries, while stressing that all sides must now move urgently towards de-escalation.

In an exclusive interview with Sky News, aired yesterday and conducted by lead world news presenter Yalda Hakim, the prime minister said Qatar had entered “a very difficult period” after coming under repeated missile and



drone attacks, but praised the performance of the country's defence and security forces. Describing Doha's anger over the attacks, Sheikh Mohammed said: “It is a big sense

of betrayal. Just an hour after the start of the war, Qatar and other Gulf countries have been attacked. We made clear that we were not going to take part in any ways against our neighbours.” He said the strikes had come despite Qatar's longstanding efforts to maintain constructive ties with Tehran. “All the attacks on the Gulf countries - we never expected this from our neighbour,” he said.

“We have always tried to preserve a good relationship with Iran, but the justifications and pretexts they are using are completely rejected.” At the same time, Sheikh

Mohammed underlined that the crisis could not be resolved through further military escalation. “We continue to seek de-escalation,” he said. “They are our neighbours - it's our destiny.” According to Sky News, the premier also called on the United States to help lower tensions, warning that the conflict risked pulling the wider region into war.

He said diplomacy remained the only workable way forward, adding: “The miscalculation by the Iranians to attack Gulf countries has destroyed everything,” but insisted renewed negotiations were now essential.

Amir receives more worldwide support

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a telephone call yesterday from French President Emmanuel Macron.

The president reiterated France's condemnation of the ongoing Iranian aggression against Qatar and countries of the region, along with the consequent threat to their security, stability, and sovereignty.

Macron underscored France's full solidarity with Qatar in confronting the attacks. He commended the efficiency of the Qatar Armed Forces in reinforcing security and protecting all those on its soil, including French residents.

Addressing the bilateral relations, both sides emphasised the importance of ensuring the stability of energy supplies, freedom of navigation in critical maritime lanes, and shoring up the existing defence co-operation between the two countries. The two sides reiterated their commitment to continuing the enduring



strategic partnership between them, stressing that achieving lasting stability in the region requires de-escalation and giving dialogue and diplomatic paths overriding priority in addressing the current challenge. **To Page 3**

Qatar Airways to operate series of emergency flights

By Tawfik Lamary
Staff Reporter

Qatar Airways will operate a series of emergency flights over the coming days through designated air corridors, offering a lifeline to thousands of passengers stranded by the regional crisis - even as Qatari airspace remains officially closed. The airline will begin outbound departures from Doha today, March 9, with flights heading to Seoul (ICN), Moscow (SVO), London Heathrow (LHR), Delhi (DEL), Madrid (MAD), Islamabad (ISB), Beijing (PKX), Perth (PER), and Nairobi (NBO).

A broader second wave of departures follows on March 10, adding Cairo (CAI), Jeddah (JED), Manila (MNL), Mumbai (BOM), Istanbul (IST), Frankfurt (FRA), Colombo (CMB), Milan (MXP), Muscat (MCT), and Kochi (COK) to the schedule, alongside repeat services to London Heathrow, Delhi, Nairobi, Islamabad, and Madrid.

Return flights into Doha mirror the same pattern. Inbound services from March 9's nine destinations - Seoul, Moscow, London Heathrow, Delhi, Madrid, Islamabad, Beijing, Perth, and Nairobi - are scheduled to arrive in Doha on March 10. The fuller roster of fifteen destinations operating outbound on March 10 will in turn fly back into Doha on March 11, covering Cairo, London Heathrow, Jeddah, Manila, Kochi, Muscat, Istanbul, Mumbai, Delhi, Nairobi, Islamabad, Madrid, Frankfurt, Colombo, and Milan.

To Page 3

Global spare capacity 'insufficient' to replace Qatar LNG, says QFC

Technical and structural barriers make a rapid pivot nearly impossible

By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

Global spare capacity of liquefied natural gas (LNG) is “insufficient” to replace Qatar's volumes on “technical constraints” of LNG importers and “structural vulnerability” of gas exporters, even as closure of Ras Laffan and Mesaieed Industrial City will impact the country's export revenues, according to the Qatar Financial Centre (QFC).

“There is not enough spare capacity to fully replace Qatar's LNG volumes,” the QFC said in its analysis on the implications from Iranian drone strikes triggered force majeure declaration (by QatarEnergy).

Stressing that pre-crisis market conditions were already tight; it said the global LNG imports amounted to 578bcm, while available export capacity was 593bcm; leaving spare capacity of about 15bcm.

“The 15bcm spare capacity is

nowhere near the 110bcm at risk from Qatar,” it said after QatarEnergy, the state-owned company handling all of Qatar's LNG exports, suspended operations citing security concerns with Iranian drone strikes hitting Ras Laffan Industrial City and Mesaieed Industrial City - two primary LNG production and export hubs for Qatar.

Qatar's hydrocarbons bellwether announced a halt in production, pending damage assessment and security evaluation, implying 20% of the world's LNG export capacity going offline.

With the stoppage of production and export of LNG, the importers of Qatar's LNG would have to pivot towards the spot LNG market, it said, adding LNG prices spiked due to production halts and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which 100% of Qatar's LNG exports flow.

In the spot market, LNG importers started paying a premium price against what they would be paying under their contracts



‘Nakilat’s superior operational excellence in energy transportation and maritime services not only supports Qatar’s vision in developing the LNG market, but also contributes towards developing the country’s shipping and maritime industry.’ (File photo)

with Qatar, it said, pointing out the 39% increase in Asian LNG benchmark and more than 50% in European gas futures, largest move since 2022 crisis.

Highlighting the storage buffers of Qatar's key import partners; China has 7.6m tonnes, which provided about two to four weeks coverage; Japan 4.4m tonnes (2-4 weeks coverage); and South Korea 3.5m tonnes (2-4 weeks coverage),

the QFC said, quoting CNBC data.

In 2025, Asia received most of Qatar's LNG exports with shipments to China amounting to 20m tonnes, India (12m), Taiwan (8m), Pakistan (7m), South Korea (7m) and others (29m). After Asia, followed Europe, it said, adding 100% of Qatar's LNG exports flow through Strait of Hormuz, which is currently all but shut. **To Page 3**

30% required to return to offices from today

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The General Secretariat of the Cabinet has ordered a partial return to in-person work starting today, March 9, with at least 30% of government employees required to report to their workplaces. The remaining 70% may continue working remotely, with mothers and people with disabilities given priority for that option. The directive applies across all ministries, government bodies, and public institutions, and remains in effect until further notice. Exempted from the decision are personnel in the military, security, and health sectors, as well as those in roles that inherently require a physical presence. The move follows earlier precautionary measures announced in Qatar amid regional developments.

Interior Ministry urges strict adherence to safety protocols in the workplace

New guidelines detail employee conduct during security alerts

The Ministry of Interior has issued safety guidelines for employees at workplaces, outlining a set of instructions and procedures to be followed when responding to precautionary security alerts. This initiative is part of the Ministry's commitment to enhancing public safety and raising awareness of preventive measures within the workplace.

The ministry clarified that employees must take national alerts or warnings issued through official channels seriously and immediately comply with their instructions. They should also



follow updates only through official sources and refrain from spreading rumours or republishing unreliable information.

The ministry emphasised the necessity of adhering to the directives of the relevant authorities and security and safety teams at the workplace, avoiding any individual interpretations.

Regarding safe conduct within buildings, the ministry urged employees to remain inside the building upon the issuance of any

precautionary alert, maintain calm, and avoid causing alarm. Employees should also avoid going outside or to open areas and stay away from windows, glass facades, and open surfaces.

The ministry stressed the importance of staying away from energy sources and flammable materials, and minimising unnecessary movement between floors or buildings.

Regarding evacuation of facilities, the ministry recommended familiarising oneself with emergency exits, evacuation routes, and designated assembly points within the workplace. It also advised against using elevators when an evacuation alert or instruction is given, recommending instead the use of stairs and emergency exits. **To Page 3**

Arab League slams Iran attacks, backs the right to self-defence

Cairo
QNA

The Arab League's Ministerial Council has unanimously condemned Iran's attacks on eight Arab states, declaring them illegal, unprovoked violations of national sovereignty and a grave threat to regional and international peace and security - and explicitly endorsing the targeted nations' right to strike back.

Meeting virtually in an extraordinary emergency session convened at the request of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, and Egypt, the Council passed Resolution No. 9241, expressing full Arab solidarity with Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, Jordan, and Iraq - all of whom have been subjected to Iranian attacks. The session reflected the breadth and urgency of Arab concern, with the resolution's co-sponsors spanning the Gulf, the Levant, and North Africa.

The resolution pulled no punches in its characterisation of Iran's conduct. It condemned what it described as the deliberate and unlawful targeting of civilian installations and infrastructure, including airports, seaports, energy facilities, food security services, public utilities, residential areas, and diplomatic premises. Such acts, the Council said, have endangered civilian lives, caused casualties, and resulted in material destruction in flagrant violation of international law and international humanitarian law. Critically, the Council reaffirmed the right of targeted Arab states to legitimate self-defence - individually or collectively - in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, effectively giving collective Arab political backing to any military response the affected nations may choose to mount. It endorsed all necessary measures they may take to safeguard their security, protect their territories, and defend their citizens and residents. The Council also recalled the Joint Arab Defence and Economic Co-operation Treaty, stressing that the security of member states is indivisible and that an attack on any one member constitutes a direct attack on all.

RAMADAN THOUGHT



Be conscious of Allah wherever you are, and follow up a bad deed with a good deed, and it will eradicate it, and treat people in a kind manner. [At-Tirmithi]

Prayer times

Fajr...4:33; Zuhr...11:44; Asr...3:08; Maghrib...5:43; Isha...7:13

Fasting times

Iftar today 5.43pm
Imsak tomorrow..... 4.22am



HE Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani. www

Deputy PM receives phone calls from French, Greek ministers

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani received phone calls yesterday from France's Minister of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Catherine Vautrin and Greece's Minister of National Defence Nikos Dendias. During the calls, the latest developments and security updates in the region were reviewed, and aspects of joint co-operation and co-ordination in light of the current circumstances were discussed. - QNA



Al-Khulaifi speaks with IAEA chief and ministers

HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi received yesterday phone calls from International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi, and foreign ministers Abdoulaye Diop (Mali) and Mahmoud Thabit Kombo (Tanzania). They discussed the situation in the region. - QNA

Arab League renews condemnation of Iran's escalation of attacks

The Arab League strongly condemned yesterday the renewed and escalating Iranian attacks targeting civilians and vital facilities in the Gulf region, saying that this reckless and unjustified escalation represents a major miscalculation that Iran must immediately reconsider. In a statement, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit stressed that Iran is engaging in aggression against nations by targeting vital infrastructure and civilian objectives, warning that such actions are pushing the entire region into a highly dangerous path of escalation. He noted that he is closely monitoring developments related to the Iranian escalation, describing it as a desperate strategy against countries that did not participate in the war, adding that this approach will only deepen hostility and hatred in the region. - QNA

Qatar takes part in Arab League ministerial meeting

Qatar participated in the Arab League Council extraordinary session at the ministerial level, held yesterday via video conferencing. Qatar's representation at the meeting was headed by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi. The meeting discussed the Iranian attacks on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of several Arab countries, which constitute a flagrant violation of international laws and charters as well as the principles of good neighborliness. It also addressed the risks these actions pose to the security and stability of the region. - QNA

Qatar extends condolences to Kuwait over border security officers' deaths

Qatar has expressed its heartfelt condolences to Kuwait following the deaths of two security officers in the line of duty. A statement yesterday from Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs carried Doha's full solidarity with the government and people of Kuwait during the painful loss of two officers of Kuwait's General Directorate of Land Border Security. The statement reiterated Qatar's support for all measures taken by Kuwait to safeguard its sovereignty and security. The ministry also extended Qatar's deepest condolences to the families of the two officers, praying for God's mercy upon them and for the protection and safety of Kuwait and its people. - QNA

The statement reiterated Qatar's support for all measures taken by Kuwait to safeguard its sovereignty and security. The ministry also extended Qatar's deepest condolences to the families of the two officers, praying for God's mercy upon them and for the protection and safety of Kuwait and its people. - QNA

Iran's aggression ... 'only invokes animosity toward Tehran'

The director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding, Chris Doyle (pictured left), has decried the Iranian aggression against Qatar and several countries of the region. Talking to the Qatar News Agency

(QNA), he said that these Iranian assaults should not have happened, and he hopes to see the calls for ceasing these attacks prevail within the inner sanctums of the Iranian leadership, while noting that these attacks would

not help Iran but would ultimately lead to war spillover. Doyle added that Iran's attacks are an escalatory step and will never assist Iran but will inevitably invoke animosity and make Iran lose its friends. - QNA

Ministry of Interior
Affirms Importance of Committing to Security & Safety Procedures within Work Headquarters

Ministry Asks Everyone to Take Caution & Commit to Official Instructions Issued

- Follow Instructions By Specialized Entities & Security & Safety Teams within Workplace without Solo Effort
- Save Emergency Numbers And Communication Methods of Security Heads Accredited within Workplace
- Know Beforehand Emergency Exits, Evacuation Paths & Meeting Points
- Avoid Using Elevators During Alarms or Evacuation Notices & Avoid Close Gatherings & Crowd Pushing
- Stay Inside Following Alarm Notice & Keep Calm & Avoid Causing Tension Amongst Colleagues & Visitors
- Keep Obstacles Away in Paths & Emergency Exits to Speed Up Evacuation

Stay in Secure Areas When Hearing Alarming Sounds Until Announcement of Clearance of Danger

Retail chains scale up online delivery services, keep shelves stocked

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Despite ongoing regional tensions, supermarkets in Qatar say grocery supplies remain sufficient for the coming weeks, with retailers strengthening supply chains, expanding 24-hour store operations and scaling up online delivery services to meet steady consumer demand. Major hypermarket chains across the country, including LuLu, Al Meera, Monoprix, Safari, and Carrefour, continue to operate at full capacity with well-stocked shelves.

At the same time, authorities have reassured the public that markets remain stable and essential goods are readily available.

LuLu Hypermarket Qatar regional director Shanavas P M told *Gulf Times* that they have taken various operational measures to cope with the recent increase in demand, particularly in online orders and home deliveries.

"LuLu Hypermarket is currently managing the surge in online orders and home deliveries by operating from 16 stores across Qatar, supported by sufficient manpower and adequate stock availability," he said. "We have strengthened our operational capacity to ensure that customer orders are processed efficiently and delivered on time."

Shanavas added that operational hours have been extended and logistics and delivery systems optimised to accommodate the increased demand over the past week.

"Our dedicated teams, including store staff, warehouse personnel, and delivery partners, are working tirelessly to fulfil online orders and ensure smooth home delivery services for our customers," he said. "We have also prioritised the availability of essential food and grocery items so that customers can conveniently shop from home without any concerns."

Shanavas also reassured customers that LuLu maintains adequate stocks of both food and non-food products across its outlets in Qatar.

"LuLu Hypermarket would like to reassure its valued customers and stakeholders that there is sufficient availability of grocery and essential items across all our outlets in Qatar," he said. "Our supply chain operations remain stable and efficient, and we currently maintain adequate stock levels of both food and non-food products in all LuLu Hypermarket stores."

According to Shanavas, the company has



taken proactive measures to ensure uninterrupted procurement and distribution of essential commodities, working closely with local suppliers and international partners to keep products flowing into stores.

"Regular shipments and replenishment processes are in place to maintain consistent stock levels across all locations," he said, adding that inventory management and distribution systems have also been strengthened to respond quickly to customer demand.

"Essential grocery items, fresh produce, dairy products, and other daily necessities are being closely monitored to maintain steady availability," Shanavas added.

To provide greater convenience and reduce crowding in stores, LuLu has also opened 12 outlets across Qatar, all of which are open 24 hours.

These are stores in D-Ring Road, Al Gharafa, Al Messila, Al Khor Mall, Barwa City, Pearl Island, Abu Sidra Mall, Ain Khalid, Al Wukair, Al Meshaf, Salwa Road and Al Hilal.

Shanavas said that the response from customers has been "very positive", noting that the extended hours allow shoppers to visit stores at any time of day or night, avoiding peak-hour congestion.

"This initiative has also helped prevent any panic situations by ensuring continuous availability of products," he said, adding that demand remains steady, particularly for food-related items.

At the national level, Qatar maintains



a long-term strategic food and essential goods reserve, helping ensure availability amid regional or international supply chain challenges.

The country has also invested heavily in local production, achieving high levels of self-sufficiency in dairy, poultry and several agricultural products.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is conducting intensive daily field inspections to monitor markets, prevent



LuLu maintains adequate stocks of food items across its outlets in Qatar. - Supplied photos



price manipulation and ensure that goods remain readily available.

Authorities have assured the public that shelves are well-stocked and urged consumers to purchase only what they need.

The ministry also stressed that supplies remain plentiful and markets stable, while encouraging residents to report any irregularities or violations through official channels as part of ongoing efforts to protect consumers and maintain market stability.



Embassy monitoring situation 24/7 as Filipino expats get assistance

The Philippine embassy in Doha has stepped up monitoring and assistance for Filipino nationals in the country, reporting one minor injury and providing temporary accommodation to a number who have been moved out of their residences.

In a statement posted on its social media page, the embassy said that it is monitoring developments around the clock and co-ordinating with local authorities, diplomatic missions in Doha, Philippine embassies across the region, and relevant government offices in Manila as the situation unfolds.

As of the latest update, one Filipino national sustained minor injuries caused by shrapnel from an intercepted missile.

Embassy officials said the individual is safe and currently recovering.

Through its Migrant Workers Office, the mission has also arranged temporary accommodation for at least 29 Filipino nationals who left their residences because of their proximity to potential danger zones.

All of them are reported to be in good condition.

The embassy added that Filipino transit passengers and nationals on temporary visits who are currently stranded are either being provided hotel accommodation by their airlines or are under the care of their visa sponsors.

Officials said that the embassy is aware of their whereabouts.

Emergency consular and labour-related concerns continue to be addressed as part of the embassy's regular services, while further updates will be issued as necessary.

The mission also urged Filipinos in Qatar with non-essential errands to remain indoors for their safety and to follow guidelines issued by the embassy and local authorities.

It further advised the community to rely on official government channels and trusted news sources, and to verify information before sharing it to prevent the spread of rumours and misinformation.

Department of Meteorology issues alert on thundery rain

Weather inshore, until 6am today, is expected to be partly cloudy to cloudy with scattered rain, possibly thundery at first and relatively cold, the Department of Meteorology said in its daily weather report, warning of thundery rain associated with strong wind at first.

Offshore, it will be partly cloudy to cloudy with scattered rain maybe thundery at times, the report added,

warning of thundery rain associated with strong winds and high sea.

Wind inshore will be mainly southeasterly to southwesterly at a speed of 5-15 knots gusting to 25 knots with thundery rain at first, shifting to northwesterly later.

Offshore, the department said that the winds will be mainly southwesterly to southeasterly at a speed of 5-15

knots gusting to 25 knots with thundery rain.

Sea state inshore will be 1-3', rising to 5' with thundery rain, while offshore will be 2-4', rising to 8' with thundery rain.

Visibility inshore will be 4-9km, 3km or less with thundery rain at first.

Offshore, it will be 4-9km, 3km or less with thundery rain. - QNA

MoI urges strict adherence to workplace safety protocols

From Page 1

The ministry emphasised the need to avoid pushing or crowding while moving to safe areas within the building and to keep corridors and emergency exits clear of obstructions to ensure rapid evacuation when necessary.

The guidelines included instructions to follow in the event of an explosion or sudden incident.

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) explained that if a person is outside the building when an explosion occurs, they should immediately go to the nearest safe area within the building and remain there after hearing the explosion or alert until instructions are issued by the relevant authorities that the danger has passed.

Regarding the handling of suspicious objects and hazards, the ministry emphasised the necessity of immediately reporting any suspicious object or unusual observation through the designated channels within the organisation or by contacting the relevant authorities.

It stressed the prohibition of touching or approaching any metallic object, shrapnel, or unidentified objects.

The ministry also emphasised the importance of organisational discipline within the workplace, stressing the need to refrain from photographing incidents, sites, or security pro-

cedures and posting them on social media.

Furthermore, it highlighted the importance of knowing emergency numbers and how to contact designated security and safety supervisors within the organisation, as well as the necessity of fully co-operating with security and safety officials and adhering to their instructions under all circumstances.

The ministry confirmed that it will take the necessary legal measures against anyone who violates these guidelines, in accordance with applicable regulations.

It also encouraged the public to contact them with any inquiries or comments regarding safety guidelines via 2355585 and 2355633. - QNA

Amir receives message from King Charles

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has received a written message from King Charles III of the United Kingdom, in which he voiced the UK's full and unwavering solidarity with Qatar in the face of the blatant Iranian aggression, and its support for the sovereignty, security, and stability of the Qatar.

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received the message during his meeting yesterday with the UK's ambassador to Qatar Neerav Patel. - QNA

Amir receives global support

From Page 1

His Highness the Amir also received phone calls from Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh, Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, The Gambia's President Adama Barrow, Spain's King Felipe VI, and Colombia's President Gustavo Petro.

The leaders expressed their country's solidarity with Qatar and support in facing Iranian aggression.

His Highness the Amir in turn thanked them for the support and highlighted the strong bilateral relations between Qatar and their countries.

Qatar Airways to operate series of emergency flights

From Page 1

The airline was careful to emphasise that these flights do not constitute a resumption of normal scheduled services, and warned

passengers not to proceed to the airport unless they hold a confirmed ticket.

Bookings can be made through the Qatar Airways website, mobile app, or via a travel agent.

The emergency operations are being conducted in co-ordination with the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA), which has authorised limited air traffic through designated emergency corridors.

Full operations, the airline said, will only resume once the QCAA formally declares Qatari airspace safe and open - a decision contingent on approval from the relevant authorities.

The Night of Decree

If one cannot draw spiritual benefit during this month (Ramadan), then in what other month can he find benefit?

If one does not turn in repentance to his Lord during this month, then at what other time will he do so? If one slackens from doing good deeds now, then when will he do them?

You should hasten to seize the opportunity in this month, before it is too late! You should preserve your souls from the ways of misery and destruction.

The blessed month is waning; its precious days and nights are moving towards their end.

So try to utilise the remaining period by doing good deeds and repenting to Allah.

All is well that ends well.

So, you have to make your deeds at the end of this month as good as you can.

Two-thirds of the month of Ramadan is over and one-third, which is the best of all the three parts, still remains.

Exert your efforts during these ten days by spending in charity, doing righteous deeds and offering optional night prayer, submitting yourselves to Allah, hoping for His good reward and seeking protection from His punishment.

Allah says (what means): "And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad) concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me (by obedience) and believe in Me that they may be rightly guided." [Qur'an 2:186]

Our Lord descends each night to the sky of the earth when the final third of the night remains.

He offers His slaves out of His generosity, saying: "Who is saying a prayer to Me, that I may answer it? Who is asking something of Me, that I may give it to him? Who is asking forgiveness of Me, that I may forgive him?" (Bukhari & Muslim)

In the last ten days of Ramadan, there is Laylat Al-Qadr (the Night of Decree) in which every precise matter of wisdom is made distinct and all events of the coming year are decreed.

It is on this night that angels descend from the heavens and blessings become abundant.

Whoever prays its nights, believing in it, and hoping for its reward from Allah, Allah will forgive all his previous sins. Whoever misses this night and deprives himself of its good; he is to blame.

Allah did not specify its order among the ten

nights so that people may exert their utmost efforts during all ten days in worship, performing optional night prayer, reciting the Noble Qur'an and doing righteous deeds.

This is also a means of distinction between those who are active in devotion and those who are not.

If Laylat Al-Qadr were identified, many people would have limited themselves to devotion on that night only, neglecting other nights.

There would also be no criteria for evaluation between the hardworking people and the lazy ones.

So, seek the reward of Laylat Al-Qadr by doing good deeds consistently and sincerely.

Ask Allah for a share of His reward and to protect you from coming out of Ramadan empty-handed.

If you hear or recite a Qur'anic verse that mentions His mercy, ask Allah to provide you from His bounties.

When you hear or recite a Qur'anic verse that contains a warning, ask Allah's protection from His punishment.

Utter glorifications of Allah many times in your Rukoo' (bowing) and make many supplications in your Sajdah (prostration), as a Muslim is nearest to Allah when he is in prostration.

A person may supplicate Allah for himself, his parents, children, relatives and all those who are dear to him from among the Muslims.

Prolong the Qiyaam (standing) after rising from Rukoo' (bowing) and the Jalsah (sitting) after rising from Sajdah (prostration), so that you may maintain an equilibrium among all the positions of Salaah.

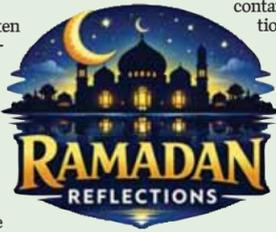
The standing after the rising from Rukoo' (bowing) is a stance of praising Allah, so utter many greetings, praises and extolments of Allah in it.

The sitting position that is between the two Sajdah (prostrations) is a stance of supplicating Allah for forgiveness, so ask Allah's forgiveness therein.

Allah says (what means): "Indeed, We sent it (i.e. the Qur'an) down in the Night of Decree. And what can make you know what is the Night of Decree?"

"The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit (i.e. Gabriel) descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter. Peace it is until the emergence of dawn." [Qur'an 97:1-5]

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



Lawyers laud SJC decision on remote court hearings

The Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC)'s recent decision to continue holding all court hearings remotely has been lauded by lawyers, who said that proceedings are running smoothly, and judgments issued electronically through the courts' digital portal and requests submitted via online systems.

The lawyers pointed out that the measure ensures the uninterrupted functioning of the judicial system and protects the rights of litigants, and guarantees the effective and swift execution of the justice system even under exceptional circumstances, which in turn has proven the solidity and efficiency of the systems that are in place.

Lawyer Abdullah al-Mutawa said that remote litigation has become a necessity in an era of rapid technological progress, describing electronic courts as an effective way to reduce litigation delays and streamline procedures for both lawyers and litigants.

He noted that the system allows participants to attend hearings via electronic links sent in advance, which helps accelerate case resolution while maintaining fair-trial guarantees.

Lawyer Dr Jawhar Zayed al-Muhannadi said that the decision aligns with broader government measures to implement remote work across ministries and public institutions.

He said the system enables parties to present arguments, submit



memoranda, hear witnesses and conduct interrogations via video communication, while ensuring procedural safeguards and transparency in both civil and criminal proceedings.

Al-Muhannadi further said that the system has been working very efficiently and ensured uninterrupted services for all the involved parties.

Lawyer Jouza Mohsen al-Shemmari, a lawyer before the Court of Cassation, described remote hearings as a significant step in modernising Qatar's judicial system.

She noted that litigants and their lawyers receive text messages containing hearing links and schedules, allowing them to participate electronically, submit documents and follow up on cases more efficiently, which helps re-

duce adjournments and speeds up legal procedures.

Lawyer Dr Rashid Abu Diya also highlighted that the remote hearing system represents a major transformation in the justice sector, supported by secure technological platforms that document proceedings, enable the electronic submission of documents, and issue rulings.

He added that the initiative reflects close institutional co-ordination between the judiciary, prosecution and other relevant authorities, strengthening procedural efficiency and ensuring the continuity of justice under all circumstances.

Dr Diya said that the process has guaranteed litigators the swift accomplishment of their issues under any circumstances.

Ministry designates 202 mosques for Itikaf

The Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs has identified 202 mosques nationwide for the observance of Itikaf during the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan.

In a statement, the ministry urged those who wish to observe this religious practice to make sure that they learn Itikaf based on the Islamic Sharia as pursued by the Prophetic Sunnah, and commit to choosing the designated mosques whose locations have been determined geographically to be congregational mosques, along with the readiness of their facilities to serve those observing this practice.

The statement laid out a condition that the age of would-be observers of Itikaf should not be less than 18, or that the person should be flanked by his parent

if his age is otherwise, provided that he is not less than eight years old.

It stressed that personal hygiene and place sanitisation matter most in this setting, in addition to making sure that mosque property is protected and that observers never engage in any kind of disturbance or bothering of worshippers, either by side talks or by harming the people there, and that they wholly stick with decorum.

In addition, the ministry called on those about to engage in Itikaf to never hang clothing on mosque walls, columns, or furnishings so as to maintain the proper propriety of the mosque.

They were also advised not to sleep or eat except in the areas designated by the mosque administration, noting that women are not permitted to perform Itikaf in mosques. - QNA

MoCI announces recall of Ford Transit 2025 models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Almana Motors Company, Qatar's Ford dealership, has announced the recall of Ford Transit 2025 models.

The recall is due to the possibility that the screw connecting the brake booster arm to the brake pedal may be missing or not properly secured, which may result in improper transmission of braking force and reduced efficiency of the braking system.

The MoCI urges all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, through the following channels: Call Centre: 16001, e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa, ministry's accounts on social media: @mociqatar, ministry's Mobile App: MOCIQATAR (available on iOS and Android devices)

Ramadan an opportunity to restore health, wellbeing: PHCC physician

A physician from the Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has stressed that as more than half of the blessed month of Ramadan has passed, it becomes increasingly important to maintain the healthy habits that many people have adopted since the beginning of the month.

Dr Aba Sellimi, family physician at Al Sheehaniya Health Centre, emphasises that fasting is not merely abstaining from food and drink for specific hours; it is also an opportunity to reorganise one's lifestyle and promote both physical and mental balance.

She says that the second half of Ramadan represents an important stage for maintaining healthy habits that help the body adapt to fasting and benefit from the holy month's spiritual atmosphere, thereby enhancing overall health.

Dr Sellimi explains that organising meals during the remain-

ing days of Ramadan is essential for maintaining energy and good health.

This begins with a moderate Iftar meal that includes a variety of nutrients such as dates, water, soup, and vegetables, followed by a healthy main dish that is low in fat.

She also advises avoiding excessive consumption of fried foods and sweets, as these may lead to fatigue and increased levels of sugar and fats in the body.

Suhoor, on the other hand, is essential for providing the body with energy during fasting hours.

Therefore, it is recommended that it be light yet rich in fibre and protein, while avoiding salty foods that may increase thirst during the day.

Dr Sellimi recommends drinking sufficient water between Iftar and Suhoor, while avoiding carbonated drinks and excessive caffeinated beverages, which may increase urination.

Hydration can also be sup-

ported by consuming fruits and vegetables rich in water, such as watermelon, oranges, and cucumbers.

Despite fasting, physical activity remains an important factor in maintaining vitality and overall health.

Light exercise can be practised one hour before Iftar or two hours afterward, such as walking or stretching exercises, as they help stimulate blood circulation and improve overall body activity.

Dr Sellimi recommends organising sleeping hours by distributing them between nighttime sleep and a short daytime nap, which can help maintain focus and energy and adhering to a consistent sleep and wake-up routine also contributes to improved mental alertness during the day.

The physician says that Ramadan represents an important opportunity to enhance mental well-being and inner calm.

Fasting helps strengthen self-



Dr Aba Sellimi

control and emotional regulation, and may also improve mood and reduce stress.

Dr Sellimi also noted that Ramadan is known for its social atmosphere that strengthens family bonds and fosters a sense of belonging.

Families gathering around the Iftar table, participating in volunteer initiatives, and visiting relatives all contribute to supporting mental health and enhancing emotional stability.

Acts of generosity and helping others also have a direct positive impact in increasing feelings of satisfaction and happiness.

Global spare capacity 'insufficient' to replace Qatar LNG: QFC

From Page 1

Termining that not all LNG is the same; the QFC said LNG varies in gross heating value (GVH) and Qatar's LNG has specific characteristics that may not match the US or Australian suppliers.

It said Ship-to-Ship Compatibility Study (SSCS) requirements suggest that vessels that may be suitable for Ras Laffan may not automatically work with alternative suppliers' terminals.

Stressing that terminals are designed differently for specific LNG compositions; it said a rapid switch from Qatar LNG to US LNG (different methane content) requires operational adjustments or infrastructure modifications.

"These technical challenges make it difficult for countries to pivot. For importers of Qatar's LNG, long-term infrastructure adaption will be required to pivot," the QFC said.

Also pointing out the structural vulnerability of the global LNG market, the QFC said that the

US LNG capacity is already running at maximum; Australian supply is geographically too far to rescue Europe efficiently; and European inventories are currently at low levels in view of the winter season.

Depending on how long the conflict lasts, importers of Qatar's LNG may seek to diversify away from Qatar but it would be difficult to achieve due to midstream integration (pipelines, compression, reserve flows); and climate policy (the EU's target of gas demand lowering by 2030), the QFC said.



Trump says new Iran leader won't last long without his approval

AFP
Tehran

US President Donald Trump warned yesterday that Iran's next supreme leader would not last long without his approval, as Tehran prepared to reveal the successor to the slain Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Nine days into the war that killed the supreme leader, three members of Iran's Assembly of Experts said the organisation had chosen a successor, but several hours after those statements no name had been revealed.

Hossein Redaei, a member of the body, said it had gathered the votes for the next supreme leader, but said it had not been deemed appropriate to hold a public and in-person gathering given the wartime conditions.

Some have suggested that Khamenei's 56-year old son Mojtaba Khamenei would succeed his father.

Trump had previously demanded a say in the appointment and dismissed the younger Khamenei as an unacceptable "lightweight".

"He's going to have to get approval from us," Trump told ABC News yesterday, referring to Iran's next leader. "If he doesn't get approval from us he's not going to last long."

But Tehran's top diplomat Abbas Araghchi said earlier in the day that the decision was Iran's alone, adding it would "allow nobody to



This video grab taken from UGC images posted on social media yesterday, shows fire erupting at an oil depot in Tehran. (AFP)

interfere in our domestic affairs". Speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press", Araghchi went on to demand that Trump "apologise to people of the region" for the spiralling war.

The younger Khamenei is regarded as a conservative figure, notably because of his ties to the Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of the nation's military.

Israel's military has warned any successor that "we will not hesitate to target you".

Israel's reach was underlined by two new operations overnight - strikes against fuel dumps in and around Tehran, and an attack on a hotel in the heart of Lebanon's capital Beirut that targeted suspected Iranian commanders.

Warplanes hit five oil facilities

around the Iranian capital, killing at least four people, according to a state oil executive, and blanketing the city in acrid smoke.

Tehran's governor told the IRNA news agency that fuel distribution had been "temporarily interrupted" in the capital.

A dark haze hung over the city of 10mn people, blocking out the sun, while the smell of burning fuel lingered in the air.

Authorities warned the fumes could be toxic and urged citizens to stay indoors, but many windows were blown out by the force of the blasts.

"The blaze has been burning for more than 12 hours, the air has become unbreathable. I can't even go out to do the daily shopping," said a 35-year-old from Tehran.

"At first, I supported this war.



A man rides a motorcycle near an ongoing fire following an overnight airstrike on the Shahran oil refinery in northwestern Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)



Women members of Iran's Red Crescent society stand near smoke plumes from an ongoing fire following an overnight airstrike on the Shahran oil refinery in northwestern Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)

After Khamenei's death, I celebrated with my friends; we danced. "But since yesterday... people say there's not even any gasoline left at the gas stations," she said in a text message to Europe.

As the war ground on, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had enough supplies to continue their drone and missile war

over the Middle East for up to six months.

Several blasts were heard over Israel's commercial hub of Tel Aviv after the Israeli military said it had detected a salvo of missiles from Iran. The Magen David Adom emergency services said six people were wounded in central Israel.

Trump again refused to rule out

sending US ground troops into Iran, but continued to insist that the war was all but won despite the ongoing Iranian missile and drone strikes.

Guards spokesman Ali Mohammad Naini said Iran had so far used only first- and second-generation missiles, but would use "advanced and less-used long-range missiles" in the coming days.

Iran's health ministry said yesterday that at least 1,200 civilians had been killed and around 10,000 wounded - figures AFP could not independently verify.

Lebanon's health minister said at least 394 people had been killed in Israeli air strikes since Lebanon was dragged into the war a week ago, including 83 children and 42 women.

Two Israeli soldiers were killed during the fighting in southern Lebanon, the Israeli military said.

Trump on Saturday attended the return of the bodies of six American service members who were killed in a drone strike on a US base in Kuwait last Sunday.

Kuwait airport, Bahrain desalination unit struck in Iran attacks

AFP
Kuwait City

Iran struck Gulf infrastructure yesterday, hitting fuel tanks at Kuwait's airport and a desalination plant in Bahrain, with at least four reported dead in the region as Tehran pressed its campaign there into a second week.

In Saudi Arabia, the civil defence said a "military projectile" killed two people - an Indian and a Bangladeshi - and injured 12 others after it fell in a residential area in Al-Kharj governorate south of Riyadh.

In Kuwait, two border guards were killed "while performing their national duty", the interior ministry said, without elaborating on the circumstances.

Fuel tanks at Kuwait's international airport were targeted in a drone attack, the military said.

The official Kuwait News Agency said a fire at the airport

Iran, with 18 people, 10 of them civilians, killed in the Gulf states since the war began, according to an AFP tally.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian warned yesterday that the Islamic republic "will be forced to respond" against its neighbours if their territory was used to attack it.

On Saturday, the president had apologised to neighbouring countries hosting US military bases for attacks on their land.

Gulf countries have said their territory has not been used in attacks against Iran, and before the war began they repeatedly said they would not allow such a move.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait all reported new attacks yesterday.

Fuel tanks at Kuwait's international airport were targeted in a drone attack, the military said.

The official Kuwait News Agency said a fire at the airport



Smoke rises from a high-rise building following a drone attack in Kuwait City, yesterday. (AFP)

was brought under control, reporting no "significant injuries".

The military called the drone attack "a direct targeting of vital infrastructure".

A separate statement said "some civilian facilities sustained material damage as a result of falling fragments and debris from interception operations".

Kuwait's national oil company announced a "precautionary" cut to its crude production, as the country's military said yesterday that it had responded to several drone and missile attacks.

Authorities said Kuwait's main building for social security was targeted, causing material damage, and that it would not receive visitors there yesterday.

Bahrain's interior ministry said yesterday that an Iranian drone attack damaged a water desalination plant, accusing Tehran of "randomly" targeting civilian infrastructure.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps said on Saturday that it had struck the United States Jufair base in Bahrain, adding it had been used to attack an Iranian desalination plant earlier in the day.

Bahrain's national communication office later said the Iranian attack on the desalination facility had no impact on water supplies or network capacity.

GCC condemns Iranian attack on Saudi residential facility

The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) has expressed the strongest condemnation and denunciation of the grave Iranian attack targeting the residential facility in the city of Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia, which led to the death of two innocent civilians and the injury of several others, QNA reported from Riyadh.

In a press statement yesterday, GCC Secretary General of GCC, Jassem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi underscored that this attack represents a flagrant violation of all international laws and norms, targeting the safety of civilians and infrastructure in clear contravention of the principles of International Humanitarian Law.

He reiterated GCC's full solidarity with Saudi Arabia in all measures it takes to protect its security, stability, and territorial integrity. He reaffirmed the Council states' firm position in rejecting and condemning all acts of aggression that undermine the security of GCC countries or target their vital facilities and the safety of their citizens and residents on their territories. (QNA)

Drone strikes on Sudan markets kill 33

AFP
Khartoum

A drone attack hit two markets in paramilitary-controlled towns in southwest Sudan, killing 33 people, a medical source said yesterday.

The strikes targeted the markets of Abu Zabad and Wad Banda in West Kordofan state -- part of the resource-rich Kordofan region that is currently the fiercest battlefield in the nearly three-year war between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

A doctor at Abu Zabad hospital, one of the few medical facilities still serving the area, said two drones struck the markets on Saturday, injuring 59 people.

Speaking via a Starlink connection and requesting anonymity, the doctor said 30 of the wounded remain receiving treatment. The two towns lie roughly 15 kilometres apart. A resident of Abu Zabad town, Hamad Abdullah, said he helped bury 20 people on Saturday following what he described as an army drone strike on the town's market.

Israeli strike kills three Palestinians in Gaza City

Reuters/AFP
Cairo

An Israeli air strike killed three Palestinians in Gaza City yesterday, said Mohamed Abu Selmia, head of the Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, the deadliest incident in Gaza since Israel and the US launched their war against Iran a week ago.

Medics said the three men were near Al-Azhar University in western Gaza City, and included a paramedic Mohammad Hamduna, and two others named as Mohammad Abu Shedeq and Ahmed Lafi.

The strike hit near crowded tent camps where Gazans were sheltering, and wounded several other people in the area, the medics added.

Such attacks have declined since the start of the US-Israeli campaign against Iran, although Israeli forces have killed several Palestinians over the past week.

The Israeli military issued a statement yesterday about the strike saying they had killed two Hamas members who they alleged had been preparing to attack Israeli soldiers without providing evidence. No fighter group has claimed any of the men as members.

The Israeli military declined to comment in response to Reuters' request for evidence connecting the men to a potential attack.

SETTLER ATTACK IN WEST BANK KILLS THREE

Palestinian authorities and the Israeli military said that three Palestinians were killed during an Israeli settler attack in the occupied West Bank, taking to four the number reported dead in such incidents over two days, AFP reported from Abu Falah, Palestinian Territories.

AFP journalists witnessed the funerals of the four men where relatives wept as mourners carried the bodies and chanted slogans.



Palestinians react at Al-Shifa hospital following an Israeli strike, according to health officials, in Gaza City, yesterday. (Reuters)

Public Announcement

To all Ships, Fishermen and Mariners
Marine survey & soil sampling between Mesaieed & Halul
by Vessels Horizon Echo
from 28-Feb-2026 to 30-Apr-2026

Pursuant to and under directives from the Department of Seafarers Affairs and Registration, Ministry of Transport, State of Qatar, this announcement is to inform all Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen that Horizon Geosciences intends to undertake Marine survey & soil sampling at HALUL, BH, IS, ISND, NGL, MESAIEED locations bound by the coordinates shown in the diagram below by Survey Vessels Horizon Echo.

All Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen are expected to keep clear of the survey locations during the operations.

Qatar Energy and Horizon Geosciences take no responsibility for any loss or damage caused to outside parties in association with this operation, following publication of this notice.

| ID | Latitude (N) | Longitude (E) |
|-----|--------------|---------------|
| A-1 | 24 52 00.320 | 51 31 43.020 |
| A-2 | 24 52 24.910 | 51 32 04.120 |
| A-3 | 24 51 58.010 | 51 32 17.040 |
| A-4 | 24 52 33.240 | 51 32 55.820 |
| B-1 | 24 52 00.850 | 51 40 01.240 |
| B-2 | 24 52 19.850 | 51 42 27.040 |
| B-3 | 24 52 09.850 | 51 40 05.020 |
| B-4 | 24 52 29.140 | 51 42 19.860 |
| B-5 | 25 01 27.820 | 51 40 29.020 |
| B-6 | 24 58 19.360 | 51 40 13.240 |
| C-1 | 25 02 19.320 | 51 40 43.020 |
| C-2 | 25 02 42.640 | 51 40 17.020 |
| C-3 | 25 02 17.240 | 51 41 09.020 |
| C-4 | 25 02 09.760 | 51 40 13.040 |
| D-1 | 25 38 58.000 | 52 25 13.000 |
| D-2 | 25 38 43.360 | 52 27 31.210 |
| D-3 | 25 40 24.160 | 52 25 38.020 |
| D-4 | 25 40 05.300 | 52 25 25.040 |
| E-1 | 25 29 35.200 | 52 41 46.200 |
| E-2 | 25 29 38.860 | 52 42 22.160 |
| E-3 | 25 24 57.860 | 52 43 58.160 |
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For Queries call +974 6683 6254

Iranian generals 'targeted' in Beirut as death toll nears 400

Reuters
Beirut

Israel's military said it hit Iranian commanders in the Lebanese capital early yesterday, expanding the scope of its campaign to the heart of Beirut after days of strikes that have left nearly 400 people dead.

The drone strike was the first within the city limits of Lebanon's capital since Israel-Hezbollah hostilities resumed last week, and came amid heavy bombardment on Beirut's southern suburbs and the country's south and east.

Israel said it targeted key commanders of Iran's elite Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards but did not name them.

"The commanders of the Quds Force's Lebanon Corps operated to advance attacks against the state of Israel and its civilians, while operating simultaneously for the IRGC in Iran," the Israeli military said in a statement.

An Israeli military source said the strike targeted five senior Quds Force members, including intelligence and finance personnel.

Lebanon says four people were killed in the strike, part of a rapidly rising death toll that has reached



First aid responders inspect the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted a neighborhood in the southern Lebanese village of Ghaziyeh, yesterday. (AFP)

394 people, the health ministry said yesterday, including at least 83 children and 42 women.

Lebanon's health ministry does not otherwise distinguish between civilians and military per-

sonnel. Israel's military has so far killed about 200 Hezbollah fighters, spokesman Nadav Shoshani said in an online briefing. Hezbollah has not published a toll for its fighters. Israel's military

announced yesterday that two Israeli soldiers had been killed in southern Lebanon, the first casualties in the Israeli army since the launch of the war. Lebanon was pulled into the widening US-Is-



Mourners grieve the victims killed earlier in the week during an Israeli operation on the village of Nabi Sheet in the eastern Bekaa Valley, during the funeral in the village, yesterday. (AFP)

rael war with Iran on Monday after the fighter group Hezbollah fired into Israel. Israel responded with heavy strikes across southern and eastern Lebanon and near Beirut — and a rare Israeli airborne raid deep into Lebanese territory that left 41 dead.

CHILDREN AMONG WOUNDED IN BEIRUT

The Raouche neighbourhood on Beirut's seafloor is typically a tourist attraction, but in recent days has hosted people displaced by strikes, some of whom stayed at the Ramada hotel.

Israel's strike appeared to hit a corner suite on the hotel's fourth floor. A Reuters reporter observed the windows of the suite were shattered and surrounding facade blackened.

Ten people were also injured in the attack on Beirut's Raouche area, the Lebanese health ministry said.

Khalil Abou Mohammad was staying in a building across the

street after being displaced earlier this week. His three children were wounded by the force of the strike and were undergoing surgery at a nearby hospital, he said as he showed Reuters bloodstained bed covers.

"We came to stay here, and as you can see, we were sleeping at 3:30 (a.m.) and the strike hit," Abou Mohammad told Reuters. Other heavy bombardment in southern Lebanese towns yesterday pulverised several homes, Reuters footage showed. A children's notebook lay in the debris near sheets of destroyed solar panels and cars buried under mounds of dust and debris.

Last week, Israel said it had killed the commander of Iran's Quds Force in Lebanon, Daoud Ali Zadeh, in a strike in Tehran.

It said a strike on Beirut's suburbs had killed Reza Khuza'i, whom it said was head of Hezbollah's weapons build-up and chief of staff of the Quds Force's Lebanon Corps.

Namibia dives into salmon farming with Norwegian know-how

AFP
Windhoek

A Norwegian-led group is setting up salmon farming operations off the coast of Namibia, which is aiming to become Africa's first commercial sea-based producer of the increasingly popular food source.

The cold Atlantic waters off Namibia and South Africa are considered ideal for salmon farming but previous attempts at large-

scale production have failed.

With about \$1mn in investment, the African Aquaculture Company (AAC) is setting itself up for a first harvest in about two years, a company representative told AFP.

A second licenced group, Benguela Blue Aqua Farming, is raising funds to begin its own operations.

"Namibia is poised to become the first African country to introduce industrial-scale Atlantic salmon farming," senior government official Kaire Mbuende said

at a recent industry seminar.

It was a "bold and forward-looking step" that would create jobs and bolster the government's diversification drive at a time when the fishing industry -- Namibia's second-biggest exporter after minerals -- was facing from declining stocks, he said.

AAC, a Norwegian-Namibian tie-up, has already brought over a first batch of ova from Europe for "trial acclimatisation" at a freshwater hatchery in South Africa, it said.

If all goes well, the facility is expected to receive 50,000 eggs by the third quarter of this year.

More would follow, up to a maximum of 350,000, country director Clement Kaukuetu told AFP.

In the meantime, work will begin to build floating cages off Namibia's southern town of Luderitz. After several months, the eggs will be transported from the Western Cape hatchery by truck to Luderitz, a journey of around 1,200 kilometres and released into the Atlantic waters.

EXPANSION

"The projected harvest of salmon for export or consumption will be at the last quarter of 2027 or early 2028," Kaukuetu said.

"We first aim to satisfy the local/regional market," he said.

"We are however in negotiations with possible off-takers in the Middle East and Asia."

AAC aims to produce 1,000 tonnes of Atlantic salmon annually in the pilot phase, reaching 51,000 tonnes at full capacity.

This is modest compared to

Norway's own production of around 1.5mn tonnes a year, according to industry figures.

Chile produces around 700,000 tonnes, followed by Scotland with nearly 200,000 tonnes.

Promoted as a nutrient-dense, high-protein superfood, salmon is gaining popularity in emerging markets such as China and Brazil, with the United States and Europe by far the largest consumers, according to industry heavyweight, Mowi ASA.

Ivory Coast women tap newfound freedom as rubber farm owners

AFP
Toumodi

Ivorian farmer Affoua Mea decided one day she'd had enough. Despite years cultivating rubber trees on the plantation inherited from her father, her brothers still held the purse strings.

Last year, the 64-year-old bought her own piece of land thanks to an initiative aimed at closing the gender gap in agricultural land ownership in the west African country.

"The family plot belongs to all of us," she said, but added: "What they give me are crumbs. That's why I decided to start my own plantation."

Standing among the tall trees whose slim trunks are tapped for the white sap known as latex that is refined to make rubber, Mea savoured her newfound autonomy.

"I'm really independent and freer," she told AFP at the plantation in the eastern town of Bongouanou.

Farming has long been the pillar of Ivory Coast's economy, but just 5% of women own agricultural land compared to 25% of men, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Such inequality is not uncommon in sub-Saharan Africa, where

women make up nearly half the workforce in the farming sector, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation says.

Mea was helped by the Association of Natural Rubber Professionals of Ivory Coast (Apromac), which offers women subsidies to buy rubber trees, at sometimes as much as 80%.

Now she is in control of her finances, Mea said she won't be passing her land down to her son. "I'll leave it to my daughter," she said. Holding a machete, her tunic knotted at the waist, Solange Koukou, 45, also bought plants at reduced cost to cultivate the land handed down by her father near the town of Toumodi.

To fill a hectare (2.4 acres) of land, she paid 62,000 CFA francs (\$110) instead of 210,000 CFA francs with Apromac subsidies.

"A lot of women say they, too, want to do rubber trees," she said.

Owning her own land means she makes around \$116 a month, which nevertheless is still only around the minimum wage.

But "women who don't have their own money, if they need to pay for something, they ask their husband... I do whatever I want", she said proudly.

Her friend Jacqueline Tano, 44, followed suit. She bought rubber plants this year for her plantation, which spans half a hectare.

Since 2009, around 2,500 wom-

en have bought rubber plants at low cost under the subsidy scheme offered to the least well-off.

Apromac's demand had increased in the last five years when new subsidies exclusively for women were introduced.

Monthly contributions paid by producers finance the subsidy scheme.

CULTURAL OBSTACLES

Women wanting to farm, however, can still face hurdles.

"In some places, girls aren't allowed to inherit a plot of land," a ban that is cultural rather than set by the law, said Apromac member Jacqueline N'Guessan, who represents the country's women rubber producers.

She negotiates with "the heads of the land, the village chiefs, the traditional leaders, or with the husbands, so that they give a small plot to their wives", she said.

"In some cases, we manage it," she said.

Other times, women sign a multi-year contract to farm a landowner's plot. "Once they have access to the land, we move on to the subsidy phase," she said.

And when the obstacles are too great, N'Guessan has set up a nursery near Toumodi that employs 15 women and whose plants are sold to recipients of subsidies.

Changes in such a key sector of Ivorian life give women a greater sense of self-esteem, she said.



Affoua Mea (second left) and other female rubber growers visit a rubber tree nursery for the establishment of their new plantations in Bongouanou. (AFP)

VEHICLE RECALL



وزارة التجارة والصناعة
Ministry of Commerce and Industry
مملكة البحرين



Ford Transit

Manufacturing Year: **2025**

DEFECT

It is possible that the screw that connects the brake booster arm to the brake pedal is missing or not properly secured, which may result in improper transmission of the braking force and reduced efficiency of the braking system

PROCESS

Contact the dealer for the free required

CONTACT

Almana Motors Company.
Telephone: 8007551
crmautomotive.aa@almanagroup.com

14001 | +974 66111400 | www.moci.gov.qa



وزارة التجارة والصناعة
Ministry of Commerce and Industry
مملكة البحرين



Colombian right-wing eyes comeback as country votes

AFP
Bogotá

Colombians started voting yesterday in legislative elections that will shape the final months of left-wing President Gustavo Petro's term and test whether the once-powerful right-wing is poised for a political comeback.

About 40mn voters will elect nearly 300 lawmakers – deciding the makeup of Congress and providing a key temperature check weeks before a May presidential election.

The new Congress will determine whether Petro can push ahead with last-minute efforts to rewrite the constitution, a move critics say would weaken checks on presidential power.

Colombia's decades of brutal internecine fighting and the presence of still-powerful cocaine mafias have cast a long shadow over the campaign.

More than 60 political leaders have been killed, including a presidential candidate who was assassinated in broad daylight in the capital, Bogotá.

Rebels also detonated a pipe bomb in a major city, and a third of the country is considered unsafe for campaigning.

The current Congress approved some of Petro's ambitious reforms but as its term neared an end it rejected others like reforming the healthcare system or changing the



Colombian President Gustavo Petro shows the ballot papers before casting his vote in congressional elections and party primaries for the presidential candidate, in Bogota, yesterday. (Reuters)

tax code to bring in more revenue.

Petro hit back with frequent big rallies in which he denounced the legislature, which has lost respect among many Colombians in recent years because of corruption scandals.

Colombia is also trying to emerge from 50 years of fighting spawned by a complex blend of leftist rebels, paramilitaries and drug lords. Much of the violence has been fuelled by the cocaine trade.

"For anything to change in this country there would need to be a miracle," said Marta Sandoval, a 39-year-old chef.

Polling stations opened at 8:00am (1300 GMT) and will stay open for eight hours.

Against this febrile backdrop lies a battle for the political soul of the country.

Petro, a former guerrilla, became Colombia's first-ever leftist leader in 2022.

He was catapulted to the presidency by a broad progressive coalition that has since been riven by infighting and has struggled to govern.

Prone to social media outbursts, grandiloquent speeches and public spat, Petro has burned through more than 60 ministers in four years.

He is constitutionally barred from running again, but his allies hope to bolster their numbers in the legislature and continue reforms after he leaves power in August.

Petro has proposed creating a constituent assembly that would rewrite the constitution.

He hopes that the new basic law



Men queue to vote at a polling station at the Corferias convention centre during legislative elections in Bogota yesterday. (AFP)

would remake the judiciary, which his allies see as tilted to the right, and give the president more power to rule by decree.

But the left must contend with the right's hope for a political revival after years in the doldrums – a trend seen in other Latin American countries.

Powerful former president Alvaro Uribe is running for a Senate seat, hoping to rally voters who backed his hardline security policies during his 2002-2010 presidency.

Despite a 2016 peace accord, dissident armed groups are expanding and rearming under Petro's stalled "total peace" negotiations.

Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez has announced a deployment of security forces to ensure "safe" elections.

This will be the first election since 2016 in which former guerrilla fighters are not guaranteed seats.

"Scraping for votes has not been easy," Sandra Ramirez, a senator and former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) guerrilla, told AFP.

Campaigns have leaned on TikTok personalities, singers and AI-generated content to cut through a crowded field.

Two activists have even put forward an AI candidate known as "Gaitana" for one of the seats reserved for Indigenous communities.

Represented by a blue-skinned woman wearing feather ornaments, Gaitana describes herself as an environmentalist and animal rights defender.

Cuban president calls Trump's Latin American summit 'neocolonial'

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said Saturday that the Latin American summit convened in Florida by his US counterpart was "neocolonial," after Donald Trump asserted the island nation is in "its final moments."

"The small, reactionary and neocolonial summit in Florida, convened by the US with the participation of right-wing governments from the region, commits them to accepting the lethal use of US military force to solve internal problems and to maintain order and peace in their countries," Diaz-Canel said in an X post. (AFP)

Lula's annual medical checkup test results are normal

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, known as Lula, underwent his annual medical checkup on Saturday morning at Sao Paulo's Sirio-Libanês Hospital and all test results were normal, the hospital said yesterday.

Lula will receive routine follow-up care with his medical team, led by cardiologist Roberto Kalil Filho and physician Ana Helena Germoglio, the hospital said in a statement, adding there are currently no plans for additional exams. Lula, 80, said in 2025 that he plans to seek re-election later this year. In 2024, he underwent two operations to relieve and prevent bleeding in his skull. (Reuters)

Sport-fishing in Panama



Sport-fishing yachts sail on Panama Bay in Panama City. (AFP)

Peru taps fuel reserves to combat worst energy crunch in two decades



Workers seen fixing a pipeline after a gas leak accident in the Megantoni district, Cusco department, Peru. (AFP)

Reuters
Lima

Peru will draw on fuel reserves to safeguard domestic supply, Prime Minister Denisse Miralles said on Friday, after a gas pipeline rupture triggered the most severe energy crisis in two decades.

The government will urge public and private-sector employees to work remotely while shifting schools to online learning, she added.

The emergency measures follow suspension of natural gas exports on Thursday as Peru scrambles to contain the fallout

from the gas-pipeline rupture on Sunday that choked energy supplies and triggered a major power crunch.

"The reduction in the gas supply has been tremendous... only 10% is being delivered," Energy and Mines Minister Angelo Alfaro told Congress on Thursday.

The National Chamber of Mining, Oil and Energy (SNMPE) on Friday said its members were working to minimise the impact on the population and are looking to import an LPG shipment in "record time."

Peru is the world's second-largest copper producer, making the mining sector a critical pil-

lar of its economy and a major consumer of its domestic energy supply.

Operator Transportadora de Gas del Peru (TGP) shut down a section of the pipeline in the Megantoni district to isolate the leak. The company implemented temporary restrictions on gas supplies to industrial and electricity sector users to prioritise residential and essential services.

The outage forced energy firm Pluspetrol to suspend production of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) at its Pisco fractionation plant, which accounts for approximately 70% of Peru's LPG consumption.

Venezuela frees more political prisoners under amnesty law

AFP
Caracas

Venezuela released 17 political prisoners on Saturday from a jail in the capital, Caracas, an AFP journalist saw, as a new law granted amnesty for crimes historically used to lock up dissidents.

The landmark law, which was adopted last month, is one of the most significant reforms championed by Delcy Rodriguez, who succeeded autocratic leader Nicolas Maduro after his January 3 capture by US forces.

The NGO Foro Penal says more than 621 political prisoners have been released since Maduro's ouster, but that around 500 remain behind bars.

Family members have been clamouring for their release for weeks, including a group of women in Caracas who staged a nearly weeklong hunger strike.

Outside the capital's national police facility known as Zone 7, family members had chained themselves to prison gates, while some had spent weeks sleeping in tents. "Get dressed, everyone's leaving," a guard told the freed detainees, according to Omar Torres, a political activist who spoke to reporters as he walked free.



Relatives of detainees wait as releases take place at the National Police Zone 7 Detention Centre, after a limited amnesty law was passed by the National Assembly last month, in Caracas, Venezuela. (Reuters)

"I feel very happy," he said. "I don't think this is the time to blame anyone. I'm happy to be free."

Venezuela's government claims that more than 7,000 people have been granted full freedom, including prisoners in jail and those on parole.

But unlike prisoners from other jails who had their cases dismissed, Zone 7 detainees must ap-

pear in court to reinstate their full freedom.

"We will continue seeking improvement and freedom for the other political prisoners," said Brayan Orozco, son of former congressman Fernando Orozco, both of whom were released from Zone 7.

"Thanks to the people of Venezuela," he said, amid cries of "freedom, freedom", hugs and tears of joy.

Sunset over Soyapango



People enjoy the sunset from Cerro San Jacinto in Soyapango, El Salvador. (AFP)

Trump offers LatAm leaders US missile strikes to hit cartels

AFP
Doral, US

US President Donald Trump on Saturday urged Latin American nations to use military power against the “cancer” of drug cartels, offering to support them with US missile strikes targeting narco kingpins.

Trump, currently waging a war with Iran, laid out a muscular position for advancing Washington’s interests in the Western hemisphere, pronouncing that communist-led Cuba was “in its last moments of life”.

He also advocated tough action by allies against organised crime blighting the region.

He formally launched a 17-nation “counter cartel” coalition that the White House described as a pledge from governments to use “hard power” against security threats.

“We’re working with you to do whatever we have to do. We’ll use missiles. You want us to use a missile? They’re extremely accurate,” Trump told a dozen right-wing leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean at his Doral golf club near Miami.

“Piu,’ right into the living room,” he said, suggesting the sound of a missile in flight. “That’s the end of that cartel person. But we’ll do whatever you need.”

Trump has already staked bold claims in Latin America with the ouster of Venezuela’s authoritarian leader Nicolas Maduro and working with his replacement, Delcy Rodriguez, to claim Venezuelan oil reserves for America.

Among the leaders attending the “Shield of the Americas” summit



US President Donald Trump reacts after signing the “Commitment to countering cartel criminal activity” document, next to Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Paraguay’s President Santiago Pena, Panama’s President Jose Raul Mulino, Dominican Republic President Luis Abinader, Argentina’s President Javier Milei and US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth during the “Shield of the Americas” Summit in Miami, Florida. (Reuters)

were Argentina’s President Javier Milei, Ecuador’s Daniel Noboa and El Salvador’s Nayib Bukele, who has arrested tens of thousands of people in a crackdown on gangs.

All three leaders posted to social media photos of them standing beside Trump. Noboa wrote in Spanish: “For too long, organised crime believed that America was its territory. That they could cross borders, move drugs, weapons, and violence without consequences. That time is over for them.”

But Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel posted on X that the “neocolonial” gathering of right-wing leaders “commits them to accepting the lethal use of US military force to solve internal problems.”

Irene Mia, a Latin America expert

at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said drug cartel violence had hit countries in the region that until recently were considered fairly safe, such as Ecuador and Chile.

The strained security situation has contributed to the right-wing’s recent string of electoral victories in Latin America and means the trend of US intervention has received less pushback than in the past, Mia told AFP.

Trump urged regional leaders to use military force to stamp out criminal organisations, which he likened to a cancer, saying “We don’t want it spreading.”

“The only way to defeat these enemies is by unleashing the power of our militaries. We have to use

our military,” he said. Trump also doubled down on his recent warnings toward Cuba, which he has implied could be “next” after taking out leaders in Venezuela and Iran.

“I’ll take care of Cuba,” Trump told the leaders.

“They have no money, they have no oil. They have a bad philosophy, they have a bad regime that’s been bad for a long time,” he said, adding, “Cuba’s in its last moments of life.”

That warning comes a week after Trump, with Israel, launched devastating strikes against Iran, sparking a regional conflict that has upended usually peaceful areas of the Gulf.

Also this week, the US and Ecuador announced joint operations to combat drug trafficking and on Friday released video of a house exploding in a forested area of Ecuador, calling it a successful blow against “narcoterrorists.”

In addition to Milei, Bukele and Noboa, Trump hosted the leaders of Bolivia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, and Trinidad and Tobago – as well as Jose Antonio Kast, the president-elect of Chile.

The analyst, Mia, pointed to some glaring absences: Mexico and Brazil, which are currently led 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 narco-trafficking and counterterrorism, she said, given that Mexican cartels play a key role in the trafficking supply chain and Brazil’s ports are critical narco-trafficking routes to Europe.

Trump again presses Congress on voter bill, says he will not sign other legislation

Reuters
Miami

US President Donald Trump yesterday threatened to withhold his signature from any other legislation until Congress passes a Republican-backed voting bill, the latest escalation in his push to impose stricter voter requirements ahead of the November midterm elections. Trump, in a post on his Truth Social platform, laid down a tough marker for the SAVE America Act, which passed the Republican-led House of Representatives in February but faces an uphill battle in the Senate, also controlled by Republicans. The measure would need at least 60 votes in the Senate to overcome the chamber’s filibuster rules, meaning it needs Democratic support that currently appears unlikely.

“I, as President, will not sign other Bills until this is passed,” wrote Trump, who is spending the weekend at his Doral, Florida, golf club.

The SAVE America bill would require proof of citizenship when registering to vote and would impose criminal penalties on election officials who register anyone without the required documentation.

Trump’s warning comes days after he threatened to bypass Congress entirely by issuing an executive order to unilaterally impose voter identification re-

quirements if lawmakers fail to act.

He has previously attempted to impose similar voter eligibility rules through executive action. A federal judge in 2025 blocked parts of an executive order that sought to require proof of citizenship for voter registration.

The shifting tactics, floating executive action one week and vowing to block unrelated legislation the next, reflect Trump’s effort to pressure Congress into adopting his preferred election rules.

Whether Trump would follow through on his latest vow to not sign other legislation was unclear.

If lawmakers pass a bill and he takes no action for 10 days while Congress is in session, the measure becomes law without his signature.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, a South Dakota Republican, has said he supports the voter eligibility legislation but has resisted calls from Trump and some conservative activists to weaken the Senate’s filibuster rules to pass it, saying there is not enough support within the Republican conference to change the chamber’s 60-vote threshold.

Democratic Party leaders say the legislation attempts to suppress the vote and undermine their electoral chances at a time when they are favoured by independent analysts to take control of the House.

NY police probe man for throwing ‘ignited’ devices outside mayor’s house

AFP
New York

New York counterterrorism police said they were investigating on Saturday after a man threw “ignited devices” near far-right protesters demonstrating outside the mayor’s home.

NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch said the devices contained nuts, bolts and screws as well as a fuse – but it was not yet clear if they were functional improvised explosive devices, or hoax imitations.

The FBI New York said in an X post that its Joint Terrorism Task Force was “actively investigating”, along with New York City Police.

There was no indication the incident was related to the ongoing hostilities in Iran, Tisch added. Police arrested six people over unrest at the protest, she said, including two suspects in connection with the devices.

Far-right influencer Jake Lang was demonstrating against alleged “Islamification” and calling for an end to “public Muslim prayer” in New York in front of Gracie Mansion, the residence of mayor Zohran Mamdani, who is Muslim.

His protest drew around 20 people, police said, while counter protesters numbered about 125.

A man wearing a dark hooded sweatshirt and beige cargo pants was handed a device wrapped in tape and billowing smoke by a fellow activist. He dropped it near a line of police before vaulting a crash barrier.

The man also threw a similar device near Lang’s group of protesters.

“Witnesses reported seeing flames and smoke as it travelled through the air before it struck a



NYPD officers arrive to control people as they clash during a rally, in New York City. (Reuters)

barrier a few feet from police officers,” Tisch told a briefing, naming the suspect as Amir Balat, 18.

“Mr Balat then... gets a second device from a man.

“Mr Balat lights the device and starts running with it. He then drops the device.”

Moments later, he and the other man were detained by police, who were heavily deployed to the protest.

“The bomb squad responded and... based on a preliminary examination and X-ray imaging, the devices which were a bit smaller than a football appeared to be a jar wrapped in black tape – importantly with nuts, bolts and screws along with a hobby fuse that could be lit,” Tisch added.

“We don’t yet know if they contained energetic (explosive) material.”

A demonstrator opposed to

Lang, teacher Mia Kurzer, 23, told AFP she “showed up because we have to show that hate has no place in our city.”

“We democratically elected a mayor who is Muslim – and that’s New York. We have different cultures, and we have to celebrate those cultures.”

She added that “I think (Lang) is an idiot. I think he underestimates the power of the people.”

There were some scuffles, apparently between protesters and counter demonstrators.

Police arrested six people, Tisch said, including a protester in Lang’s group who used pepper spray against counter-protesters, the two men who handled and threw devices and three others for disorderly conduct and obstructing traffic.

Tisch said she did not believe mayor Mamdani was home.

US judge voids 2025 actions taken by VOA chief, including job cuts

Reuters
Washington

A federal judge ruled on Saturday that Kari Lake’s leadership of the US Agency for Global Media for much of last year violated federal law, invalidating a sweeping series of actions she took to cut staff and end many operations at its Voice of America (VOA) unit.

In another blow to the Trump administration’s attempts to diminish various government agencies, US District Judge Royce Lamberth granted a summary judgment in favour of plaintiffs – including VOA journalists and a union representing federal employees – who argued that Lake’s appointment as acting CEO and actions she took in that role ran afoul of the Federal Vacancies Reform Act and the Constitution’s Appointments Clause.

Lamberth ruled that Lake was ineligible to serve as acting CEO because she was not employed by USAGM when former CEO Amanda Bennett resigned in January 2025, and had not been confirmed by the Senate to any other federal post. Lake officially joined USAGM in March as a senior adviser. A November 21 news release from the agency called her deputy CEO.

The judge also rejected the administration’s argument that Lake could wield CEO authority through a delegation from previous acting CEO Victor Morales.

Saturday’s decision marks at



File photo shows a reporter trail United States Agency for Global Media’s (USAGM) Kari Lake as she walks on the driveway outside the West Wing of the White House in Washington, DC. (Reuters)

least the third time Lamberth has ruled against the Trump administration in cases involving the Voice of America. The judge in April and September halted plans that would have put many VOA employees out of work, although the April ruling was later overturned by an appeals court.

Lake vowed to appeal Lamberth’s latest ruling. “Judge Lamberth has a pattern of activist rulings – and this case is no different,” she said in a statement.

The named plaintiffs, Patsy Widakuswara, Kate Neeper and Jessica Jerreat, said the decision “brings renewed hope and momentum” as they push to roll back cuts in VOA’s operations around the world.

“We feel vindicated and deeply grateful,” they said in a statement.

Under the Vacancies Act, actions taken by someone not lawfully serving in a vacant office “shall have no force or effect” and cannot be ratified, Lamberth wrote. That standard could threaten the legal standing of Lake’s decisions, including a reduction-in-force affecting hundreds of employees that remains under a court-ordered suspension. “As a consequence, any actions taken by Lake during her asserted tenure as acting CEO between July 31 and November 19, 2025...are void,” Lamberth wrote.

Voice of America, which had broadcast in 49 languages to 420mn people across more than 100 countries, was limited to four languages under the administration’s efforts to dismantle the agency.

NTSB board member Inman says he was fired by White House

A Republican member of the US National Transportation Safety Board said yesterday he was fired from Friday by the White House without any explanation.

Todd Inman, a former chief of staff to Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao during President Donald Trump’s first term, had served on the NTSB since April 2024. He was the on-scene board member at the American Airlines collision with an Army helicopter in January 2025 near Reagan Washington National Airport that killed 67 people and the November crash of a UPS cargo plane on takeoff from the Louisville, Kentucky, airport that killed 15 people.

The White House did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Inman was removed from the NTSB website yesterday. The NTSB told senior leaders in an e-mail seen by Reuters that Inman’s position was terminated. The NTSB declined to comment. The White House fired then-NTSB Vice-Chair Alvin Brown in May. Brown, a Democrat who was the first-ever African American elected mayor of Jacksonville, Florida, has filed suit challenging his dismissal. The NTSB investigates all civil aviation accidents. The board investigates significant accidents in other modes of transportation

– highway, marine, pipeline and railroad – and determines the probable cause of accidents and makes safety recommendations. Inman said serving on the NTSB had been a great honour. “Witnessing these horrible accidents have undoubtedly taken a toll on me and my family and has changed my perspective in a positive way on how we regulate safety for the travelling public,” Inman said. Late last month, the Senate confirmed John DeLeeuw, who had been managing director of safety and efficiency for American Airlines and a Boeing 787 captain, to fill Brown’s seat on the NTSB. (Reuters)

US suspects China in breach of FBI surveillance network, WSJ reports

Reuters
Washington

US investigators believe hackers affiliated with the Chinese government are responsible for a cyber intrusion on an internal Federal Bureau of Investigation computer network that holds information related to some domestic surveillance orders, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported on Friday.

The scope and severity of the intrusion are not known, and the investigation is in its early stages, the report said, citing people familiar with the matter. The FBI declined to comment.

The Chinese embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to Reuters’ request for comment.

The FBI began investigating abnormal log activity in the targeted system on its network February 17, according to a copy of a notification sent by the FBI to Congress this week reviewed by Reuters.

Hackers targeted an unclassified system that contains information about and related to the communications of people under FBI investigation, according to the notification.

The FBI described the hackers’ techniques as “sophisticated,” and said remediation and foren-

sic investigations were ongoing. Politico reported that the White House, National Security Agency, Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the FBI were collaborating on an investigation into the matter.

A White House official told Reuters it “regularly convenes meetings to discuss any cyber threat to the US,” but that it would not discuss the details of any particular incident or particular meetings.

CISA referred questions to the FBI, which declined to comment. The NSA did not respond to a request for comment.



Australia could help protect Gulf states from Iran attacks: FM

AFP
Sydney

Australia will consider a request by Gulf states for assistance against Iranian drone and missile attacks, Foreign Minister Penny Wong said yesterday.

Speaking to national broadcaster ABC, Wong said: "We've had many countries which are non-participants having been attacked by Iran through this... we have been asked for assistance".

Asked whether that meant assistance in protecting them from Iranian drone and missile attacks, Wong said "correct".

"We will work through that in accordance with the position I have outlined, which is, we are not participating in offensive action against Iran, and we've made clear we would not participate in any ground troop deployment into Iran," she said.

The US and Israel launched strikes on Iran last week and triggered a war in the Middle East.

Iran responded with drone and missile strikes targeting Israel as well as Gulf states like the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar.

The attacks have forced busy Gulf hubs including Dubai and

Doha to suspend flights, leaving passengers stranded around the world.

Australia backed the US-Israeli strikes as necessary to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

It has a small military presence in the Middle East – around 100 personnel, many stationed at the Al Minhad base in the UAE.

"We've had many countries which are non-participants having been attacked by Iran"

Officials have said Canberra has no plans to take part in any military action against Iran.

But the country has close military ties with the US.

As of last month, around 70 Australian military personnel are currently serving on American nuclear submarines, Canberra has said.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has said that three Australian personnel had been on board a US submarine when it sank an Iranian ship on Wednesday.

The personnel were on the submarine as part of training arrangements under AUKUS, a multi-decade defence pact with Britain and the US, Albanese said.

Ramadan in Surabaya



A woman buys dates near the Sunan Ampel Mosque during the holy fasting month of Ramadan in Surabaya, Indonesia's East Java province, yesterday. (AFP)

Indonesian crew missing after UAE tugboat sinks

Three Indonesian crew members are missing after the United Arab Emirates-flagged tugboat *Mussafah 2* sank in the Strait of Hormuz on Friday, Jakarta's foreign ministry said in a statement.

There have been numerous attacks on ships navigating the strait since the US-Israeli war on Iran started on February 28.

The *Mussafah 2* had seven crew members from Indonesia, India and the Philippines, the ministry

said, adding that four survived and three others, all Indonesians, were missing. The UN's International Maritime Organisation (IMO) also confirmed the incident but said it resulted in four fatalities and three others severely injured, the body said in a list on its website. It was unclear why there was a discrepancy between the ministry's and the IMO's tolls. Before it sank, the boat experienced an explosion that caused it to catch fire, the ministry statement said. (AFP)

New hunt for flight MH370 ends with no clues to 12-year mystery

AFP
Kuala Lumpur

The latest search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, which went missing 12 years ago in one of aviation's greatest enduring mysteries, concluded in January without yielding any findings, Malaysia's transport ministry said yesterday.

The Boeing 777 carrying 239 people vanished from radar screens on March 8, 2014, while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

Two-thirds of the passengers were Chinese, while the others included Malaysians, Indonesians and Australians, as well as Indian, American, Dutch and French nationals.

Despite multiple searches, including the largest in aviation history, neither the aircraft, passengers nor black boxes have ever been found.

The latest search, which began in December, scoured an area of around 15,000 square kilometres but efforts "have not yielded any findings that confirm the location of the aircraft wreckage", Malaysia's transport ministry said in a statement.

Exploration firm Ocean Infinity, based in Britain and the US, led the search which concluded on January 23.

Families of the Chinese passengers published an open letter yesterday – the 12th anniversary of the flight's disappearance –

criticising the lack of information they received during the latest search.

"We understand the difficulties of the search," the relatives said in an joint open letter to Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, in which they thanked him for the initiative.

"However, since 15 January this year, families have received no further search briefings whatsoever."

"Over the past two months, we have repeatedly contacted Malaysia's Ministry of Transport through both Malaysia Airlines and the Chinese government, yet have received no response," they said.

In an attempt to locate the aircraft, Ocean Infinity deployed autonomous underwater drones capable of diving to depths of up to 6,000 metres (20,000 feet).

The company conducted previous unsuccessful searches in 2018, as did Australia for three years until January 2017.

In their letter, the Chinese families added that "for 12 years, we have received virtually no genuine psychological support".

"We ask for little: only to be seen, to be heard, and to be treated as individuals with emotions and dignity."

The families are expected to be received by China's foreign ministry on Monday, as they are every year, before visiting the Malaysian embassy in Beijing to deliver the letter for Anwar.

Beijing blasts US and Israeli military strikes on Iran

AFP
Beijing

China's top diplomat urged the United States yesterday to iron out its differences with Beijing, as the world's two largest economies lock horns over trade tariffs and geopolitical issues.

Ties between China and the United States have been strained since US President Donald Trump returned to the White House last year, followed by a trade war that saw the two countries impose tariffs on each other's products.

While the US-China trade war has uprooted the global economy, Beijing has sought to profit off Trump's mercurial policies by positioning itself as a reliable alternative partner.

"We observe a certain country erecting tariff barriers and pursuing decoupling and supply chain disruption," Wang told a press conference yesterday.

"These actions are akin to trying to extinguish a fire with fuel. Ultimately, they will backfire."

He was speaking during China's annual political gathering, which began this week, known as the "Two Sessions".

The parallel meetings of China's parliament and political consultative body are closely watched for clues as to the priorities of China's leaders in the face of a precarious geopolitical landscape.

Wang addressed a range of issues, including the US-China re-

lationship, tensions in the South China Sea, as well as wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

"This year is indeed a big year for Sino-US relations," Wang told reporters.

While China and the United States "cannot change each other," he said, adding "we can change the way we interact with each other".

Wang urged both sides to "manage existing differences and eliminate unnecessary interference". But a wide range of disagreements remain.

Beijing has blasted US and Israeli military strikes on Iran, which sparked the war in the Middle East.

China has diplomatic and trade ties with Tehran, and has condemned the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Wang said yesterday the war "should never have happened".

"A strong fist does not mean strong reason. The world cannot return to the law of the jungle," he told reporters.

At the same time, he maintained that China's relations with Moscow, which have been criticised by Western countries for sustaining the war in Ukraine, remained "steadfast and unshakable".

Beijing has sought to position itself as a neutral player in the Ukraine war, but Western leaders say China is supporting Moscow through imports and by helping the Kremlin to avoid sanctions.

Leaders from France, Canada, Finland and the United Kingdom, among others, have flocked to Beijing, recoiling from Trump's bid to seize Greenland and tariff threats against fellow Nato members.

China FM urges US to manage differences in face of trade woes



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, attends a press conference in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)

China-Russia ties remain 'steadfast, unshakable': FM

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that relations between Beijing and Moscow remain "steadfast and unshakable".

"Amidst the turbulent and complex international environment, China-Russia relations remain steadfast and unshakable," he told a press conference in Beijing. (AFP)

Wang welcomed the visits, saying "more and more insightful Europeans agree that China is not a competitor, but a global partner".

Relations between China and the European Union had seen "a steady improvement" in the last year, he told reporters.

In the spirit of warming rela-

US unlikely to increase tariffs on South Korea

South Korea's Industry Minister Kim Jung-kwan on Sunday said the US is unlikely to slap higher tariffs on South Korea should the Korean parliament move swiftly to implement investment legislation sought by the US next week as scheduled.

Seoul has been in talks with Washington after US President Donald Trump threatened to hike tariffs on goods imported from South Korea to 25%, blaming a delay in the Asian ally's enactment of commitments to invest \$350bn in the US as agreed in a trade deal last year.

"The US expressed gratitude for (South Korea's) upcoming plans to approve the US investment act and the way I heard things from them is that there won't be an official announcement to raise tariffs if what we discussed from the deal gets implemented," Kim said in televised remarks after meeting US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick.

South Korea's ruling Democratic Party will hold a vote on March 12 to pass a special bill to make investments in the US under the trade deal between the countries, the party's floor leader said on Wednesday. (Reuters)

Young Chinese parents tighten belts as childcare costs rise

AFP
Langfang, China

New mother Zhang Xiaofei wanted to be financially secure before having a baby, wary of high childcare costs that have been softened only a little by Chinese government cash incentives to boost record-low births.

The world's second-most populous country is threatened with a demographic crisis after its birth rate halved over the past decade – all while people rapidly age out of the workforce.

Beijing has made "building a childbirth-friendly society" a priority over the next five years, China's Premier Li Qiang said on Thursday as lawmakers gathered in the Great Hall of the People for their annual political conclave.

The government introduced a raft of financial incentives last year, including free pre-school education and annual subsidies of 3,600 yuan (\$500) for each child born.

However, young Chinese say

the measures do little to alleviate financial stress.

Zhang, 32, and her husband Zhu Yunfei, both manicurists, decided to save before having a child.

"We discussed it before. The two of us were aligned in wanting to (focus on) work first because our families' (financial) conditions aren't that good," she told AFP while on maternity leave in Hebei province.

"If we were to have a child, we would want to give them the very best life," she said, cradling her three-week-old daughter.

"Doesn't mean anything".

The new childcare subsidies have cost the government more than 100bn yuan (\$14.5bn), China's national health director told reporters on Saturday.

They were announced shortly after Zhang and Zhu learned they would be parents.

"We thought our kid was too lucky," Zhu, 36, said.

However, the handout – roughly 1.5% of their pooled annual income – doesn't come close to covering a year's worth of baby formula.



Zhang Xiaofei (right) holds her newborn baby Zhu Wanning next to her husband Zhu Yunfei in Langfang, northern China's Hebei province on Friday. (AFP)

"People joke that it's like giving you a five-yuan voucher towards a Rolls-Royce," he told AFP.

Zhu scours second-hand platforms for deals on diapers, while Zhang plans to return to work after her daughter turns one month old.

In Henan, soon-to-be father Li plans to take up a second job once

his daughter is born.

To save money, he and his wife made a five-hour round trip to neighbouring Hubei province, where he said hospitals offer free prenatal genetic screening.

Li, using a pseudonym for fear of repercussions, was reluctant to have children and said he was in-

different to the incentives.

"This bit of cash doesn't mean anything," the 35-year-old told AFP. Incompatible with careers

Social demographer Yun Zhou warned that subsidies "often do not lead to any meaningful rebound in fertility".

The government has also promoted the image of "the ideal Chinese family that is centred around heterosexual marriages" as it tries to boost birth rates, said Zhou, an assistant professor at the University of Michigan.

"For young Chinese women, especially young highly educated Chinese women, there is also this inherent concern about the pervasive gender-based discriminations in the labour market that is front and centre on their mind."

In 2023, the government banned employers from withholding advancement based on marriage, pregnancy, or parental status, as well as the practice of including pregnancy tests as part of pre-employment physical exams.

However, some women still "feel like childbearing and having successful careers and having

a life as a whole is fundamentally incompatible", Zhou said.

Lawmakers this week proposed measures such as extra cash for families with three children and lowering the legal marriage age from 22 for men and 20 for women to encourage earlier childbearing.

Chinese social media users slammed such proposals as "nonsense".

"Being a parent in China is "very difficult", Yuan Limei, a 30-year-old mother of two, told AFP.

"There are all kinds of expenses. Everything requires money," she said, pushing her six-year-old on a swing in Beijing.

"And with kids, there's no way for you to work."

Yuan's oldest child is 10 but she does not plan on having a third.

"A kid is much harder to raise than a dog or cat," she laughed.

New father Zhu noted that, while subsidies have little impact in big cities like Beijing, they can make a dent in smaller villages.

"In the city, 3,600 yuan is hardly anything and can't even buy a baby pram, but in some rural areas it's not a small sum," he said.

Lanka hospital releases 22 rescued from Iranian vessel

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka discharged 22 Iranian crew from hospital who were plucked from life rafts after their warship was sunk by a US submarine, officials said yesterday.

The crew had been treated at Karapitiya Hospital in the southern port city of Galle since Wednesday after the IRIS Dena was torpedoed just outside Sri Lanka's territorial waters.

The attack on Dena was the first military strike far outside the Middle East since the United States and Israel launched their war on Iran a week ago.

Those discharged overnight had been taken to a beach resort in the same district, as Sri Lanka's navy ended its search yesterday for survivors from the vessel. Just over 60 people remain missing, according to an official Sri Lankan estimate. "Another 10 are still undergoing

treatment," a medical officer at the hospital told AFP. He said the bodies of 84 Iranians retrieved from the Indian Ocean were also at the hospital.

Sri Lanka has denied claims that it was under pressure from Washington to stop the Iranians from returning home, saying Colombo would be guided solely by international law and its own domestic legislation.

The survivors from the Dena were being handled according to international humanitarian law, and the government had contacted the International Committee of the Red Cross for assistance, officials said.

The island is also providing safe haven for another 219 Iranian sailors from a second ship, the IRIS Bushehr, which was allowed to enter Sri Lankan waters after the Dena was sunk.

The crew from the Bushehr have been moved to a Sri Lanka Navy camp at Welisara, just north of the capital Colombo, and their vessel

has been taken over by Sri Lanka's navy.

Sri Lanka announced it was taking the Bushehr to the north-eastern port of Trincomalee, but an engine failure and other technical and administrative issues had delayed the movement, a navy spokesman said.

A US State Department spokesperson said the disposition of the Bushehr personnel and Iranian crew rescued at sea was up to Sri Lanka.

"The United States, of course, respects and recognises Sri Lanka's sovereignty in the handling of this situation," the spokesperson told AFP in Washington.

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

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

hankar said on Saturday.

The three ships were part of a multinational naval exercise held by India before the war in the Middle East started last week.

The Lavan docked in the south-west 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," Jaishankar said.

Sri Lankan authorities meanwhile reported an oil slick at another nearby beach resort and said about 50 workers and volunteers had been deployed for a clean-up, while boats were being sent to check for more pollution.

"We saw a thin oil patch at Hikkaduwa beach yesterday," said Samantha Gunasekara, chairman of the Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA).

He added that parts of a damaged life raft, a barrel of lubricants and footwear had washed ashore, and officials were trying to establish if they were from the sunk Dena.

Indian police arrest alleged killers of Bangladesh uprising leader

Indian police said yesterday they had arrested two Bangladeshi nationals accused of murdering a popular student leader in Dhaka, after they allegedly entered India illegally.

Sharif Osman Hadi, a vocal India critic who took part in the mass uprising in 2024 that led to the ouster of Bangladesh's then-premier Sheikh Hasina, was shot by masked assailants last year and later died from his injuries at a Singapore hospital.

Bangladeshi police alleged that the killer had fled to India, a claim rejected at the time by Indian authorities.

However, police in India's West Bengal state, which borders Bangladesh, said yesterday that preliminary interrogation of two Bangladeshi nationals in their custody suggested they had been involved in Hadi's murder.

There was "secret credible information" that the pair had fled

Bangladesh and illegally entered India, trying to "take shelter in the border area... with the intention of crossing back into Bangladesh", the police said in a statement.

Hadi's death set off violent protests in Bangladesh, with angry mobs torching several buildings including two major newspapers deemed to favour India, as well as a prominent cultural institution.

The killing further strained ties between India and Bangladesh that had frayed since Hasina fled the pro-democracy uprising and sought refuge in India.

India's foreign ministry has said it rejects "false narratives" about New Delhi's involvement in Hadi's killing.

In a sign of a potential thaw, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the Bangladesh Nationalist Party for winning the first parliamentary elections after Hasina's exit in February. (AFP)

Nepal probe commission submits protest report

AFP
Kathmandu

Nepal's government-formed investigation commission to probe the deadly September 2025 youth-led uprising that toppled the government submitted its report yesterday.

At least 77 people were killed in the September 8-9 protests, triggered by a brief government ban on social media but building on public frustration after years of economic stagnation and allegations of entrenched political corruption.

Its findings have not yet been made public.

The submission comes days after the country held an election, where the centrist Rastriya Swatantra Party's rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah defeated the ousted four-time prime minister K P Sharma Oli.

RSP has secured a majority in the direct parliamentary elections, partial official results showed Sunday, and is heading for a landslide according to official trends.

Commission chair Gauri Bahadur Karki handed the report to Sushila Karki, the interim prime minister, who has led the Himalayan nation since the unrest.

"After studying it, the implementation process will move forward. We will also discuss making it public," Karki said in a statement after receiving it.

Commission member Bigyan Raj Sharma told reporters the team had questioned more than 200 people, and had submitted a 900-page report – with more than 8,000 additional pages.

"We tried to conduct fact-finding for September 8 and 9," he said.

"Based on what we saw, understood, and verified through the evidence, we have provided our

opinions and recommendations. This is now the government's property, and the government will take the necessary action."

At least 19 young people were killed in a crackdown on the first day of protests.

The unrest spread nationwide the following day as parliament and government offices were set ablaze, resulting in the government's collapse.

More than 2,700 structures were attacked across Nepal, including government buildings, police stations, hotels, businesses, party offices and the houses of politicians. Supermarkets, stores and private residences were also looted.

Around 14,500 detainees also escaped from prisons nationwide during the chaos. Within days, 73-year-old former chief justice Karki was appointed interim prime minister. One of her first acts was to establish a commission to investigate the violence.

Nepal's rapper-led centrist party heads for poll landslide

AFP
Kathmandu

Nepal's centrist RSP party of rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah had secured a majority in the direct parliamentary elections, partial official results showed yesterday, and was heading for a landslide according to official trends.

The 35-year-old's Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) was also leading in the proportional representation vote, according to results declared and election commission trends.

The vote was the first since deadly September 2025 youth anti-corruption protests toppled the government.

Shah himself had on Saturday defeated the veteran four-time prime minister K P Sharma Oli – whose Marxist-led government was ousted in the violence last year – in his own seat.

His victory over the 74-year-old Oli, and his rise from the capital's mayor to potential prime minister, marks one of the most dramatic results in recent Nepali politics.

The September 2025 youth-led demonstrations, under a loose Gen Z banner, began over a brief social media ban but quickly tapped into broader grievances over corruption and a struggling economy.

Elections on Thursday chose a new 275-member House of Representatives, the lower house of parliament, with 185 seats chosen directly, and 110 by a proportional representation vote.

Poll monitors the Asian Network for Free Elections said yesterday that voting had been "peaceful and orderly and reflected continued public engagement with democratic processes despite recent political instability".

Yesterday afternoon, 157 of



Rastriya Swatantra Party election candidate Balendra Shah (centre) greets supporters at the counting centre in Damak in Nepal's Jhapa district on Saturday. (AFP)

the direct elections had been declared: RSP dominating with 121, Nepali Congress 17, and the Marxists of now-defeated Oli trailing with seven.

Former Maoist guerrilla commander Pushpa Kamal Dahal, a three-time prime minister, won his seat, with his party holding seven in total.

Trends showed Shah's RSP was also leading in half of the remaining eight constituencies in the direct elections.

In the proportional representation vote, RSP was leading with nearly half of the counted votes – but final results could take several more days.

Nepali Congress, the largest party in the past coalition government, also saw its new leader, Gagan Thapa, defeated by RSP.

"Counting is moving forward smoothly in all remaining constituencies," Election Commission spokesman Narayan Prasad Bhattarai said, adding that final results will take a "few days".

The first-time parliamentary lawmaker Shah toured the streets of his new constituency on Saturday evening, wearing his signature dark sunglasses and waving from the sunroof of a car in a

victory parade through cheering crowds who chanted "Balen" – as he is better known.

Shah, who did not make a speech, won more than three times more votes than Oli, who congratulated the winner, wishing him "a smooth and successful five-year tenure".

Nepal's government-formed investigation commission to probe the deadly September 2025 violence also submitted its report yesterday.

No one has been held accountable for the deaths as yet.

The report was handed to Sushila Karki, the interim prime minister.

Karki said it would be up to the new government taking power to act – but that she hoped its key findings would be made public before she steps down.

"We will not be here for its implementation, because we have to handover to the new government and go," she said.

"But, I believe, that the next government will study and implement this."

Oli has denied ordering security forces to open fire on protesters, and has told AFP that he blames "infiltrators" for the violence.



People wait in a queue to refuel their vehicles near a fuel station in Dhaka yesterday. (AFP)

Bangladesh launched fuel rationing yesterday as the war in the Middle East deepened an energy crunch, creating long queues at filling stations and boiling over into anger.

The country of 170mn people imports 95% of its oil and gas needs.

Following the US and Israeli attacks on Iran, and Tehran's retaliatory strikes throughout the Gulf, the national oil company, Bangladesh Petroleum Corp (BPC), restricted fuel sales for most vehicles.

Authorities capped fuel purchases for several types of vehicles as panic buying and hoarding spread following warnings of possible supply disruptions.

For example, motorcyclists are now limited to a maximum of two litres (0.5 US gallons) per tank.

"Consumers tend to buy more than they usually purchase" during times of crisis, BPC said in a statement.

One man was killed on Saturday night in the southern district of Jhenaidah after an altercation with filling station staff over refu-

elling, triggering unrest.

Following the death of Nirob Hossain, 25, angry crowds torched three buses and vandalised a filling station, police officer Md Mahfuz Afzal said.

As soon as the restrictions took effect yesterday, long lines of vehicles formed outside numerous gas stations in the capital Dhaka.

"I waited for more than an hour to get two litres," said motorcyclist Md Al-Amin, 45. "My tank holds eight litres, and I usually fill up once a week – so now I'll have to come back the day after tomorrow."

Philippine entomologist goes to bat for misunderstood bugs

AFP
Los Baños, Philippines

A thin band of light from Cristian Lucanas's headlamp pierces the blackness of a Philippine rainforest as he digs through the underbrush before gently scooping up a cockroach with his bare hands.

As the Southeast Asian country's lone expert on the oft-misunderstood insect – and discoverer of 15 species – friends have dubbed the soft-spoken scientist "Ipis Lord", after the local name for the ubiquitous bug.

While fully aware most view cockroaches as disgusting, disease-bearing pests, the 31-year-old University of the Philippines entomologist says they deserve more study – and credit – for their key role in the planet's ecosystem.

"I also hated cockroaches when I was a child," Lucanas said with a grin during an interview with AFP in the college town of Los Baños, south of Manila.

"Fear of cockroaches is innate," he conceded, adding he usually

tells people "I work in a museum" when asked about his job.

His girlfriend, also an entomologist, is more understanding, though her work focuses on insects less reviled than the cockroach, of which there are more than 4,600 known species.

"It's possible the real total is double or even triple that," said Lucanas, unable to hide his enthusiasm.

"For the longest time, no one was studying them," he said, calling it "sad" given the size and variety of the archipelago nation's cockroach population.

The massively biodiverse Philippines has about 130 known species, three-fourths of which are found nowhere else on earth.

Lucanas thinks there could be another 200 local varieties yet to be documented.

"Because of their outsized role in the ecosystem, its processes would be hampered if they disappear," he said.

Like dung beetles and earthworms, cockroaches are detritivores, built to eat and break down dead organic matter – including their own kind – and return them to the soil.



Cristian Lucanas, an entomologist from the University of the Philippines Los Baños, shows preserved specimens of cockroaches among troves inside a laboratory at the University of the Philippines in Los Baños town, south of Manila. (AFP)

While some cockroach species do carry disease-spreading microbes, a world without them would slow the process of decomposition crucial for sustaining ecosystems, he said.

Birds and spiders would lose a key food source, and plants would absorb less carbon dioxide, potentially contributing to global warming.

When his biology class adviser was unable to identify the species, Lucanas knew he had found his niche.

A lifelong fan of J R R Tolkien, Lucanas often names his discoveries after creatures in the author's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy: "Valar", "Hobbitoblatta", and "Nazgul".

Their ranks are set to grow once he finishes writing up scientific papers on his newest finds, he promised.

Given the uniqueness of his speciality, the young scientist occasionally finds himself in demand, albeit for very specific situations.

The country's biggest bug spray firm once invited him to lecture its staff on cockroach identification.

Its top restaurant chain also sought his advice, desperate to stop raids on their commissary by so-called German cockroaches, an invasive species from India.

"Control is not really my forte," Lucanas admitted.

But cockroaches are far from the indestructible creatures that they are often portrayed as, he insists.

It is not true, for instance, that

cockroaches will inherit the earth after a nuclear war, he said, noting that their resistance to radioactive exposure is about on par with other insects.

Humans, not bombs, pose a more immediate threat to the creatures, he said, noting that some species, especially in mountain environments, reproduce slowly and could disappear if their habitats are encroached upon.

Several cave-dwelling Philippine species first described in the 1890s during the Spanish colonial period "have not been seen again" since their habitats were opened to tourism, he explained.

He laments that most science funding in his country "goes to research that will directly affect humans", worrying that at best he will only be able to catalogue and explain the Philippines' cockroaches.

But for now, that's enough, he said when asked about the decades still left in his career.

"I think I'll stick with what I'm doing. It's how I've built my reputation."

"And I really do enjoy working with cockroaches."



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GULF TIMES

Hungary PM Orban's battery bet turns into election headache

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's bet on a battery-driven economic upswing appears to have backfired, with the sector mired in a prolonged downturn and environmental concerns coming to the fore shortly before a make-or-break national election.

In power for 16 years, Orban has bet big since 2021 on EV batteries, attracting foreign investment worth some 26bn euros, based on a government tally, mainly from South Korean and Chinese manufacturers, and making Hungary a key hub in Europe.

But with Orban, a eurosceptic nationalist, already trailing his centre-right challenger Peter Magyar, according to most opinion polls, surveys show Hungary's battery plants have become an electoral risk ahead of the April 12 ballot.

Although battery demand is seen rising in the years ahead, the sector has proved unable so far to revive Hungary's stagnant economy.

Orban's government has also been on the defensive since news website Telex published a report last month on the scale of health and safety violations at Samsung SDI's battery plant in the northern town of God. Orban aide Gergely Gulyas said Samsung had been fined several times between 2022 and 2023 for exceeding emissions standards in the factory, although the government says there was no pollution outside the plant.

However, last Friday police said they had launched four criminal procedures against Samsung since 2023, including a 2024 probe into environmental damage and occupational endangerment, and a 2026 inquiry into waste management violations.

Flagship EV sector dogged by environmental, other concerns

continue to consider the safety and health of our employees as our most important value in the future and continue to conduct responsible corporate activities based on trust with the local community," it said on its website.

Laszlo Toth, however, who rents a house near the factory, said he was concerned by what he described as large plumes of steam rising from the plant every night. "These battery plants were not supposed to be located next to human settlements but in deserts," said Toth, 50, who works as a food courier.

"We did not need them. We used to have farmlands."

When Orban won the 2022 election, he set out plans to turn Hungary into a battery "superpower" by luring Asian investors and making it the world's fifth-largest exporter of batteries. But that was followed by a three-year stretch of stagnation, including two years of falling battery output.

Saddled with the EU's worst inflationary surge after Russia's 2022 invasion of neighbouring Ukraine, Hungary's economy has lagged even a weak EU growth average that Orban had sought to eclipse. Orban's hopes of lifting growth towards 6% beyond 2026 now look out of reach. The International Monetary Fund projects annual expansion of 2% to 2.6% until 2030. His government has backed the EV sector with subsidies worth some 1.3bn euros (\$1.51bn), including up to 344mn euros for Samsung's capacity expansion last year.

David Karas, senior researcher at CEU Democracy Institute, said the perception that Orban's nationalist government was prioritising foreign capital over local interests was politically toxic.

Orban's bet could still pay long-term dividends, with the International Energy Agency projecting EV battery demand more than tripling by 2030 from 2024 levels. But a Median survey released last week showed nearly two-thirds of those polled believed the Samsung plant's difficulties had harmed Orban's re-election prospects. Opposition leader Magyar has pledged to tighten oversight of battery plants and curb subsidies for gigafactories if his Tisza Party unseats Orban's Fidesz.

God resident Istvan Takacs, 64, said he had still not decided how to vote but expressed concern about the rising cost of living. "When I started working, I could buy three loaves of bread from an hourly wage," said Takacs, who drove tractors for four decades. "Now, we haven't got much further, though we're not worse off either," he said. "I think everything's stagnating here." - Reuters

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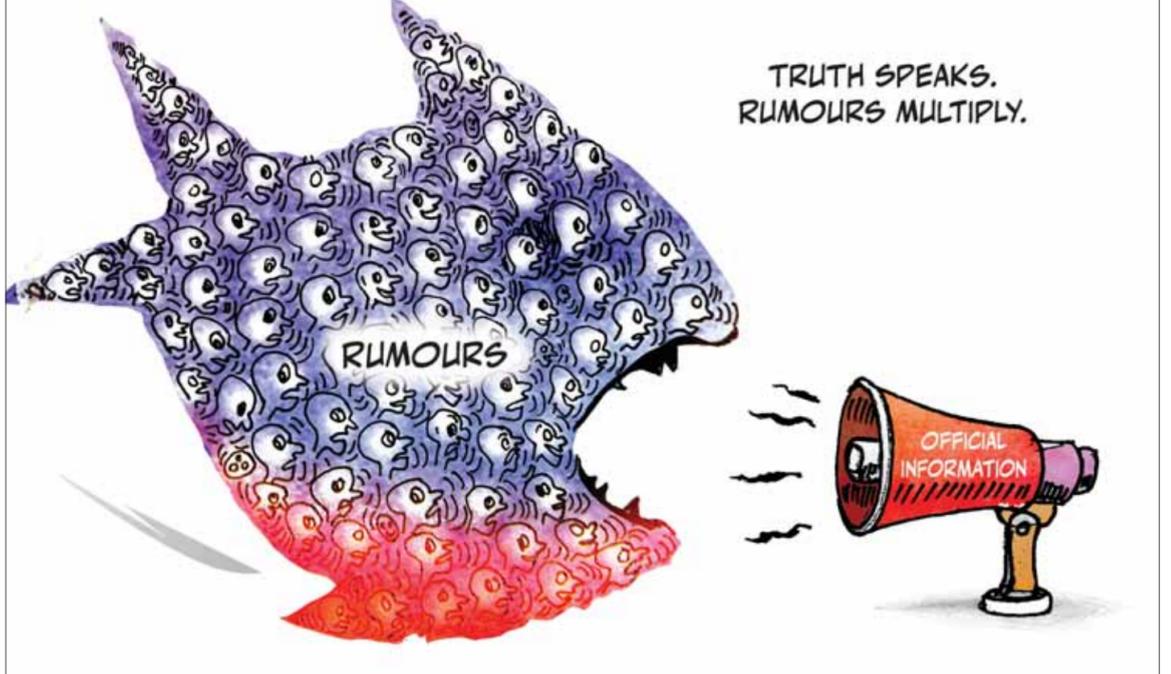
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TRUTH SPEAKS.
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'Qatar's response to regional security situation exemplary'

By Muhammad Aamer

Ambassador of Pakistan

On behalf of the Government of Pakistan and the more than 350,000-strong Pakistani community residing in Qatar, I would like to express our deep appreciation for the exemplary measures taken by the Government of Qatar during the ongoing regional security situation.

Pakistan stands in full solidarity with Qatar during these testing times.

The timely alerts issued through the Ministry of Interior's Early Warning System and national emergency notifications have been instrumental in keeping residents well informed and safe. These alerts are saving lives by ensuring that residents receive immediate guidance during rapidly evolving situations.

We have full confidence in the Government of Qatar and its institutions, which have continued to provide safety and security to all residents. Despite the current regional tensions, Qatar has maintained essential services and a sense of normalcy, reflecting the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the effective governance of His Excellency the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani.

It is also important to note that resident Pakistanis have continued to remain in Qatar, which reflects the confidence of our community in the stability of the country and in the ability of the Qatari authorities to manage the situation effectively. The embassy has not received any instructions from the Government of Pakistan regarding evacuation, which further reflects confidence in the safety and stability being



Lieutenant-General (R) Muhammad Aamer, Ambassador of Pakistan to Qatar.

Resident Pakistanis have continued to remain in Qatar, which reflects the confidence of our community in the stability of the country and in the ability of the Qatari authorities to manage the situation effectively

maintained by the host government.

The Embassy of Pakistan in Doha has activated round-the-clock communication channels to assist Pakistani nationals who may require support. Our crisis response mechanism remains fully operational while the embassy continues to function normally and provide all regular consular services. A

facilitation desk has also been established at Hamad International Airport to support Pakistani transit passengers facing travel disruptions.

Particular attention has been given to Pakistani transit passengers who became stranded in Doha due to flight disruptions. The embassy has been working closely with Qatari authorities, airlines and Pakistani missions in neighbouring countries to identify practical travel options. We are also co-ordinating with the Embassy of Pakistan in Riyadh to facilitate Saudi visas for those willing to travel by road to Saudi Arabia for onward travel.

In addition to travel facilitation, the embassy has been extending consular and humanitarian assistance, including provision of food, ration items, medicines, medical support and transport facilitation where required. The embassy also continues to provide guidance and assistance to Pakistani workers and students, while maintaining close engagement with community representatives.

I would like to reassure the Pakistani community that their safety and well-being remain our highest priority and the embassy stands ready to provide assistance and facilitation whenever needed.

At the same time, I urge all members of the Pakistani community to strictly follow the instructions issued by the Qatari authorities and to exercise caution. Residents should also use social media responsibly and refrain from spreading unverified information as responsible communication is essential during such situations.

Pakistan and Qatar share deep-rooted fraternal relations and the Pakistani community remains an integral and valued part of Qatar's social and economic fabric.

The embassy will continue to remain fully engaged in ensuring the welfare of Pakistani nationals in the country.

Maritime insurance premiums surge as Iran conflict widens

By Noor Z Hussain and Manya Saini

Reuters

As the conflict in the Gulf widens, maritime insurance premiums for war coverage are surging -- in some cases by more than 1000% -- dramatically driving up the cost of moving energy through a critical maritime corridor.

The conflagration sparked by Saturday's Israeli-US air strikes against Tehran has paralysed traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a major shipping chokepoint. Iran has said it would fire on any ship trying to pass, and at least nine vessels have suffered damage in the area since the conflict began.

War risk insurance allows ship owners to claim against any damage to their vessel or the cargo resulting from conflict or terrorism. Policies are typically annual, although some cover one-off voyages through risky waters, including war zones.

The spike in premiums underscores how the war is raising costs for ship owners, traders and energy companies moving cargo through the Strait, adding to fears the conflict -- which shows no signs of abating -- could stoke inflation if it goes on, said analysts.

"The hull war market has reacted more immediately," due to the risk of large, concentrated losses if multiple vessels are hit in the same area, said Stephen Rudman, head of marine, Asia, at global insurance broker Aon, adding that if the situation escalates

materially, further rate correction is likely.

"Additional premiums for vessels transiting high-risk waters are rising sharply and may continue to fluctuate in the short term," he said.

Cargo war risk premium rates are also increasing, with quotes being reviewed on a voyage-by-voyage basis, particularly for energy and bulk commodity trades, he said.

Analysts at Jefferies estimated on Thursday that potential industry losses from at least seven vessels reported damaged, at the time its note was published on March 5, could reach up to \$1.75bn.

With most tankers valued between \$200mn and \$300mn, the new insurance rate of 3% would imply a hull war risk premium of about \$7.5mn, up from around 0.25%, or \$625,000, before the conflict began, the brokerage added.

Angus Blayney, marine divisional director at Gallagher, a major insurance broker, told Reuters that rates have increased and are changing daily depending on vessel type and individual circumstances, but he did not provide specific figures. He added that cover remains available.

CONCENTRATED RISK IN THE AREA

More than 20mn barrels of crude, condensate and fuels passed through the Strait daily last year on average, data from analytics firm Vortexa showed. About a fifth of the total oil the world consumes passes through the Strait.

"There remain approximately 1,000 vessels, about half of which are oil and gas tankers,

with an aggregate hull value exceeding \$25bn in the Arabian Gulf and surrounding waters," Lloyd's Market Association's CEO Sheila Cameron said in a statement.

Cameron added that the vast majority of these vessels were insured in the London market and insurance "currently remains in place".

Morningstar DBRS wrote in a note earlier this month that reinsurers may respond by raising the loss level at which their liability kicks in, or reducing capacity, "leaving primary underwriters retaining more risk and potentially pressure solvency levels."

ADMINISTRATION SEEKS SOLUTIONS

The Trump administration is exploring ways to bring down oil prices by getting shipping routes moving again.

On Tuesday, President Donald Trump said the US Navy could begin escorting oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz and added he had ordered the US International Development Finance Corporation to provide political risk insurance and financial guarantees for maritime trade in the Gulf.

He also met with global insurance broker Marsh to discuss the matter, the company said. A Lloyd's spokesperson also said the company was engaging with the Development Finance Corporation and relevant stakeholders to find solutions.

But analysts said it remains unclear how the administration intends to intervene and whether any scheme would apply to ships and cargo of all nationalities.

Pope Leo urges end to bombing, calls for dialogue

Pope Leo said yesterday that deeply troubling news continued to arrive from Iran and across the Middle East, urging an end to the violence and renewed efforts to open space for dialogue.

As fighting escalated on the ninth day of the US-Israeli assault on Iran, the first US Pope warned that the conflict was fuelling fear and hatred and raised concerns that it could spread further.

Iranian missile-and-drone retaliation has targeted many Gulf countries and further afield in the Middle East.

US President Donald Trump has refused to rule out sending American ground troops into Iran, but continues to insist that the war is progressing speedily.

"Alongside the episodes of violence and devastation and the widespread climate of hatred and fear, there is also growing concern that the conflict could spread and that other countries in the region, including dear Lebanon, could once again sink into instability," Leo said at the Angelus prayer in St Peter's Square.

"Let us raise our humble prayer to the Lord that the roar of bombs may cease, that weapons may fall silent, and that space may be opened for dialogue in which the voices of peoples can be heard," he added.

The Vatican's top diplomat warned on Wednesday that the US-Israeli strikes undermined international law and said nations did not have a right to launch "preventive wars", an unusually direct criticism of the military campaign. - **AFP/Reuters**

Macron to visit Cyprus as France sends warships to Mediterranean

President Emmanuel Macron will visit Cyprus today, his office said, as France deploys warships to the Mediterranean following a drone attack on the island EU member days ago.

Macron will meet Cypriot counterpart Nikos Christodoulides and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Paphos to show "solidarity" and detail moves to "strengthen security around Cyprus and in the eastern Mediterranean", the Elysee said yesterday.

The visit will take place as the war pitting US and Israel against Iran is in its second week, affecting much of the Middle East.

Last Monday Cyprus was targeted by Iranian-made drones, leading Macron to order France's Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier to the Mediterranean and a frigate and air defence units to Cyprus.

"This trip is intended to demonstrate France's solidarity with Cyprus, a member state of the European Union with which we have a strategic partnership" and which was recently hit "by several drones and missile strikes", the Elysee said.

The visit to Cyprus will also allow Macron "to emphasise the importance of guaranteeing freedom of navigation and maritime security in the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz, in particular through the European Union's Aspides maritime operation," it added. - **AFP**

Possible terrorism motive seen in US embassy blast: Norway police

AFP/Reuters
Oslo

Oslo police said yesterday that an explosion at the US embassy in Norway overnight may have been an act of terror, but stressed they were also investigating other possible causes.

The blast, which caused no injuries and minor material damage, occurred around 1am (0000 GMT) at the entrance to the embassy's consular section.

Police did not provide details about what might have caused it, but did say that an "explosive device" had been used.

Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store called the incident "very serious and completely unacceptable".

In a statement, he said he had spoken with the head of the US embassy in Oslo yesterday.

Shattered glass could be seen in the snow outside the building's entrance, as well as cracks in a thick glass door.

Overhead lamps dangled from wiring, and there were black marks on the ground at the foot of the door, presumably from the blast.

"One of the hypotheses is that it is an act of terrorism," Frode Larsen, the head of the

police's joint unit for investigation and intelligence, told public broadcaster NRK.

"But we are not completely stuck on that. We have to be open to the possibility that there may be other causes behind what has happened," he said, speaking on the sidelines of a news conference.

Police were searching for the perpetrators but had "no suspects" yet, Larsen told journalists.

Oslo police official Grete Lien Metlid appeared to confirm that an explosive had been thrown at the embassy.

Asked by a reporter if the device used was a hand grenade, she replied: "We haven't said anything about what was thrown."

US embassies have been placed on high alert in the Middle East over American military operations in Iran and several have faced attacks as Tehran hits back at industrial and diplomatic targets.

Investigators in Oslo have not ruled out a possible link to the war in the Middle East.

"It is natural to see this in connection with the current security policy situation," Larsen said, adding that police had increased security at the scene after the attack.

Prime Minister Store said security had also been beefed up at "at other American, Israeli, and also Jewish targets" in Norway,

but stressed that "nothing indicates that the situation is dangerous for people in Oslo or elsewhere in the country".

Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide had earlier stressed that "the security of diplomatic missions is extremely important to us".

The Norwegian security service PST told AFP that it had called in extra staff to assist police with the investigation.

Spokesman Martin Bernsen stressed there had been "no change" to the threat assessment level in the Scandinavian country, which has been at three on a five-point scale since November 2024.

He refused to disclose whether any threats had been made against US interests in Norway prior to the explosion.

Investigators examined the scene overnight, while dogs, drones, and helicopters were brought in to search for the perpetrators, Oslo police said in a statement.

Security is normally high outside US embassies worldwide.

It was not immediately known what security the Oslo embassy had at the time of the incident.

Several hours after the blast, police declared the area around the building "safe" for residents and passersby.

"There was a very thick layer of smoke

on the street," said Sebastian Toerstad, 18, a high school student who drove past the embassy at the time of the explosion. "There was some damage to the entrance."

A 16-year-old identified only as Edvard told TV2 that he had been watching television when he heard the blast.

"My mother and I first thought it came from our house so we looked around a little, but then we saw the flashing lights outside the window and (many police officers)," he said. "There were police dogs and drones and police with automatic weapons and helicopters in the air."

A group of three friends meanwhile told TV2 that they were waiting for a taxi near the embassy when the explosion went off.

"We felt three 'bangs' that made the ground shake," Kristian Wendelborg Einung said.

Once in their taxi, they drove past the scene and saw the street in front of the embassy covered in smoke.

"We arrived before the police. The blanket of smoke was very strange. It was like thick fog," he said.

The US embassy referred all inquiries to the US State Department, when contacted by Reuters.

The State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.



People take part in a rally for gender equality and against violence towards women to mark the International Women's Day in Istanbul. - **AFP**



A police officer stands before demonstrators holding a banner reading 'We march for a life with dignity' during a rally marking the International Women's Day in Pristina. - **AFP**

Left: Activists take part in a rally on International Women's Day in Kyiv. - **Reuters**



A woman holds a sign that reads 'Solidarity is our superpower' during a demonstration to mark International Women's Day in Berlin. - **Reuters**

Thousands come out for women's rights

Thousands of people came out in cities across Spain yesterday to denounce violence against women and the war in the Middle East sparked by US-Israeli strikes.

Demonstrations marking International Women's Day took place in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Granada, Bilbao, and San Sebastian, among other cities.

"No to war" and "Anti-fascist feminists against imperialist war" were among the slogans written on signs at the protests.

"It is within our power to stop the war, to stop the barbarity, and to win rights. We proclaim ourselves in defence of peace, in defence of the Iranian people, in defence of Iranian women," Yolanda Diaz, second vice-president, told the press at the rally.

Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has drawn the ire of the US administration after he refused the use of Spain's military bases for strikes against Iran, which he called an "extraordinary mistake" and "not in accordance with international law".

US President Donald Trump lashed out at Sanchez's government, threatening to sever all trade with the EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) member, which he called "a loser". - **AFP**

Swiss set to reject plan to cut funds for broadcaster

Swiss voters looked set yesterday to reject a referendum to slash public broadcaster SRG's funding, with early projections showing 62% opposing a plan to cut the annual licence fee, a move critics warned would weaken media and fuel disinformation.

The campaign wanted to reduce the annual licence fee that all Swiss households must pay, from 335 Swiss francs (\$431.87) to 200 francs.

Supporters, mainly from right-wing groups including the Swiss People's Party (SVP), had argued that the charge - the highest in the world - was too expensive, and that SRG, which runs 17 radio stations and seven TV channels in four languages, had become too bloated.

They also said the SRG was not politically independent, and had a left-wing bias in its coverage.

Opponents had said the move reflected pressure on public media organisations from the political right, which has accused national broadcasters globally of being politically biased against them.

News, sports and cultural coverage would suffer, opponents said, while an SRG weakened by lower funding could mean that disinformation would be easier to spread.

"A major dismantling of Switzerland's media infrastructure has been prevented," said Laura Zimmermann, leader of the campaign against the cuts. "Our access to reliable information remains protected."

"We remain fully committed to accompanying the public in their everyday lives with a diverse and high-quality programme," said Susanne Wille, SRG director-general. - **Reuters**

Zelensky discusses joint drone production with Dutch PM

Reuters/AFP
Kyiv

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said he and Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten discussed joint arms production during the latter's visit to Kyiv yesterday, and he stressed Ukraine's unique experience in defending against Iranian-made drones used by Russia.

"It is important that we are producing weapons together with the Netherlands - and we will certainly continue and expand this joint work," Zelensky said on X, adding that they had

discussed investments and possible production volumes in detail.

In recent months, Ukraine has stepped up efforts to establish joint arms production with European countries, opening several factories to manufacture drones.

As Iran launches drones at US allies across the Gulf and beyond in response to intense US and Israeli strikes, Ukraine is hoping the Middle East crisis will increase its leverage with allies by showing them that the expertise it has built during four years of Russia's full-scale invasion could be invaluable to partners' own long-term security.

Zelensky said that Kyiv has unique experience in combating drones, which Iran actively uses in its attacks on Middle Eastern countries.

He said that Ukraine is ready to sell the interceptor drones that are not used by the Ukrainian military, and the first group of Ukrainian military instructors will head to the Middle East today.

"They are coming with the means to help," Zelensky noted, adding that Ukraine would provide the expertise and experience in defending against "Shahed" model drones and cruise missiles.

Ukrainian manufacturers of cheap interceptor drones de-

signed to knock out enemy unmanned aerial vehicles have said they have the capacity to export in large volumes.

Russia has been using Iranian-designed Shahed drones throughout its four-year invasion of Ukraine, and Kyiv has developed a range of cheap and effective drone interceptors against them.

Ukraine says that the interceptors - aircraft designed to hit incoming attack drones mid-air - are world-leading.

A delay in US missile supplies during winter made Ukraine's civil infrastructure more vulnerable to widespread Russian airstrikes that left hundreds of thou-

sands without heating in freezing temperatures.

Ukraine is facing a shortage of the expensive US PAC-3 air defence ammunition and Kyiv fears a longer Middle East war could disrupt supplies even further.

On Tuesday Zelensky offered US allies in the Middle East to swap some of their air defence missiles for Ukrainian drone interceptors, which he said would better protect them from Iranian drone attacks.

When asked how exactly he wants to help the United States and its Gulf allies repel the drones, Zelensky said: "It is too early to say anything else at this stage."

Ukraine strike kills one, injures 10 in Russian-occupied region: local official

An overnight Ukrainian drone attack killed one person and injured around 10 others in the Russian-occupied southern Zaporizhzhia region, Moscow-installed authorities said yesterday.

A video posted on social media site VK overnight showed firefighters extinguishing a burning residential building that the drone reportedly hit.

"(There are) more than 10 injured people, and the body of a woman was found during the night," Vasylyivka municipality official Natalia Romanichenko told Russia's state news agency Tass.

In Ukraine's Kharkiv region in the northeast, a Russian strike on the village of Velyka Babka wounded three people, authorities said.

"Russian forces carried out a targeted

strike on emergency services last night," Ukraine's emergency service said yesterday on Telegram.

Ukraine's emergency service added that an initial drone strike set a house on fire and wounded three before a second Russian drone hit the fire engine sent to put out the blaze.

On the night of Friday to Saturday, 12 people were killed in Ukraine when Russia

fired a volley of missiles and drones.

At least 10 were killed in Kharkiv when a Russian missile struck a five-storey apartment building.

Over the past week, Russia has launched "nearly 1,750 attack drones, 1,530 guided aerial bombs, and 39 missiles against our people" Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday on social media. - **AFP**



American visitor finds reassurance in Doha's calm amid tensions

By Shaima Sherif
Doha

A tourist visiting Doha after performing Umrah found his holiday unexpectedly unfolding amid regional tensions, describing a mix of concern and reassurance as Qatar's calm atmosphere and welcoming community helped ease uncertainty.

What began as a short holiday in Qatar for American visitor Wajeeh Mehmood turned into an unexpected experience of witnessing regional tensions firsthand, yet he says the calm atmosphere in Doha has been reassuring despite moments of uncertainty.

Mehmood, who arrived in Doha after completing Umrah in Saudi Arabia, said visiting Qatar had long been on his travel list.

"I had always wanted to come to Doha," he said. "I've been to Dubai and other places in the region, but I always heard beautiful things about Doha from friends back home."

However, only a few days into his stay, regional developments intensified, and Mehmood found himself hearing the sounds of missile interceptions for the first time.

"At first I thought it was just another situation in the region that would blow over," he recalled. "But when I actually heard the explosions and felt the windows



Wajeeh Mehmood

shaking, I realised this was serious."

He described the moment when the situation suddenly felt real.

"I went to the window and saw everything shaking and thought, 'Okay, what's going on?' It was a bit scary."

Despite the initial shock, Mehmood said the experience also highlighted the sense of calm that continues to characterise daily life in Doha.

"What surprised me is that many places were still open," he said. "Restaurants were open, people were still going about their daily lives."

According to Mehmood, this sense of normality appeared to stem from residents' confidence in the country's response.

"I think people are not freaking out because they feel safe," he said. "That says something about

the trust people have in the government and how the situation is being handled."

He also noted the supportive atmosphere within the community. "People have been very welcoming. Some even say, 'If you want to come over for iftar, let us know! That kind of hospitality really stands out.'"

At the same time, he admitted that the uncertainty surrounding travel plans has been challenging.

"My mum keeps texting me asking when I'm coming home," he said with a smile. "And of course it's Ramadan, so missing iftar with my family is difficult."

The frequent alerts and news updates have also created moments of anxiety. "At the begin-

ning it was very alarming," he said. "But after a few days you almost become a little desensitised to it. It becomes another alert on your phone."

For now, Mehmood says he is trying to remain positive while waiting for travel plans to become clearer. "It's a strange situation. On one hand, it feels like an extended holiday in a beautiful city. On the other hand, you're not sure what will happen next."

Still, he remains appreciative of his experience in Qatar. "Doha is a beautiful city, and the people are amazing and very hospitable," he said. "If there is anywhere to be stuck for a while, it's not a bad place to be."

Startup leader underlines unity of Qatar's diverse communities amid regional turmoil

By Peter Alagos
Business Editor

Qatar's startup community has become a mirror of the nation's strength in times of uncertainty, with citizens and expatriates alike standing behind each other and the government's efforts to safeguard stability.

Startup Grind Doha chapter director Indica Amarasinghe told Gulf Times yesterday that the unity of Qatar's diverse communities is also a source of optimism, underscoring the shared resilience of citizens and residents in demonstrating how solidarity can "overcome short-term challenges and reinforce the country's long term vision."

"From the perspective of the startup community, I've seen how Qatar has handled different challenges over the past decade. Each time, the government has acted wisely and proactively to support citizens, businesses, and residents.

"As an expatriate living in Qatar and part of the startup ecosystem, I firmly believe they are doing their very best for everyone right now. I'm confident we will come through this," explained Amarasinghe, citing the ongoing regional conflict that shocked both regional and global markets.

According to Amarasinghe, the country's investments in the startup ecosystem, through initiatives like the Web Summit Qatar and the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA)'s fund of funds programme, among others, "are designed for the long term."

"My encouragement to entrepreneurs, founders, startups, and the wider ecosystem is to focus on overcoming these short-term challenges, because there is so much more to contribute to and benefit from in Qatar's future," he emphasised, adding that "We're not the only ones affected; many countries and much of the world are facing challenges. We're not in this alone."

Amarasinghe also encouraged young entrepreneurs in Qatar who are just starting their journey: "My advice is to hold on. This is part of the startup journey; just another bump in the road. Entrepreneurs need to be resilient and take a lean approach to their operations to get through this period and come back stronger."

"The opportunities in Qatar are not going away. They remain, and will only grow. Founders should stay the course, wade through the challenges, and be ready to restart if they've had to pause. The key message is: opportunities are still here in Qatar."

When asked about the qualities of Qatar's people and community that inspire confidence in overcoming challenges together, Amarasinghe pointed out: "Over the past week, I've seen on social media how supportive people have been of the government's efforts."

"Citizens and residents are looking out for each other's safety, sharing updates, and showing solidarity. It has created a real sense of community. This conflict has brought us together. Everyone has been affected equally, regardless of background or faith, and that has united



Startup Grind Doha chapter director Indica Amarasinghe.

us even more." Citing past regional challenges, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic and other challenges, Amarasinghe emphasised that "Qatar has shown resilience throughout these times."

He also said: "Different agencies, such as Qatar Development Bank (QDB) and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as many others, quickly opened communication channels and hotlines to support businesses over the past week. The support was comprehensive."

Amarasinghe also lauded the response and support of citizens and residents on various social media platforms. "I've also seen many posts from expatriates on social media, including one I shared on LinkedIn, expressing support for Qatar, calling it home, and praying for peace. People are showing their full support for the country and its leadership."

"For the past 17 years, Qatar has been my home — a place that has given me and my family opportunities, friendships, and a community that feels like family. During times like these, it is inspiring to see the strength, unity, and resilience of the people of Qatar."

"[I'm] proud to call this country home and to stand with this incredible community. May God protect Qatar, its leadership and its people, and continue to bless it with peace and prosperity," stated Amarasinghe's LinkedIn post.

Tale from a bygone era: Spirit of Ramadan in old mosques

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

In Qatar, as in many Gulf countries, old mosques were the heart of the community, serving as social and spiritual centres where worshippers gathered for Taraweeh prayers during Ramadan. These mosques were characterised by their simplicity and tranquillity. The traditional architectural style lacked elaborate decorations or vibrant colours, relying instead on wood, white walls, and open windows that allowed for air circulation, filling the space with the serene spirit of Ramadan.

There were no large loudspeakers as there are today; instead, the muezzin's call to prayer filled the air, reaching every corner of the neighbourhood. Traditional lamps lit the mosques, and worshippers sat in neat rows, feeling a sense of unity and shared spirit. What was beautiful about that period was that mosques were a fundamental element of community relations.



People cooperated and participated in organising Ramadan activities through the mosques: from distributing food to the needy to holding communal Ramadan celebrations. There was always an opportunity for social interaction and learning, as the mosque was the spiritual and social cornerstone of the community.

During Ramadan, the Taraweeh prayers in the old mosques took on a unique communal character. People would flock to the mosque after breaking their fast, filling every corner. The mosques would also be filled with the sounds of children studying the Quran under the sheikhs' supervision.

Today, with the spread of large mosques and modern architecture, some of these details have changed, but the spirit of Ramadan remains.

Mosques remain the spiritual sanctuary and gathering places for Muslims of different ages and social classes. Today's mosques may be larger and better equipped, but the scent of the first Tarawih prayers and of praying in the old mosques where the call to prayer was first heard remains in everyone's memory. Among the most prominent of these old mosques are: Al-Qubaib Mosque, Al-Shuyoukh Mosque, Abu Dhalouf, Fudair, and Al-Nu'man.

Qatar: An Arab model in sports investment

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

During the eighth session of the "Green Tent" programme, part of the "Every Spring a Flower" initiative of Qatar Foundation (QF), the topic of "Sports Investment in Qatar and Strengthening Solidarity" was discussed. The session, held remotely via Zoom recently, included several specialists and those interested in sports and media affairs. It addressed several important themes focusing on Qatar's experience as a pioneering model in sports investment, the role of sports in supporting economic development and strengthening Arab ties, and the importance of strategic planning and sustainability in developing sports investments.

The session also highlighted the growing role of sports tourism as an economic driver, helping diversify income sources. Furthermore, it discussed how sports can be used to foster closer ties among Arab peoples and solidify the concepts of solidarity and regional cooperation, in light of the rapid transformations taking place in the global sports sector.

The session concluded with a discussion of the importance of sports in promoting solidarity and regional cooperation in Qatar. In this context, Dr Saif



Screenshot of the online session.

al-Hajri emphasised that Qatar's experience in sports investment represents a prominent Arab model worthy of study, given the country's remarkable achievements in organising major tournaments and building advanced sports infrastructure according to the highest international standards.

He pointed out that this experience has not been limited to hosting sporting events alone, but has also included adopting sustainability concepts and post-tournament planning, ensuring a long-term sporting and developmental legacy.

Dr Al-Hajri noted that the session aims to discuss ways to leverage sports investment to support sustainable development goals and strengthen Arab ties, and to present a model that can

be utilised regionally to develop the sports sector. It also aims to produce a set of practical recommendations that maximise the developmental return from sports investment, establish the concept of a sustainable legacy for tournaments, and support specialised sports media as a key partner in disseminating sports culture and raising public awareness.

Media figure Saad al-Rumaihi affirmed that Qatar was one of the founding countries of the Arabian Gulf Cup, which was launched in 1970, and Doha hosted the third edition of the tournament in 1976, in an important milestone that contributed to strengthening its organisational presence in the region and consolidating its position on the map of sporting events.

Qatar Charity lays foundation stone for 'Ahl Qatar Village' in Djibouti

Despite exceptional challenges, Qatar Charity (QC) laid the foundation stone for the "Ahl Qatar Village" project in Damerjog, on the outskirts of Djibouti City, under the patronage of Amina Abdi Aden, Minister of the City, Urban Planning and Housing, Djibouti.

The project includes the construction of 80 housing units for targeted families, the expansion of three classrooms at a local primary school, and the establishment of a mosque and a Qur'an memorisation centre.

The project is expected to benefit approximately 3,500 residents of Damerjog. It reflects Qatar Charity's commitment to sustainable development and improving the living conditions of vulnerable communities, with social housing as a key pillar of long term stability.

The foundation-laying ceremony was attended by several senior officials, including Mohammed al-Derham, chargé d'affaires of the embassy of Qatar in Djibouti; Ghada Ezzeldin Ahmed, country director of Qatar Charity's Djibouti branch; and Hassan Dabaleh Ahmed, Prefect (governor) of the Arta region. Also present were Abdourahman Ali Ahmed, director general of the Urban Rehabilitation and Social Housing Agency; and Abdelkarim Mahmoud Hassan, secretary-general of the Ministry of the City, Urban Planning and Housing.

The project aims to provide a safe and dignified living environment that strengthens social and economic stability for the most vulnerable Djiboutian families, reflecting Qatar Charity's conviction that decent housing is essential to building cohesive and



productive communities. Abdi Aden underscored the importance of social housing projects as a key pillar of social and economic development, noting their role in ensuring stability and dignified living conditions for low-income

families, expressing her appreciation to the State of Qatar for its continued support of development initiatives in Djibouti.

For her part, Ahmed said the project will have a direct impact on beneficiaries by moving families



from precarious housing to safe homes that strengthen family and social stability.

She noted that the mosque and Qur'an centre will help promote educational and ethical values while supporting local development,

adding that the project reflects Qatar Charity's partnership-based approach and close cooperation with the Ministry of the City, Urban Planning and Housing to ensure alignment with national plans and long-term sustainability.