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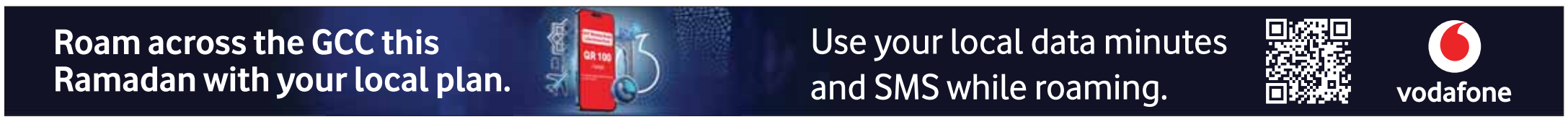











Our Say



Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka, Editor-in-Chief of *Gulf Times*

Between restraint, retaliation: Gulf's test of strategic patience

In moments of escalating regional tension, a central question inevitably arises: what might compel the Gulf states to move from deterrence to direct retaliation against Iran — and what would mark the decisive turning point?

The answer begins with a crucial clarification: the confrontation unfolding today is fundamentally an Iranian-American-Israeli conflict, not a Gulf war. Yet the Gulf finds itself precariously caught between both sides. Israeli escalation risks widening the conflict, while Iran's retaliations often unfold unpredictably. The region thus remains exposed to the fallout of a crisis not of its own making.

For years, the Gulf — and particularly His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani — has championed dialogue as the essential path to stability. From UN speeches to international forums, Qatar's leadership has repeatedly urged diplomatic engagement on Iran. Even in the tense weeks preceding this war, Qatar pursued direct talks with all stakeholders, including Tehran, in a bid to de-escalate.

A critical question now looms: can the world sustain wars of this nature? Modern conflicts reverberate far beyond the battlefield, disrupting global markets, transport, and energy flows. The evidence is already stark. Aviation analytics firm Cirium reports over 23,000 flight cancellations since February 28 — more than half of the 36,000 scheduled Middle East flights — cutting some 4.4 million passenger seats. All GCC states experienced temporary airspace closures, dealing a severe blow to regional tourism during Ramadan and causing projected losses of $40 billion. **To Page 3**

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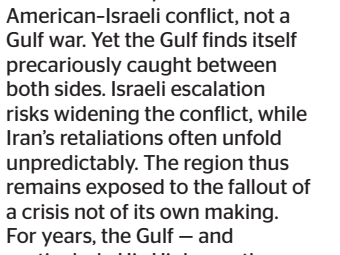
RAMADAN THOUGHT



Surely! Allah wrongs not even of the weight of an atom (or a small ant), but if there is any good (done), He doubles it, and gives from Him a great reward. (**Qur'an 4:40**)

Prayer times

Fajr....4.31; **Zuhr**....11.44; **Asr**....3.08; **Maghrib**.....5.44; **Isha**.....7.14

Fasting times

Iftar today.....5.44pm
Imsak tomorrow.....4.20am

Qatar underpins sovereignty, diplomacy in face of attacks

Resilience intact as Doha leads push to restore calm

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar is fending off daily Iranian attacks on its territory while leading a vigorous diplomatic drive to defuse regional tensions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said yesterday, warning that continued strikes on energy and civilian infrastructure could trigger a humanitarian catastrophe with global economic shockwaves.

Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson HE Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari told the ministry's weekly briefing that Qatar's armed forces are repelling the aggression "with high efficiency," preventing any significant damage to critical infrastructure. Still, he revealed that as a precaution, some production facilities had been temporarily shut down — the first such decision in the country's history.

HE al-Ansari underscored that any attack on Qatar constitutes an attack on its sovereignty — a principle that is, he said, "absolute and non-negotiable." He stressed that current conditions require the state to prioritise defence over mediation until the immediate threat is contained.

"Qatar will not allow security pressures to translate into diplomatic concessions," he declared.

He assured that national security remains stable, crediting the preparedness of Qatar's armed forces and the precautionary measures taken to protect key infrastructure. Most attacks, he noted, were thwarted before reaching ground targets.

On relations with Iran, HE al-Ansari said that since the outbreak of the conflict, official contact between Doha and Tehran has been limited to a single telephone call between HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.



HE Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari

Iranian assurances, including an apology and a pledge not to attack Arab countries, "have not translated into action," he added, citing subsequent offensives targeting the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar itself.

Given that Iranian strikes continue, HE al-Ansari said any further responses to Tehran's statements are unnecessary until clear changes on the ground are seen.

By contrast, Qatar's diplomatic activity has surged. He noted near-daily co-ordination with US officials, describing the defence and security partnership with Washington as a "fundamental pillar" of regional stability. Decisions concerning defence strategy and facility monitoring, he said, are being made in real time in close synchrony with allies.

Contacts with Russia, he added, are ongoing at multiple levels, though no specific mediation proposal has emerged. "Qatar welcomes any initiative — Russian or otherwise — that contributes to ending the attacks and achieving de-escalation," he said. **To Page 2**

Qatar intercepts more missiles

The Ministry of Defence announced that Qatar was subjected yesterday to an attack involving 5 ballistic missiles launched from Iran. In a statement, the ministry said that Qatar Armed Forces successfully intercepted and neutralised 5 ballistic missiles, with no casualty or damage reported. Later last night, Qatari Armed Forces intercepted another missile attack that targeted its territory. (**QNA**)

CDC reviews preparedness

The Civil Defence Council (CDC) reviewed the latest developments in the overall situation in the country and examined reports from relevant authorities on preparedness levels across several vital sectors. The discussions took place during a meeting of the Council chaired by Major General Mohammed Jassim al-Sulaiti, Director General of Public Security and Vice-Chairman of the Civil Defence Council. During the meeting, the Council reviewed a report from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change on the environmental situation in Qatar, which confirmed the stability of environmental conditions and the absence of any indicators of air or marine pollution. The Council affirmed continued environmental monitoring and surveillance efforts, stressing its readiness to respond swiftly to any potential emergencies in co-ordination with relevant authorities. (**QNA**)

MoI hails public conduct, seeks vigilance over suspicious calls

The Ministry of Interior has praised the responsibility shown and co-operation extended by citizens and residents in recent weeks, noting its clear impact on enhancing public safety.

In a post on its official X account, the ministry highlighted that public awareness and adherence to official guidelines are a key pillar in supporting security efforts. It urged everyone to continue their co-operation in the coming period.

However, the ministry cautioned the public against engaging in suspicious phone calls or messages that take advantage of current developments and falsely claim to represent state or government bodies and asks for bank information or the transfer of funds.

The ministry said that it was critical to avoid sharing passwords, credit card or debit card information, or one-time verification codes (OTP). It also urged the public to avoid clicking on any links in those messages. (**QNA**)

Determined Qatar moves to make own medicines

Biologics, generics anchor a new industrial push

By Santhosh V Perumal
Business Reporter

Qatar spent $1.13bn importing medicines last year. Now it wants to make them itself — and sell them to the world.

A sweeping push to build domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity is reshaping the country's industrial ambitions, with biologics, biosimilars, and high-tech drug production emerging as the new frontier in Qatar's drive to wean itself off import dependency and carve out a regional export powerhouse.

Qatar's tonic for its pharmaceutical industry in the form of a big push for local manufacturing will not only reduce high propensity for imports but also stimulate exports.

The vital importance attached to the sector, which at present has a small but expanding base of local manufacturers, can be gauged from the National Manufacturing Strategy 2024-30, aiming to strengthen the sector's capabilities and raise the sector's value-added contribution to QR70.5bn.

The strategy places pharmaceutical industry within the priority industrial sectors, a move that has elevated Qatar on higher trajectory of biologics, whose infrastructure has been gaining traction in the country's free zone.

Historically dependent on imports, Qatar has taken the decisive steps to build domestic manufacturing capacity, a move that aligns with its national vision 2030, which emphasises economic diversification, knowledge-based industries, and national resilience.

Qatar's imports of medicinal and pharmaceutical products (medicines, vaccines, biologics, and related pharmaceutical preparations) were valued at about $1.13bn in 2024, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database.

Qatar relies heavily on imports from major pharmaceutical companies in the US and Europe but is aiming to strengthen domestic production.

Qatar's pharmaceutical manufacturing industry has emerged as a strategically important yet still developing segment of the nation's broader healthcare and industrial framework.

"The Covid-19 exposed the fragility of global pharmaceutical supply chains. For Qatar, pharmaceutical manufacturing is more than economic ambition," the analyst said. **To Page 2**





A calm Ramadan night at Old Mina Port frames Doha's illuminated skyline across still waters, its quiet beauty carrying an added weight amid the region's continuing security tensions. The image captures a city holding on to reflection and routine, where serenity, vigilance and resilience meet under the glow of the holy month. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen

Regional tensions test resilience of businesses

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Local businesses across Qatar are demonstrating resilience as they continue operating amid ongoing regional tensions, although many report reduced customer traffic and are relying on cautious strategies to sustain operations.

A number of locally owned and operated establishments have remained open since the start of the situation, though in some cases operating at limited capacity. Many companies have also maintained flexible work arrangements, with a significant number of employees continuing to work remotely.

For food and beverage outlets, including eateries and coffee shops, this shift has translated into a greater reliance on walk-in customers in the evening and on online orders during the day, particularly as Ramadan shapes consumer habits.

Terry, an employee at a local coffee-and-dates chain with branches abroad, said the business has seen a noticeable decline in customers since tensions escalated.

"We've seen a significant decrease in customers since the start of the tension, but many of our shops at various locations have remained open," he said, noting that online orders have driven daytime activity. Physical visits tend to increase after sunset when people break their fast. **To Page 4**

QATAR

PM receives EU, Italian, Chinese messages of support


HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received telephone calls yesterday from EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Kaja Kallas, Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation Antonio Tajani, and China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi.

Developments in the military escalation in the region, the consequences on regional and global security and stability, as well as avenues for resolving all disputes through peaceful means, were discussed during the calls.

HE Sheikh Mohammed reiterated his condemnation of the Iranian attacks on Qatar's territory, stressing that they cannot be accepted under any justification or pretense.

He pointed out that Qatar has always been committed to refraining from regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue between the Iranian side and the international community.

HE the Prime Minister warned against the irresponsible targeting of critical infrastructure, especially the facilities related to water, food, and energy, emphasising that this represents dangerous precedents that would expose the region's peoples to multiple risks.

He further stressed the importance of the immediate cessation of all escalatory acts, noting that there should be a return to the dialogue table, prioritising the language of reason and judiciousness, and working to contain the crisis to safeguard the region's security.

Kallas, Tajani and Wang in turn voiced support for Qatar, called for de-escalation, upholding the voice of reason, and returning to negotiations and diplomatic means to avoid further chaos. – ***QNA***

Deputy PM speaks by phone with Mauritania's defence minister

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani received yesterday a phone call from Mauritania's Minister of Defence Hanana Ould Sidi.

During the call, they discussed the latest developments and security updates in the region, as well as aspects of co-operation and joint co-ordination amid the current circumstances. – ***QNA***


HE Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani

Al-Muraikhi receives phone call from Lithuania's foreign minister

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi received a phone call yesterday from Lithuania's Minister of Foreign Affairs Kestutis Budrys.

During the call, they discussed the developments of the military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions on security and stability regionally and internationally, as well as ways to resolve all disputes through peaceful means. – ***QNA***


HE Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi

People find govt measures during crisis 'reassuring'

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

With the geopolitical tensions having continued for more than a week, residents of Qatar feel more reassured with the actions taken by the authorities.

Many of them, in an interaction with *Gulf Times*, highlighted the government's efforts to ensure the safety and security of the people, the uninterrupted supply of essential goods, and the right information through official communication channels.

Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) president A P Manikantan said that the emergency needs of the community is being taken care of in co-ordination with government departments.

"When the tensions broke out, we were caught off guard as it was quite sudden and unexpected," he said. "However, with the government providing all the necessary guidelines and support for the public, the community members are not frantic anymore, though some of them remain concerned about the situation."

Manikantan noted that some flights to various destinations in India could be arranged to take stranded people to their homes.

"There were several people who were on visit visa or Hayya Visa, and their (Permitted) duration of stay expired on these days," he said. "We could very smoothly deal with the departments and manage their return to India."

"In addition, some who had any emergency needs also could be assisted to fly home through those flights," Manikantan added.

Social activist V C Mashood Thiruthiyad noted that it is time to comfort and bring positivity to all around.

"The government measures have been very comforting," he said.

"The alert system helps everyone to reach for safe areas and protect themselves," Thiruthiyad continued. "The official communication channels give the accurate information, which is very important for us to understand the real situation."

He said that it is also important for everyone to spread positivity during the crisis and help each other.

"We need to be in touch with the fellow brothers and sisters, especially those who are staying alone here," Thiruthiyad said. "It is also important to provide mental support as many of the people could be facing such a situation for the first time."

"The Qatar government has been at the forefront to provide a feeling of security and safety for the public," he added.

Anwar Hossain, who runs a laundry service in Doha, said that it has been a difficult time, but the government's efforts are helping him to overcome the situation in a big way.

"The government measures are helping everyone to face the situation positively," he said.

"The authorities have ensured the steady supply of food items which was a major concern for me in the beginning," Hossain explained.

"The government has ensured that prices are kept under control and food items are very well available at every store," he added. "We are confident that the government will be able to manage the situation very well and take care of the people."

Longtime resident John Gilbert remarked that Qatar has been able to provide the right information to the public in a timely and orderly manner.

"In addition to the public safety alerts, we also get the right information about the happenings in the country," he said. "Moreover, the government has taken strict action against irresponsible social media posts which create panic among the public, as well as our family members and friends back home."

"I believe that the situation will improve soon and normalcy will prevail at the earliest," he added.

Blue collar worker Ramesh Prajwal said that he was quite nervous at the beginning and did not know what to do.

"I did not know how to respond when I first heard of the crisis," he recalled. "However, I was in constant touch with my friends and family members back home. My friends and superiors at the office comforted me."

"Furthermore, the government actions have helped me to understand the situation better, and now I feel far more relaxed," Prajwal said. "I have the feeling that the government ensures the safety and wellbeing of all the people in the country."

Qatar underpins sovereignty, diplomacy in face of attacks

From Page 1

He also said that Qatar has received over 57 calls from global leaders and foreign ministers expressing solidarity and monitoring developments.

On the multilateral front, HE the Prime Minister chaired Qatar's delegation during an emergency GCC–EU summit held virtually, which focused on reducing military escalation and returning to diplomacy.

Separately, HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi represented Doha at an extraordinary Arab League ministerial session, where Qatar reiterated its condemnation of the Iranian attacks and affirmed solidarity with neighbouring states.

Qatar has also sent formal messages to the United Nations and international partners, calling for unequivocal condemnation of Iranian violations and rejecting any justification for hostile acts.

Dr al-Ansari warned that the targeting of energy, water, and food infrastructure risks severe humanitarian and economic fallout far beyond the Gulf.

Attacks on desalination plants, reservoirs, medicine stockpiles, or pharmaceutical production sites, he said, threaten the well-being of millions.

Likewise, interference with shipping lanes or oil and food shipments in the Arabian Gulf is "unacceptable" and could endanger international trade.

"The repercussions for global markets could be devastating," he cautioned, urging the international community to mobilise all tools to halt the attacks immediately.

He noted that Qatar remains fully committed to fulfilling obligations to international partners while ensuring the resilience of its economy through robust contingency measures.

Stepping back from the immediate crisis, Dr al-Ansari reaffirmed Doha's long-held belief that only negotiation can bring lasting peace.

"All crises, even those involving military confrontation, ultimately end at the dialogue table," he said, recalling that Qatar had long warned that unchecked escalation would bring catastrophic consequences – a warning, he added, now tragically realised.

Dr al-Ansari emphasised that "getting to the negotiating table quickly and stopping attacks will benefit the peoples of the region and international peace and security", urging all parties to forgo further escalation and return to diplomacy before the situation becomes irreversible.

Throughout the briefing, he maintained that Qatar's foreign policy remains anchored in defending sovereignty, supporting regional stability, and advancing diplomacy rooted in dialogue and de-escalation – principles that, he said, "stand unchanged despite the challenges now facing the region".

Determined Qatar moves to make own medicines

From Page 1

The country has three local manufacturers: Qatar Pharma, which produces sterile IV and dialysis solutions; Qatar Life Pharma, which is into oral solids and semi-solids; and QPI (Qatar Pharmaceutical Industries), which has diverse product range.

Higher healthcare spending, population growth, and rising chronic disease prevalence led to expansion of the pharma market in Qatar, which has been nurturing its biotechnology segment – particularly around clinical research, precision medicine, and advanced therapies – complementing growth path for pharmaceutical manufacturing.

"World-class logistics infrastructure, free zones, and strong financial backing make good concoction for Qatar, which is well-positioned to scale production beyond local demand," a senior financial analyst tracking the sector told *Gulf Times*.

Qatar's relatively small population limits domestic scale, making the regional export strategies crucial for sustainable growth.

According to Ken Research, Qatar's active pharmaceutical ingredients CRDMO (Contract Research, Development and Manufacturing Organisation) market is valued at $1.1bn, based on a five-year historical analysis.

This growth is primarily driven by the increasing demand for pharmaceuticals, advancements in biotechnology, and a growing focus on personalised medicine.

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has modernised pharmaceutical regulations, ensuring high standards for drug safety, efficacy, and quality, in line with international best practices.

Suggesting the need to prioritise essential and high-demand generic medicines, a top official of a local producer said that by localising production, Qatar cuts exposure to external supply chain disruptions and improves cost predictability.

"Going forward, opportunity extends beyond generics," the analyst said, adding highlighting immense potential in biosimilar and biologics.

The Qatar Free Zones Authority (QFZ) had last year signed a strategic agreement with WuXi Biologics, a leading global biologics CRDMO, to advance co-operation in biologics manufacturing, research and development and biopharmaceutical innovation.

The collaboration paves the way for the establishment of WuXi Biologics' first integrated CRDMO centre in the Middle East, located within Qatar's free zones.

The planned biotech ventures in free zones aim to transfer technology, boost research and development capacity, and help Qatar emerge as a regional hub for high-tech pharmaceutical production.

In April 2025, the QFZ and Russian biotechnology entity BIOCAD signed a memorandum of understanding, focusing on localisation of pharmaceutical manufacturing, specifically the production of biotechnological medicine for the Qatari and global markets.

Qatar is home to biopharmaceutical companies like Anabion (active in development and manufacturing of monoclonal antibody therapies for oncology, autoimmune diseases, with plans for advanced biologics operations), and QGen RX; while the Qatar Biomedical Research Institute (QBRI), under Qatar Foundation/Hamad Bin Khalifa University, focuses on translational medicine, precision health, immunology, and related biomedical research.

Qatar's drug market is poised for growth with strong efforts put in place to expand local production, it said, forecasting 3.1% CAGR (compound annual growth rate) to $1.8bn between 2024 and 2030, according to Invest Qatar.

"Pharmaceutical demand drives biotech growth by creating a need for advanced therapies, precision medicine and biomanufacturing solutions that traditional drugs alone cannot fulfill," it said.

Qatar contributes a small share of the Gulf's pharmaceutical output, roughly 4.5% of medicines produced in the GCC, where Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the dominant players.

Qatar is actively forming joint ventures with global pharma companies, according to reports.

Ebn Sina Medical partnered with BeiGene to expand access to innovative oncology medicines in Qatar.

A joint venture was announced between Licorne Gulf Holding (Qatar) and the Nodra branch of Olys Pharma for enhancing local pharmaceutical production, leveraging regional market expertise and international manufacturing technology.

In comparison, Saudi Arabia has seen global pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer, Astra Zeneca, Roche, Novartis, GSK, Amgen, Hankook Chorus Pharm and MSD join localisation; while in the case of the UAE, GSK, Biocad and Merck were seen joining the drive.

Qatar sends 7th identical letter to UN and UNSC on regional developments

Qatar has sent a seventh identical letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and to the US's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and president of the UN Security Council for the month of March, Michael Waltz, regarding the latest developments of the Iranian attack on its territories.

The letter was sent by Qatar's Permanent Representative the United Nations, HE Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani.

The letter noted the continued attacks targeting Qatar's territories, indicating that Qatar's Ministry of Defence announced that the country was subjected, up until the afternoon of Monday, March 9, 2026, to an attack with 17 ballistic missiles and six drones from Iran.

Qatar's Armed Forces successfully intercepted all 17 ballistic missiles and six drones.

The letter added that all damage and losses resulting from the attacks will be assessed by the relevant authorities, and that the UN would be kept informed of developments.

The letter reiterated Qatar's strong condemnation of this attack and its right to respond in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, in a manner commensurate with the nature of the aggression, in defence of its sovereignty and to safeguard its security and national interests.

Qatar also requested that this letter be circulated as an official document of the Security Council. – ***QNA***

Qatar strongly condemns Iranian ballistic missile attacks on its territory

Qatar has strongly condemned Iranian missile attacks on its territory as a blatant violation of its national sovereignty and a breach of international law and the United Nations Charter, threatening regional stability.

The comments were made yesterday by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Delegation of Qatar to the UN Office in Geneva, Jawhara bint Abdulaziz al-Suwaidi, during a meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

She said that the targeting of Qatar's territory violates the principles of good neighbourliness and cannot be justified under any pretext.

Al-Suwaidi stressed that Qatar has always sought to distance itself from regional conflicts and had worked to facilitate dialogue between Iran and the international community.

The official added that peaceful means represent the best way to address differences and resolve disputes.

She affirmed that Qatar reserves its full right to respond to this targeting, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter and in a manner proportionate to the nature of the aggression, in defence of its sovereignty and to safeguard its security and national interests.

She also expressed Qatar's strong condemnation of the violation of the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, and raq, affirming its full solidarity with these nations.

Al-Suwaidi emphasised that Iran's continued opening of new fronts and escalation with neighbouring countries were a highly dangerous development, adding that sustainable regional security can only be attained through dialogue and diplomacy.

She stressed the necessity of protecting civilians, diplomatic missions, vital infrastructure, energy facilities, and maritime navigation routes, in accordance with the rules of international law. – ***QNA***

Qatar condemns attack targeting UAE consulate general in Iraqi Kurdistan

وزارة الخارجية
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
State of Qatar • دولة قطر

Qatar has expressed its strong condemnation and denunciation of an attack that targeted the UAE's consulate general in Iraqi Kurdistan, deeming it a rejected act and a clear violation of all international norms and conventions that protect diplomatic missions and their headquarters.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) stressed in a statement yesterday that the targeting of diplomatic missions and headquarters was a clear violation of Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and a dangerous escalation that threatens the safety and security of diplomatic staff, and undermines internationally-recognised rules for diplomatic work.

The ministry renewed Qatar's unwavering rejection of all violence and terrorist acts that target diplomatic missions or undermine security and stability, affirming its solidarity with and support for the United Arab Emirates in all measures it would take to enhance security and stability in Iraq and the region. – ***QNA***

SJC resumes court services, family documentation at government service centres

The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) has announced the resumption of work at government service centres dedicated to court services and family documentation.

The council said in a statement on X that visitors will be received from 9am to 1pm every day at the centres in Rayan, Al Hilal, and Rawdet Al Hamama.

The council also said that the public can access all services electronically through its portal. – ***QNA***

Be patient when experiencing harm while fasting

If anyone curses you in Ramadan, then say, "I am fasting". If anyone fights with you in Ramadan, then say, "I am fasting".

I should be patient upon the harm that I may receive from people, I should endure being wronged by others, follow the steps of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam (may Allah exalt his mention) and say to anyone who does evil to me, transgresses, or harms, or abuses, or insults me, "I am fasting". "I am fasting." With my fasting, I have cut off Satan's share from me and narrowed his paths and ways.

"I am fasting" is a phrase which the fasting person reminds himself of, and reminds others of, and it is with this phrase that he keeps his fasting and worship of his Lord free from behaving ignorantly towards others, or attacking or wronging them.

"I am fasting." My fasting is an impregnable dam against my soul's evil inclinations, fortunes, and misguidance.

Since I abstain from the lawful things that I used to indulge in, such as food, drink and the like, for the purpose of getting closer to Allah Almighty, then how is the case with what is unlawful in principle?

Of course, I will be the farthest from it, simply because I am fasting.

Because I am fasting, I am indeed tranquil, stable, good-humoured, pure, active, smiling, and not frowning to anyone.

The effect of my fasting is visible on my bodily organs and way of speech.

I am fasting; and the smell of my mouth is more pleasant in the sight of Allah Almighty than that of musk.

Because I am fasting, I do not respond to evil, just to please my Lord, the Almighty, as I am fasting for His sake, in confirmation of the statement (of Allah Almighty in the Qudsi Hadith) which reads: "He leaves his food, drink and lusts for My Sake. Fasting is for Me; for it, I give reward, and the good deed is multiplied to ten times the like of it." [Al-Bukhari]

There is no act of worship but that its reward is multiplied ten times (or more) except for fasting, because it is part of patience.

Allah Almighty said in the following Qudsi Hadith: "All deeds of mankind are for him except for fasting, which is for Me, and I will give its reward."

Allah, The Almighty, promises the patient ones that He is with them and combines things for them which He never combines for others, saying (what means): {Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided.} [Qur'an 2:157]

Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "No one has ever been given any favour better and greater than patience." [Al-Bukhari]

Al-Hasan, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: "Patience is one of the treasures of good that Allah only gives to a servant who is honoured in His sight."

Patience is of three kinds:

1 – Keeping patient in performing acts of worship; a servant is in need of showing patience in performing acts of worship because the soul, by nature, dislikes obligatory acts of worship.

2 – Keeping patient in abstaining from committing sins; a person is in dire need for this since the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil.

3 – Keeping patient at times of calamities; these are so many, like the death of beloved ones, loss of wealth, loss of health, and so on.

The highest rank is to keep patient with people's harm, especially during Ramadan; Allah says (what means):

■ {But if you are patient and fear Allah – indeed, that is of the matters [worthy] of determination.} [Qur'an 3:186]

■ {And We already Know that your breast is constrained by what they say.} [Qur'an 15:97]

Sufficient in this respect is the statement of the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam: "No fatigue, disease, sorrow, sadness, hurt, or distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick that he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for it." [Al-Bukhari]

You are, O Muslim, upon good in whichever state you are, especially if you feel that you are imitating your Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, when he kept patient upon all the harm, abuses and insults that he received. Allah Almighty says (which means):

■ {so patience is most fitting.} [Qur'an 12:18]

■ {So be patient over what they say.} [Qur'an 20:130]

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

High school students explore careers in medicine at WCM-Q



A total of 24 high school students had the opportunity to experience campus life at Weill Cornell Medicine – Qatar (WCM-Q) by participating in the college's weeklong Qatar Medical Explorer Programme (QMEP).

The programme, which forms part of the WCM-Q's series of enrichment programmes offered by the college's Office of Student Outreach & Educational Development, gives high school students the chance to both experience life as a medical student and learn about career paths in medicine.

Entry to the programme is through nomination by high school counsellors and teachers, who put forward students who have demonstrated academic excellence, particularly in the sciences and mathematics.

As part of the programme, the students were exposed to a series of sessions that accurately reproduce the experiences of current WCM-Q students, with classes in biology, anatomy, clinical skills, plastic and reconstructive surgery, research, and problem-based learning.

There were also sessions on study skills, time management, writing personal statements, interview techniques, applying to medical school, and careers in medicine.

Students also participated in an oral presentation exercise, in which they researched a medical topic and then presented their findings to their peers and WCM-Q faculty members.

This year, students from 11 schools participated in the QMEP winter session, which took place in February.

These were the Academic Bridge Programme, Al Arqam Academy for Girls, American School of Doha, Doha College, Education City High School, GEMS Wellington School, International School for Medical Science and Engineering, Qatar Academy High School, Sherborne Qatar School for Girls, Lebanese School of Qatar, and West Virginia Academy.



Dr Syed Ahmed Hasnain, senior manager of student outreach and educational development, said: "This year we were deeply impressed by the aptitude, curiosity and maturity of the students who visited the WCM-Q campus for the winter session of our Qatar Medical Explorer Programme."

"We feel that the students benefit greatly from gaining direct experience of life as a medical student and from learning about the wide range of extremely rewarding career paths that can be accessed by studying medicine," he said.

Dr Rachid Bendriss, associate dean for foundation, student outreach and educational development programmes, said: "Our enrichment programmes provide outstanding local high school students with meaningful opportunities to experience firsthand what studying at WCM-Q is really like."

"This highly engaging and unique programme presents an excellent way for students to make informed decisions about pursuing careers in science," he said.

MoCI announces recall of Ducati Panigale V4 – Streetfighter V4 2025 models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Alfardan Motorcycles, Qatar's DUCATI dealership, has announced the recall of DUCATI Panigale V4 – Streetfighter V4 2025 Models.

The recall is due to the possibility that the rigid guide of the rear brake hose may fail to provide adequate protection and which may cause malfunction of the rear brake.

The ministry said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that motorcycle dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs.

The MoCI said that it will co-ordinate with the dealer to follow up on the maintenance and repair works and will communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out.

The ministry urges all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, which processes complaints, inquiries and suggestions 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)

Rosa Publishing House celebrates creativity of female writers



Screen shot of the covers of books by Risa Publishing House's women writers.

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

On the occasion of International Women's Day, Rosa Publishing House celebrated the female writers who have enriched the literary and cultural landscape, emphasising that women writers are a cornerstone of thought, creativity, and the dissemination of awareness through the written word.

The company said on its digital platforms that celebrating women's creativity is an appreciation of a long history of contributions.

It said that female writers contribute literary and intellectual works that express profound human experiences and open new horizons for readers to reflect and understand.

Rosa Publishing House noted that every book written by a woman is a window into her mind and experience, a story of strength, and a voice that deserves to be heard, given the visions and ideas these writings carry, which inspire society and enrich culture.

The company affirmed that its female writers are not merely names on book covers, but rather voices that shape awareness and tell stories capable of inspiring generations.

Their words, Rosa Publishing House added, become bridges that carry the reader toward a deeper understanding of life and society.

As the publishing house points out, women are not merely present in the narrative, but are the narrative itself.

Inspiration is born from their thoughts, and stories that can change the world and leave a lasting impact transcend the boundaries of the text, beginning with their words.

Rosa Publishing House added that women's creativity constitutes a vital element in the contemporary literary movement, given its diversity of perspectives and human experiences.

The company emphasised its belief that the female voice is not fleeting but an enduring influence, renewed with each new text, illuminating the paths of thought and culture.

This initiative aligns with Rosa Publishing House's vision of supporting literary creativity and showcasing intellectual talent.

It strives to offer diverse publications that enrich cultural life both within and beyond Qatar and to strengthen the presence of Arabic literature in the contemporary cultural landscape.

Rosa Publishing House concluded its message by affirming that women will remain a renewable source of inspiration and creativity, and that female writers will continue to play a powerful role in shaping knowledge and writing the stories of the future.

Between restraint, retaliation: Gulf's test of strategic patience

From Page 1

Hamad International Airport in Doha logged over 2,000 cancellations, Dubai International endured an evacuation after being hit, and Abu Dhabi's Zayed International scrapped more than 1,000 flights since the war began.

Even perceived threats to maritime corridors have triggered market shocks far beyond regional shores.

The energy shock has been no less dramatic.

Oil prices surged about 50% following the initial strikes on Iran, with Brent crude briefly topping $119 a barrel – the first time since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine that prices crossed the $100 mark.

Qatar's Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi warned that Gulf producers could be forced to halt output if tankers cannot transit the Strait of Hormuz, a scenario that could push prices toward $150 a barrel and "bring down the economies of the world".

Rystad Energy analysts predict that unless the war eases, Brent could average $135 within four months.

Amid this volatility, a strategic question arises: are US–Israeli objectives in this conflict aligned with those of the Gulf?

The Gulf's enduring priorities are clear – regional stability, secure energy flows, and economic continuity.

Diplomacy, led by states such as Oman, once brought Iranian engagement to an advanced stage.

However, the current escalation risks unraveling that delicate progress.

Nonetheless, the Gulf has shown professionalism and preparedness in managing security risks.

Defence co-ordination across the region – from co-ordinated air operations to joint intelligence – reflects growing institutional maturity.

As of March 10, 2026, Qatar's Ministry of Defence reports that national defence systems intercepted approximately 138 ballistic missiles, seven cruise missiles, and 53 drones since the onset of Iranian attacks.

Yet an irony remains: Qatar – a state that has consistently played mediator, including during Gaza ceasefire efforts – has sometimes faced criticism or even threat despite its diplomatic overtures.

Such contradictions underscore the volatility and polarisation of the present moment.

Across the Arab world, recent days have revealed divided reactions.

Social media commentary in the Gulf has shown frustration toward some Arab states perceived as unresponsive or muted in the face of crisis.

Whether justified or not, this sentiment highlights a deeper truth: Gulf states represent one of the few remaining zones of Arab political and economic success.

Their stability rests on decades of governance reform, diversification, and institutional consolidation.

However, success brings responsibility.

The Gulf must now move beyond economic integration toward strategic co-ordination.

A unified foreign policy posture – even if imperfect – would amplify collective influence and reduce vulnerability in future crises.

Divergent diplomatic messaging risks weakening Gulf voices at precisely the moment when unity matters most.

The Gulf must now move beyond economic integration toward strategic co-ordination

The region's potential is extraordinary: young populations, deep financial reserves, and globally pivotal geography.

With critical infrastructure bridging the Red Sea, Arabian Gulf, and Indian Ocean routes, the Gulf is indispensable to global logistics.

Middle East airports handle 14% of all international transit, so disruptions here ripple through global connectivity networks within hours.

Security architecture is equally vital.

International bases across the Gulf have long provided deterrence, but recent events are a reminder that lasting stability depends on regional unity first.

A shared missile defence grid, tighter joint drills, and institutionalised crisis-response mechanisms would strengthen collective resilience and reduce reliance on external actors.

The Gulf's influence, however, extends far beyond defence.

Its energy exports power entire continents – from liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments from Qatar lighting Japanese cities, to Saudi and Kuwaiti oil sustaining economies in China and India.

The Strait of Hormuz alone handles about 20% of global oil and LNG flows, and roughly 16% of the world's fertilisers.

Even brief disruptions there can send commodity shocks from Tokyo to Frankfurt.

Hence, Gulf stability is not simply a regional imperative – it is a global necessity.

Iran has often spoken of "strategic patience" as its guiding principle.

However, today, it is the Gulf's patience that is most tested.

The war has already disrupted 20% of global oil supply – more than double the losses seen during the Suez Crisis of 1956-57 – and the clock is still ticking.

Despite provocations, Gulf diplomacy continues to stress restraint.

The realities of war are unforgiving: ruined economies, displaced populations, and shattered infrastructure.

Oxford Economics estimates international arrivals across the region could drop 11-27% in 2026, meaning a loss of 23-38mn visitors and $34-56bn in tourism revenue.

The longer-term reputational damage to the Gulf's hard-won image as a safe, global hub could be even costlier.

History repeatedly shows that conflicts launched with limited aims often spiral into crises far beyond their original scope.

This is why the Gulf must remain cautious and avoid being drawn into a conflict fundamentally not its own.

Maintaining open lines with Tehran remains indispensable.

However tense the moment, diplomacy is always preferable to irreversible escalation.

The Gulf states have the wisdom and institutional experience to navigate these challenges.

Their leaderships have steered the region through regional wars, energy shocks, and global recessions – always with stability and development as guiding ideals.

That continuity has preserved their credibility and strategic weight.

Today's moment demands renewed adherence to those same guiding principles: unity at home, restraint abroad, and an unwavering belief in dialogue.

For in the end, the Gulf's greatest strength lies not in war, but in stability, co-operation, and the pursuit of peace.

QATAR/REGION/ARAB WORLD

Regional tensions test resilience of businesses

From Page 1

Despite the initial slowdown, he observed that weekends have begun to draw larger crowds again, indicating that residents may be gradually adjusting to the situation.

Weekends have seen a huge footfall in most of our branches. It's business as usual, especially on Fridays, and people seem to have got used to the situation," he said.

He also lauded the government's efforts to ensure public safety and provide timely information to residents.

"We appreciate the authorities' efforts to keep people safe and informed through alerts and safety guidelines that notify all of us about the security threat level," he added.

Iqbal, a staff member at a tea and eatery shop along Airport Road, shared a similar experience, saying regular patrons have helped sustain the business despite the current environment.

According to him, online orders have been the primary source of sales during daytime hours, while customers who visit at night tend to do so carefully and in compliance with precautionary measures issued by authorities.

"We thank the authorities for keeping all of us safe and allowing us to live a normal life despite the tension," he said. "I hope it ends soon because, at some point, if this continues, I think it will affect our sales, and we may need to start streamlining."

It is learnt that businesses outside the food sector have also reported similar patterns.

Christine, an employee at a company that supplies household items and packaging materials, acknowledged that sales have dropped in the past week due to the situation. However, the company has continued receiving steady orders from partner businesses.

"Sales are low, but we remain open to supply the items needed by our partner companies," he said, expressing optimism that regular customers will gradually return.

To cope with the slowdown, the company has been trying to control operational costs while maintaining its workforce.

"We try to lessen or cut our expenses, but we also try to retain our current number of employees as much as we can, hoping that the situation gets better," he added.



In contrast, some sectors are seeing increased activity. A mechanic at a local car and vehicle garage in Doha said the shop has seen a surge in customers seeking repairs and maintenance in recent days.

He believes the rise in demand reflects public confidence in the government's efforts to maintain security and stability during the tense period.

"The increase in customers shows that people have confidence in the government's efforts to keep all of us safe and secure," he said.

According to him, this demand and enthusiasm suggest that businesses can continue operating and even grow despite the challenges posed by the current regional climate.

Qatar affirms combating terror is global priority

Qatar has affirmed that countering terrorism and violent extremism remains a shared priority for the international community, stressing that such efforts must fully respect international law and fundamental human rights.

The remarks were made yesterday by Reem Nasser al-Muraikhi, third political researcher at the Office of the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, during her participation at Item 3 – the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, as part of the 61st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

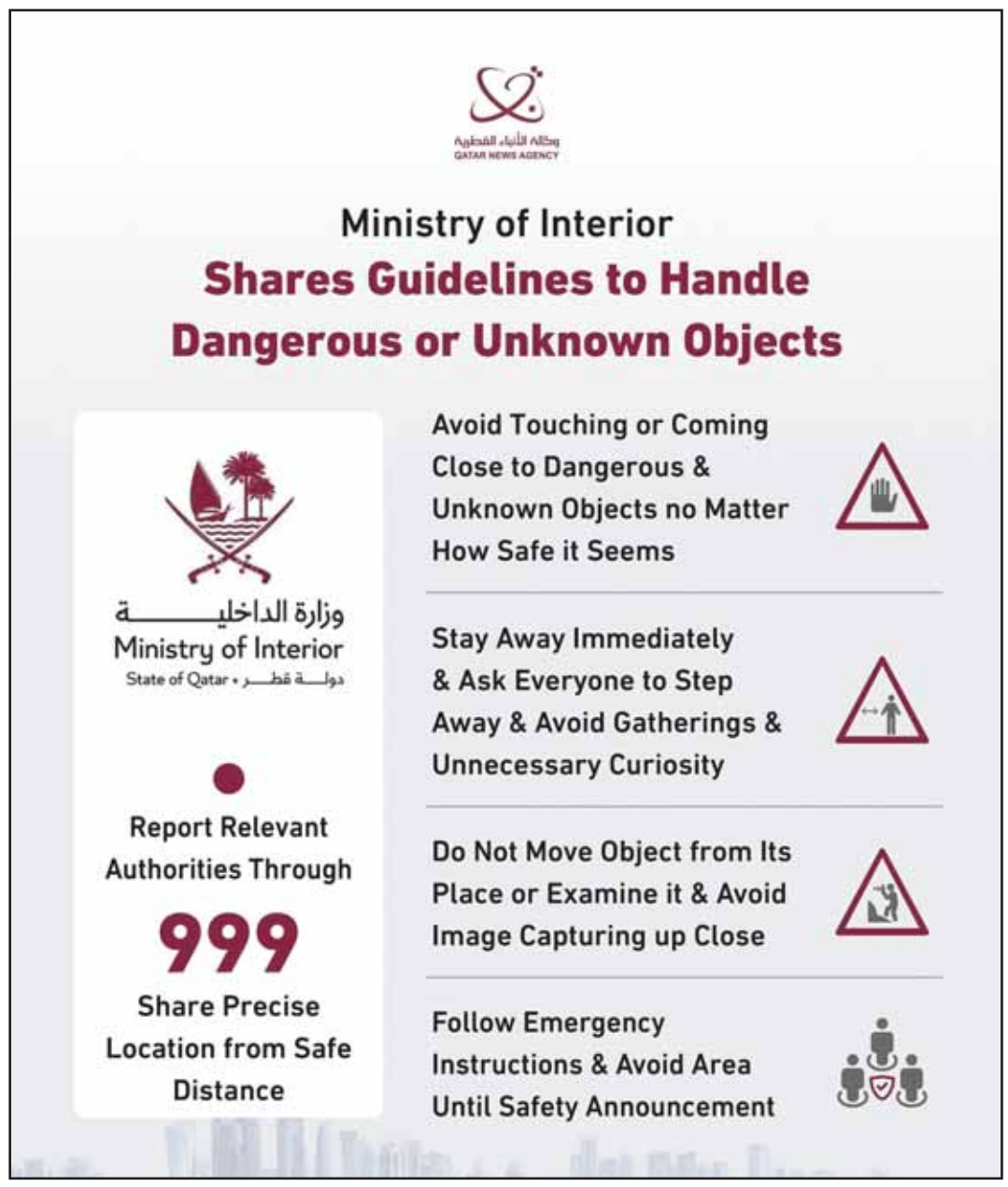
Al-Muraikhi stressed that counterterrorism measures must not be used as a justification for violating freedoms or discriminating against peoples under occupation, whose legitimate right to self-determination is guaranteed by international law.



She added that effectively addressing terrorism requires a comprehensive approach that tackles its root causes, including conflicts, deprivation, marginalization, and hate speech, through promoting sustainable development, strengthening the rule of law, and supporting education and intercultural dialogue.

Al-Muraikhi highlighted Qatar's approach in this field, which complies with international standards, ensures balance between security measures with development policies, and strengthens international cooperation and respect for the rule of law and human rights.

She also noted that Qatar will continue to take the necessary measures to combat terrorism through bilateral, regional, and multilateral co-operation, and support relevant international initiatives, including hosting the International Hub on Behavioral Insights to Counter Terrorism and the Office on Parliamentary Engagement in Preventing and Countering Terrorism. **(QNA)**



Qatar Collegiate Sports Federation holds General Assembly meeting online

The Qatar Collegiate Sports Federation (QCSF) held its third Ordinary General Assembly meeting for the 2025-26 sports season on Monday via video conferencing.

The meeting was chaired by QCSF president Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi, with secretary-general Rashid Saeed Adiba and members of the board of directors in attendance.

Also in attendance were Dr Hareb Mohammed al-Jabri, representing the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and Abdullah Yousef al-Abdullah, representing the Qatar Olympic Committee.

A total of 18 out of 26 General Assembly members attended the meeting, ensuring the required quorum.

Members approved the minutes of the previous General Assembly meeting held in 2024 and reviewed the board of directors' report on the QCSF's activities for the year ending 2025.



The meeting also discussed the auditor's report for the same period, the proposed 2026 budget, and several proposals presented by General Assembly members.

The meeting also discussed the progress of the university sports activity plan for the 2025-26 season, focusing on mechanisms to increase student participation in the tournaments organised by the QCSF and further promote university sports among students.

Heaviest day of strikes yet on Iran despite hopes that war will end soon

Reuters
Dubai/Tel Aviv/Washington

The United States and Israel pounded Iran yesterday with what the Pentagon and Iranians on the ground called the most intense airstrikes of the war, despite global markets betting that President Donald Trump will seek to end the conflict soon.

Raising the stakes for the global economy, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they would block oil shipments from the Gulf unless US and Israeli attacks cease.

But the White House reiterated Trump's threat to hit Iran hard if it tries to stop the flow of energy supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, where the war has effectively halted one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas shipments, and repeated his offer for the US Navy to safely escort tankers.

"Today will be yet again, our most intense day of strikes inside Iran: the most fighters, the most bombers, the most strikes, intelligence more refined and better than ever," US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth told a Pentagon briefing.



A photograph shows a damaged building in the aftermath of a drone strike in the Seef district of Manama, Bahrain, yesterday. (AFP)

Tehran residents reached by Reuters described the war's most intense night of bombardment.

"It was like hell. They were bombing everywhere, every part of Tehran," a resident said by phone, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons. "My children are afraid to sleep now."

In Tehran's east, two five-storey residential buildings had been hit on Monday, blasting out floors and walls and leaving a rickety concrete frame. Footage from Iran's Red Crescent showed rescuers there carrying a victim in a body bag. Workers were still recovering bodies at the site yesterday when a missile struck a road intersection nearby.

Yet with Trump having described the war on Monday as "very complete, pretty much", investors appeared convinced he would end it soon - before the disruption to global energy supplies caused a worldwide economic meltdown.

An historic surge in crude oil prices on Monday was mostly reversed within a day. Asian and European share prices staged a partial recovery from earlier precipitous falls, and Wall Street bounced to around its levels of late February, before the war.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters yesterday that the American public will see oil and gas prices drop rapidly once the objectives of the joint Israeli-US air war are fully achieved.

QC continues humanitarian efforts in Turkiye, Syria

Despite the significant challenges and exceptional circumstances facing the region, Qatar Charity (QC) continues its humanitarian operations without interruption, reaffirming its commitment to ensuring that the generosity of benevolent donors reaches those most in need.

This effort comes at a time when urgent interventions are increasingly required to support vulnerable groups during Ramadan.

Since the beginning of Ramadan, and as part of the "Good Starts with You" campaign, the QC office in Turkiye has continued distributing Ramadan food baskets under its Iftar projects.

The initiative aims to distribute 2,857 food baskets to needy families among refugees and the local community in Gaziantep and anlıurfa.

In recognition of this co-operation, Adam Ilık, the director of the Social Assistance Department at ahinbey Municipality in Gaziantep, said: "Qatar Charity's Ramadan food basket distribution project for needy families aligns closely with our vision of social services and embodies the spirit of co-operation and solidarity that characterises this holy month."

"We thank all supporters of this initiative and wish everyone a blessed Ramadan," he said.

In Syria, food basket distribution also continues as part of the Iftar project.

This initiative aims to deliver 3,696 food baskets to displacement camps and orphanages in Azaz, Akhtarin, Al Bab, Badha, and Sarmada, in addition to the City of Hope, which the QC inaugurated last year.

Each basket contains 64kg of essential food items, enough to sustain a family for an entire month.





Iman Naasan, the social welfare co-ordinator at Qatar Charity's Turkiye office, said: "With the launch of the Ramadan food basket distribution under the Iftar project, we witnessed the true impact of this act of kindness on the ground."

"These baskets were more than food items; they were messages of reassurance and support reaching families in need during this blessed time," the official said.

"What touched us most were the heartfelt prayers we heard during the distribution, prayers we consider a sacred trust to convey to every donor who contributed to this good deed," Naasan added. "We ask God to accept this from everyone, to place it on the scales of their good deeds, and to perpetuate the blessing of giving during this month of mercy."

Meanwhile, the distribution of 6,800 food baskets continues in co-operation with Qatar's embassy in Syria.

The project, which began before Ramadan, continues throughout the holy month and targets affected families across various regions of the country.

Fresh Israeli strikes hit Lebanon after evacuation warnings


Smoke rises after an Israeli strike on Beirut's southern suburbs, following an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, Lebanon, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

AFP
Beirut

Fresh Israeli strikes hit Beirut's southern suburbs and south Lebanon yesterday after the Israeli army warned people to evacuate, with Lebanese authorities saying nearly 760,000 people had been registered as displaced.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war last week when Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli strikes.

Israel, which kept up strikes targeting Hezbollah despite a 2024 ceasefire, has since launched new waves of attacks across Lebanon and sent ground troops into border areas.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported several strikes yesterday on the capital's southern suburbs, where Hezbollah holds sway.

AFPTV footage showed smoke rising from the area, while the Israeli military said it had begun "striking Hezbollah infrastructure" there.

In Lebanon's south, the NNA said "the Israeli enemy launched a strike" in Abbassiyeh, near Tyre, after the Israeli military said it would strike a building there and in the coastal city of Sidon.

It also reported strikes in other areas of the south.

Hezbollah said in a statement that its fighters had repeatedly attacked Israeli troops near the southern town of Khiam.

Lebanese authorities have said Israel's attacks since March 2 have killed at least 486 people and wounded more than 1,300 others.

Authorities said yesterday that 759,300 people had been registered as displaced, with 122,600 of them staying in shelters.

The Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Health Committee said 15 of its rescuers had been killed in Israeli attacks since March 2.

Among those taking refuge in Beirut's Camille Chamoun Sports City Stadium, which has been turned into a shelter, was Fatima Shehadeh, 35, a mother of four who fled the southern suburbs last week.

"I was pushing my baby in a stroller. We left on foot at 2:00 am and spent the night outside" before coming to the shelter, she said.

She expressed worry about the impact of Israeli raids on her children, one of whom hid inside their tent a day earlier in fear.

"He didn't come out because of the strikes. They were really close," she said.

Dozens of family-sized tents have been set up inside the stadium, with people sleeping inside on thin mattresses on the concrete floor.

Beirut mayor Ibrahim Zeidan said the site could shelter more than 3,000 people.

Malak Jaber, 35, a mother of three from south Lebanon's Nabatiyeh, said: "We spent two or three days living under a bridge, until they opened up this place."

"My home was bombed yesterday," she said.

"If I want to go back... we'll be starting from zero."

The UN earlier yesterdau said it noted "a faster pace of displacement compared to 2024", during Israel's last war with Hezbollah.

Meanwhile, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun's office said that he and his Syrian counterpart Ahmed al-Sharaa had agreed on the need to control their shared border after Syria accused Hezbollah of firing artillery shells into its territory overnight.

A day earlier, Aoun accused Hezbollah of working to "collapse" the state and expressed Beirut's readiness for "direct negotiations" with Israel.

The head of the group's parliamentary bloc Mohamed Raad had vowed that his group would "defend our existence whatever the cost". Also yesterday, the last residents of the Christian village of Alma al-Shaab near the Israeli border fled, according to a UN source, the mayor and an AFP correspondent, after locals had for days defied an Israeli order to leave.


Ambassador of the European Union to Lebanon, Sandra De Waele, uses her mobile phone to capture the unloading of aid supplies as the first aid shipment from the European Union and Unicef arrives at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport, yesterday. (**Reuters**)


A woman looks out of a window at a school hosting displaced people, following an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel, in Beirut, yesterday. (**Reuters**))

Madagascar's leader fires PM, cabinet

AFP
Antananarivo

Madagascar's leader, Colonel Michael Randrianirina, has sacked his prime minister and dissolved the cabinet he appointed soon after seizing power following youth-led protests five months ago.

The colonel appointed Herintsalama Rajaonarivelo, from the private sector, as prime minister in October soon after a military power grab during protests that sent former president Andry Rajoelina fleeing.

Randrianirina "announces that, in accordance with the provisions of the constitution, the government is suspended from its duties," the presidency said in a statement Monday.

A new prime minister will be appointed "shortly", it said, without providing a timeline or a reason for the dismissal.

Demonstrations against water and power shortages in September last year snowballed into a protest movement that the government failed to stop with a crackdown that left people dead and injured.

When the colonel's army unit mutinied and joined the protesters from the "Gen Z" movement, Rajoelina fled the Indian Ocean island with the help of France.

Randrianirina has denied staging a coup, insisting the Constitutional Court "transferred power" to him, and has pledged a two?year transition, according to a roadmap released at the end of February.

His choice of cabinet — which included well-known figures from Madagascar's fraught political landscape — had already raised eyebrows, with concerns its agenda would remain far from the aspirations for radical change expressed by the young demonstrators.

But Monday's dismissal of the government came as "a surprise", said Elliot Randriamandrato, spokesperson for the "Gen Z" collective.

"It's true that we didn't like the choice of prime minister at first, but they showed an openness that made us think we could move forward," he told AFP.

While a reshuffle had not seemed necessary, the change could be "an opportunity to push for people who could take up our demands", Randriamandrato said.

The group was not reassured by recent developments including the release of the transition roadmap without its consultation and signs of "militarisation" in the regime, he said.

"There are faint signs that... perhaps we are drifting towards something that does not follow the demands" of last year's protests, he said.

The transition plan sets out wide-ranging consultations until the end of 2026, the drafting of a new constitution and presidential elections due in late 2027.

Elections for the capital's new mayor, a key position in Madagascar's politics, are expected before then, after the top administrative court annulled on Monday results of the 2024 vote.

The election had been won by an ally of the ousted president but her rival claimed electoral fraud.

Women's Day march


Congolese women chant slogans as they participate in a march marking International Women's Day in Beni, North Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, yesterday. **(Reuters)**

MSF says two workers arrested in Central African Republic

Two employees of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) have been arrested in the Central African Republic, the charity said yesterday, a day after authorities announced the detention of a French aid worker.

The two workers — one French and the other a Centrafrican — were detained in the southern town of Zemio last week and then transferred to the capital Bangui "where they are still in police custody", MSF said in a statement.

The announcement comes two days before France's top diplomat Jean-Noel Barrot carries out the first visit to Bangui by a French foreign minister for seven years.

Barrot is to meet President Faustin Archange Touadera tomorrow.

The Central African defence ministry late Monday said the French MSF aid worker was suspected of "activities aimed at destabilising the security situation" in the region.

The ministry accused the suspect of having "contacts with criminal elements" and working towards "subversive agitation among the local population of the Azande ethnic group" to "turn them against the legally elected authorities" in the country.

It alleged that he had illegally crossed into the Central African Republic from the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo.

MSF said it had had a team in northern DRC since February.

"It was as part of this mission that our colleagues went to Zemio at the invitation of the local civil authorities," the aid group said.

Belgian-Portuguese Joseph Martin Figueira, a consultant for an American NGO, was arrested in Zemio in 2024 and sentenced to 10 years forced labour by a court in November, accused of undermining state security.

Security in the country has improved following civil war more than a decade ago.

But the restive southeastern region of Haut-Mbomou, which borders South Sudan and the DRC, is beset by tensions between the Central African armed forces, supported by Russian Wagner group mercenaries, and a local militia.

Clashes were reported in the region in January between an Azande militia and the army. (**AFP**)

Fears of fresh war drive Tigrayans to flee north Ethiopia

AFP
Mekelle

Its deep in the night in Mekelle, the capital of Ethiopia's Tigray region, but dozens of young men with backpacks and suitcases are searching for a bus to Addis Ababa.

Abel, 23, fought for the Tigrayan Defence Forces during the civil war against the federal government of 2020-22 that killed at least 600,000 people. He worries a fresh conflict is imminent.

"It's not safe here anymore," said Abel, whose name has been changed to protect his identity. "I saw people die. I don't want to relive that, I don't want the war to catch up with me again."

While war sets much of the Middle East alight, just across the waters of the Red Sea, another conflict is looming in the Horn of Africa.

Federal and Tigrayan forces are once again massing at their shared border in northern Ethiopia.

The peace agreement that ended the last civil war in 2022 was never properly implemented and relations have remained highly volatile, not helped by Ethiopia's worsening ties with Eritrea, which borders Tigray.

There are no exact numbers, but hundreds are fleeing Tigray — a region that was home to around 6mn people before the war — every day by bus or plane.

Abel wants to join them but the buses are full for the 700-kilometre drive to the federal capital of Addis Ababa, one of the few areas of Ethiopia not facing some form of conflict or insecurity.

"There's nobody left here," he said.

Shortages of basic products are worsening. Hawkers sell bottles of smuggled petrol at intersections and their prices are rising fast — from 300 to 430 birr (around $1.90 to $2.80) in just a few days, an AFP journalist said. Federal authorities have cut subsidies to the region for months. Many civil servants are no longer being paid and banks are running out of cash.


Residents gather to buy and collect goods at an open market in Wejerat, southern Tigray. (**AFP**)

Heading to southern Tigray, a destroyed tank lies on the side of the road, a relic from the last war.

Chercher, a town of around 50,000 roughly 150 kilometres south of Mekelle, is near the borders with the Afar and Amhara regions, where federal troops are reportedly massing. In January there was a brief outbreak of fighting in the area, sparking fears that a full conflict was restarting.

Mahlet Terefe, 23, briefly fled to another town with her three-year-old son when she heard the heavy artillery. She returned to run her stall selling alcohol and juice, but says business is almost non-existent. "As you can see its deserted, there is nobody around," she said. "I want to leave with my boy before war starts. I'm very afraid."

A local official in Chercher told AFP it was a matter of time.

"There will be a new war," said Zinabu Gebredhin. "Federal forces have mobilised soldiers nearby."

He said the main federal army base was 23 kilometres from Chercher and troops were positioned on hills just 10 kilometres away.

'ENCIRCLED'

The federal and Tigrayan administrations blame each other for the rising tensions. "The federal troops are advancing" from all corners of Ethiopia "and I can say that Tigray is being encircled by federal troops", Amanuel Assefa, second-in-command of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), long the dominant party in region, said last week.

"The highly likely scenario seems that there will be a conflict," he said.

The following day, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said he did not want war, in a speech that was unusually delivered in Tigrinya, the language of Tigray.

But he also said the TPLF "wasn't ready to make even a small compromise".

This verbal sparring is meaningless to Berhan Adhana, 50, running a small spice stall in the almost-deserted marketplace of Chercher.

"War is destructive, it destroys countries. There is nothing we will gain from war," she said.

WORLD

US cost of Iran war's first two days is $5.6bn

Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump's administration said it used $5.6bn in munitions during the first two days of strikes against Iran in a report provided to US congressional committees, a source familiar with the information said yesterday. Members of Congress, who may soon have to approve additional funding for the war, have expressed concern that the conflict will deplete US military stocks at a time when the defence industry was already struggling to keep up with demand. Trump met executives from seven defence contractors on Friday as the Pentagon worked to replenish supplies.

The administration has not provided a public assessment of the cost of the conflict it launched on Feb 28 along with ally Israel.

Democratic members of Congress have clamoured for more information, including public testimony from officials about issues including how the conflict might affect the US military's readiness to defend the country. Administration officials have held several classified briefings for members of Congress and staff. In a speech as he opened the US Senate yesterday, Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic leader, called on administration officials to appear before Congress.

"When it comes to sending our servicemembers into harm's way, the American people need to understand why. But right now, they don't even have a 'why'. That needs to change," Schumer said.

Several congressional aides have said they expect the White House to soon submit a request to Congress for additional funding for the war. Some officials have said the request could be for $50bn, but others have said that estimate seems low.

'Press freedoms slide across Americas'

AFP
Miami

Press freedom has suffered a "dramatic" decline in the Americas over the past year, with journalists killed, detained and forced into exile, a regional media organisation said in its annual report yesterday.

Of the 23 countries of the Western Hemisphere analysed, Venezuela and Nicaragua were ranked as having no press freedom, while eight other countries — Ecuador, Bolivia, Honduras, Peru, Mexico, Haiti, Cuba, and El Salvador — severely restricting it.

"This is one of the worst years for journalism in the region, marked by murders, arbitrary arrests, exile and rampant impunity," the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) said, adding that the worsening restrictions were observed across governments of all political persuasions.

On the bright side, the Dominican Republic ranked first in the index as the only country on the continent with full freedom of expression, according to the study prepared by the IAPA together with the Andres Bello Catholic University in Caracas.

It was followed by Chile, Canada, Brazil, Uruguay, Jamaica, and Panama, which had relatively few restrictions on the media in the period from November 2, 2024, to November 1, 2025.

The US, meanwhile, experienced a "significant" decline in press freedom, sliding from the "low restriction" to "with restriction" category following "a stigmatisation of critical journalism spaces" by President Donald Trump and his administration.

Adding to that was the dismissal of more than 500 employees from Voice of America, an international broadcasting service funded by the US government and the 170 attacks against journalists recorded in the US.

Canada boosts security at US consulate after shooting

Reuters
Toronto

Canada is increasing security around US and Israeli diplomatic buildings after a shooting at the US consulate in Toronto, a Canadian police official said yesterday.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Chief Superintendent Chris Leather said the consulate shooting is being investigated as a "national security incident," although it's too early to determine the motive.

Leather said the US and Israeli consulates in Toronto, the country's most populous city, and embassies in the capital Ottawa will be seeing a change in the security posture in response to the shooting.

"These consulates deserve a heightened amount of vigilance and security at this time in the hopes that we can bring the temperature down in the coming days and weeks," Leather told reporters at a press conference.

Toronto Police Deputy Chief Frank Barredo said police were called to the US consulate in Toronto around 5:30am ET on Tuesday, where they found spent shell casings and damage to the building.

Barredo said witness evidence indicated that two men exited a white SUV that was stopped outside the consulate around 4:30am ET, shot a handgun at the front of the building and then drove away.

While there were people in the building at the time of the shooting, police say no one was injured.

The consulate shooting follows three separate incidents last week where gunshots were fired at synagogues in the Toronto area. No one was injured in those shootings.

Barredo said it's too early to draw a connection between the consulate shooting and those at the synagogues.

"We definitely will be looking at any possible connections. Obviously, it is far too early in this investigation, but we do not look at them in isolation," he said. Canada's public safety minister described the consulate shooting as an unacceptable incident.

"The shooting... is absolutely unacceptable. Canada will never tolerate intimidation and violence of any kind, including towards our American friends in Canada," Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree said in a post on X.

The US State Department said in a statement that it was aware of the incident and was closely monitoring the situation in coordination with local law enforcement.



Law enforcement personnel survey the scene outside the US Consulate after shots were fired, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, yesterday. **(Reuters)**

Fertiliser prices surge, squeezing US farmers

AFP
Washington

American farmers are again feeling the squeeze after a year marked by trade turmoil and low crop prices, with the US-Israeli war on Iran fuelling a fertiliser cost surge as planting season approaches.

Jim Martin, an Illinois farmer who grows soybeans, corn and other crops, said fertiliser and input costs were "everybody's nightmare right now."

While he considers himself lucky enough to have already bought what he needs for this planting season, costs are "still the highest that they've been in years," he told AFP.

Around 33% of the world's fertilisers transit through the Strait of Hormuz, where traffic has all but halted since the war broke out, according to analytics firm Kpler.

US-Israeli strikes targeting Iran on February 28 sparked a war that has caused regional chaos, with missiles flying across the Strait snarling maritime traffic.

About 35 % of fertiliser in the US is imported, said Veronica Nigh, chief economist at The Fertilizer Institute.

This includes phosphorus and nitrogen from the Middle East, she added.

Costs of urea, a nitrogen fertiliser, rose nearly 30 % per short ton between the week of February 27 and the week of March 6, she said.

"Without strategically prioritising the delivery of critical farm inputs such as urea, ammonia, nitrogen, phosphate, and sulphur-based products, the US risks a shortfall in crops," American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall warned on Monday.

He added in his letter to US President Donald Trump that such a production shock could fuel inflation across the US economy. Most US producers would have already acquired a lot of their fertiliser supplies for the year, said American Soybean Association economist Jacquie Holland.

"But because prices have been so high, we saw a lot of producers this year wait till the last minute to book those supplies," she told AFP.

Those farmers bear the brunt of soaring costs.

Others like Iowa-based Aaron Lehman, who grows corn, soybeans and oats, fret about the autumn planting season.

The fertiliser problem comes as other costs — for pesticides, seeds and healthcare — have gone up, Lehman told AFP.

"Farmers are under a tremendous amount of economic stress," he said.

He noted the number of farm bankruptcies was up, as were the amounts that farmers are borrowing.

While Trump last year announced $12bn in one-time payments to help farmers hit by lower crop prices, trade uncertainty and other issues, this was "not enough" to offset the pressures, Lehman said.

"People are extremely worried just because there's so much uncertainty" about how long the war in the Middle East would last, Lehman added.

"To be honest, it's not something that we feel adequately prepared for."

Nigh estimates that about 50% of agricultural production can be attributed to fertiliser use. If farmers pulled back on fertilisers due to the price surge, there would be lower output and, in turn, less revenue for struggling producers.

Farmers could also shift away from crops like corn that need more fertilisers. "My planning is already done for the year, but there might be a change to more soybean acres," Martin said.

Beyond the high price of inputs, crop prices have also been near multi-year lows, he added.

US intensifying strikes on Iran, says Pentagon chief

AFP
Washington

US attacks on Iran will hit a new intensity Tuesday and the war will continue as long as President Donald Trump decides, Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth said.

"Today will be yet again, our most intense day of strikes inside Iran — the most fighters, the most bombers," Hegseth told a news conference at the Pentagon more than 10 days into the US-Israeli war against the Islamic republic.

As for a timeline for the war, Trump "gets to control the throttle. He's the one deciding", Hegseth said.

"It's not for me to posit whether it's the beginning, the middle or the end," the defence secretary said. Trump had said the previous day that the war could end "very soon," but remained vague.

Among the goals is destruction of Iran's navy, which has been targeted with "artillery, fighters, bombers and sea-launched missiles," General Dan Caine, the top US military officer, said alongside Hegseth yesterday.

Iran has vowed to block all oil exports via the Gulf while the war lasts, while Trump has threatened "death, fire, and fury" if Tehran interferes with crude exports.

Caine said US forces continue "to hunt and strike mine-laying vessels and mine storage facilities" — weapons Iran could use to block maritime traffic.

Hegseth meanwhile accused Iran of "moving rocket launchers into civilian neighbourhoods, near schools, near hospitals to try to prevent our ability to strike," saying "that's how they operate."

He did not directly address a strike early in the conflict that hit an elementary school in the southern city of Minab, which Iran said killed more than 150 people, but said that "no nation takes more precautions to ensure there's never targeting of civilians than the US of America."

Trump has said the incident is being investigated, while suggesting Monday that Iran may have fired a Tomahawk missile at the school itself.

Iran does not possess Tomahawks — a US weapon used extensively by US forces, including in the current conflict.

Hegseth said yesterday that the volume of fire is lessening.

"The last 24 hours have seen Iran fire the lowest number of missiles they've been capable of firing yet," he said.

'Rise in energy prices temporary'

Reuters
Washington

The American public will see oil and gas prices drop rapidly, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said yesterday, once the objectives of the joint Israeli-US air war against Iran are fully achieved.

"Rest assured, to the American people, the recent increase in oil and gas prices is temporary, and this operation will result in lower gas prices in the long term," Leavitt told reporters.

Oil prices on Monday surged to more than $119 a barrel - their highest since June 2022 - as supply cuts by Saudi Arabia and other producers stoked fears of major disruptions to global supplies.

Leavitt added that Trump and his energy team were closely watching the markets, speaking with industry leaders, and that the US military was drawing up additional options in line with the president's directive to keep the Strait of Hormuz open.

The deliberations reflect White House worries that the surge in oil prices - following more than a week of US and Israeli strikes on Iran - will hurt US businesses and consumers ahead of the November midterm elections, when Trump's fellow Republicans hope to retain control of Congress.

Hormuz escorts not possible for now: US Navy

Reuters
London

The US Navy has refused near-daily requests from the shipping industry for military escorts through the Strait of Hormuz since the start of the war on Iran, saying the risk of attacks is too high for now, according to sources familiar with the matter.

The Navy's assessments spell continued disruption to Middle East oil exports and reflect a divergence from President Donald Trump's statements that the U.S. is prepared to provide naval escorts whenever needed to restart regular shipments along the key waterway.

Shipping along the narrow strait has all but halted since the start of the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran more than a week ago, preventing exports of around a fifth of the world's oil supply and sending global oil prices surging to highs not seen since 2022.

A senior official with Iran's Revolutionary Guards has said the Strait is closed and Iran will fire on any ship trying to pass, Iranian media reported last week. Several ships have already been hit.

The US Navy has held regular briefings with shipping and oil industry counterparts and has said during those briefings it is unable to provide escorts for the time being, three shipping industry sources familiar with the matter said.

The sources, who declined to be identified due to the sensitivity of the matter, said the shipping industry has been making requests almost daily during the calls for naval escorts through the strait.

One of the sources said the Navy's assessment during yesterday's briefing had not changed and that escorts would only be possible once the risk of attack was reduced.

The United States has not yet escorted any oil tankers or vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters yesterday

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, AFTAB

holder of

Indian Passport No. Z7095181
QID No. 29235643417

hereby change my name

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AFTAB

to

AFTAB SHAQUEEL KHAN

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

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I, ALI AHAMMAD

holder of

Bangladesh Passport No. EH0314497
QID No. 27205003481

hereby change my name

from

ALI AHAMMAD

to

MD ALI AHMAD NASER AHAMED

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

US regulator briefly grounds JetBlue flights

The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said yesterday it had lifted a brief order grounding all JetBlue flights, after the airline suffered a system outage.

The FAA said in an advisory that the ground stop, which was in force for just over an hour, was issued at the airline's request. JetBlue said a system outage was to blame for its ground stop request.

"A brief system outage has been resolved and we have resumed operations," the airline told AFP in a statement. The FAA did not immediately reply to AFP's request for comment. **(AFP)**

US investigators search Epstein's former New Mexico ranch

AFP
Washington

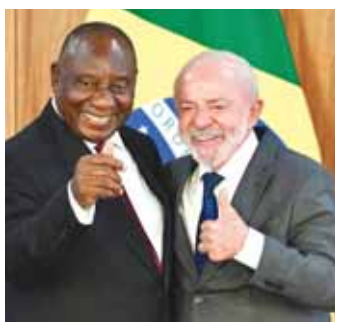
Investigators in New Mexico began searching on Monday the former ranch of Jeffrey Epstein, as part of a probe into allegations women and girls were abused there, authorities said.

The search is the latest fallout from the publication in January by the US Justice Department of millions of files related to the late financier, which mention the "Zorro ranch" thousands of times. "This search is part of the criminal investigation announced by the New Mexico Dept of Justice on February 19th into allegations of illegal activity at Epstein's ranch prior to Epstein's 2019 death," the New Mexico Dept of Justice said.

New Mexico Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury said the state's justice department was leaving "no stone unturned". "Epstein survivors have waited for far too long for justice and New Mexico is leading the way in the pursuit of truth," she posted on X.

Brazil president warns Ramaphosa of invasion risk if defences lag

AFP
Brasília



Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (right) and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa give the thumbs up as they pose for a picture during a press statement at the Planalto Palace in Brasilia. (**AFP**)

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Monday urged his South African counterpart Cyril Ramaphosa to boost defence co-operation, warning that both countries were vulnerable to foreign invasion.

Both Lula and the visiting Ramaphosa have been critical of the war against Iran waged by the US and Israel.

"I don't know if comrade Ramaphosa realises that if we don't prepare ourselves in terms of defence, one day someone will invade us," said Lula.

"We need to combine our potential and see what we can produce together, build together. We don't need to keep buying from foreign arms suppliers."

Ramaphosa noted that Brazil was "much more advanced" than South Africa in defence and aviation.

"We have a lot to learn from each other and we also have a lot to show you as well."

The two countries' defence ministers were due to meet Monday to work on a co-operation agreement.

"In South America, we present ourselves as a region of peace. No one has a nuclear bomb, no one has an atomic bomb. So we think of defence as deterrence," said Lula.

South Africa and Brazil are members of the Brics group of emerging nations, which US President Donald Trump has labelled "anti-American."

The bloc also includes China, Russia, and Iran, among others.

Lula has been critical of Washington's actions in Latin America, saying the US attack on Venezuela to oust president Nicolas Maduro crossed "an unacceptable line."

Prior to Maduro's ouster, the US military carried out several air strikes on alleged drug trafficking boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean.

Trump on Saturday offered to help Latin American leaders combat drug cartels with US missile strikes targeting narco kingpins.

Brazilian media on Monday reported that Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had spoken by phone about Washington's possible designation of Brazil's two largest criminal factions as terrorist organisations.

Lula scraps plan to attend inauguration of Chile's Kast

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva yesterday cancelled plans to attend the inauguration of Chile's far-right president-elect Jose Antonio Kast, without explanation.

Lula's office had announced in early March that he would attend the ceremony today, but yesterday it said he would send Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira in his place.

Lula's official schedule showed he would instead meet with various members of his government in Brasilia.

Questioned by AFP, the presidency did not explain the change in his agenda.

Despite their ideological differences, the leftist Lula and Kast embraced when they met in Panama in January on the sidelines of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic Forum.

Right-wing senator Flavio Bolsonaro, who is running in Brazil's October presidential election, was invited to the inauguration and plans to attend, his team told AFP.

Following the conviction of his father, former president Jair Bolsonaro, for attempting a coup against Lula in 2022, Flavio is emerging in the polls as Lula's main rival.

Lula has said he plans to seek a fourth term in the election. (**AFP**)



Spain's King Felipe poses for a photograph alongside Chile's President-elect Jose Antonio Kast before a bilateral meeting in Santiago, Chile, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Chile's Kast takes office as global turmoil rattles markets

Reuters
Santiago

A spokesperson for Kast's economic team has said that no economic contingencies were planned at the moment, but did not provide further details of how recent developments would impact their economic agenda

Elected on promises of economic growth, deregulation and public spending cuts, local markets rallied after Chile elected far-right Jose Antonio Kast as president in December, but the economic tailwinds have turned turbulent as the Iran war has sent global markets into a tailspin.

Kast, who takes power today, is now in charge of managing the turmoil.

A spokesperson for Kast's economic team said that no economic contingencies were planned at the moment, but did not provide further details of how recent developments would impact their economic agenda.

"(Kast) was elected on a promise of being an 'emergency government' that was going to fix things that mattered to Chileans quickly," said Kenneth Bunker, a political analyst and academic at University of San Sebastian, adding that one of Kast's main promises was economic growth.

"Kast's priorities will probably remain stable, but his ability to carry them out will probably be affected by the exchange rate, inflation and economic growth," Bunker said, adding that if his government can't achieve the growth it was expecting, several of its plans could be delayed.

Chile, the world's largest copper producer and second-largest lithium producer, is sensitive to fluctuations in international markets.

Copper, Chile's main export and the country's main source of revenue, climbed from less than $10,000 per tonne last June to a peak of $13,618 at the end of January and every cent increase represents an additional $27 million to $35mn for the Chilean treasury, according to the outgoing government.

Before the Iran war, experts estimated Chile could receive up to $4bn in additional revenue from the soaring prices of the red metal but the price has been volatile in recent weeks, dropping up to 8% from recent highs.

As yesterday, the price has risen back up to $13,098. Chile is also one of the largest oil importers in Latin America due to its lack of domestic production, increasing the impact of rising oil prices which hit nearly $120 a barrel since the start of the war.

"The Iran war has increased inflation risks considerably," Oxford Economics said in a report surveying emerging markets published on Monday.

The report added Central and Eastern Europe, Chile and India would be the hardest hit in its oil shock simulation, which showed Q2 inflation estimates rising between 0.4ppts to 1.7ppts.

"(Chile) is very sensitive to external shocks, very sensitive, whether they be geopolitical, military, or fluctuations in global markets," said Marcela Vera, an economist at the University of Santiago.

"The economy has very few financial protection barriers and it has a lot of free trade agreements, so its model is based on a primary export system." After months of setting new highs, Chile's IPSA stock market continued to rise following the election and peaked in late January, with about a 65% surge from a year earlier.

Chile's peso, boosted by strong copper prices, had been gaining steam since July and reached its strongest point in years in early February.

But since those recent highs, the stock market has dropped over 10% and the currency has depreciated about 5% as spiking oil prices and global economic uncertainty rock the nation.

Vera noted that Chile has a fuel stabilisation fund, MEPCO, that operates on three-week cycles to help smooth out price spikes.

"If the war continues for months, then we'll have a chronic effect on our economy," Vera said. "It won't just be the price of oil going up, but the cost of logistics and the price of the dollar."

A JPMorgan report released Friday said that while MEPCO dampens the impacts of spiking oil prices, it "does not eliminate pass-through effects" and raised its inflation forecast by 20 bp to 3.6% for December with "risks tilted to the upside."

Colombia complains over exclusion from US anti-cartel alliance

AFP
Bogotá

Colombian President Gustavo Petro on Monday complained about the exclusion of his country — the world's biggest cocaine producer — from a new US-led military alliance to combat drug cartels.

US President Donald Trump on Saturday used a summit with Latin American leaders to launch a 17-nation coalition that he said would "eradicate the criminal cartels plaguing our region."

The summit, held at Trump's Florida golf club, included right-wing allies from the region.

The left-wing presidents of Colombia, Mexico and Brazil — countries that play a key role in the global drug trade — were not invited.

Petro criticised his country's exclusion from the alliance, which includes Presidents Javier Milei of Argentina, Nayib Bukele of El Salvador and Daniel Noboa of Ecuador.

"In the case of cocaine, Colombia is essential because of its experience," Petro, who has regularly crossed swords with Trump, said at an event in Austria's capital Vienna.

"With 17 small, weak, and inexperienced countries, you can't create a shield" against drug violence, Petro added, referring to Saturday's "Shield of the Americas" summit.

Trump has made combatting drug trafficking a cornerstone of his Americas policy.

Petro has criticised Washington's campaign of deadly missile attacks on suspected drug boats in the Caribbean and Pacific, saying the US has not provided evidence they were involved in drug trafficking.

Peruvian writer Alfredo Bryce Echenique dies

Peruvian author Alfredo Bryce Echenique, a leading figure in Latin American literature, has died at the age of 87, the government-affiliated House of Peruvian Literature announced yesterday.

He shot to prominence with his 1970 post-modern masterpiece, *A World for Julius*, a novel chronicling the lives of Lima's elite and drawing on his own charmed but lonely childhood.

The book won Peru's National Literature Prize and became one of the country's best-loved works of fiction.

Bryce was considered Peru's greatest living author, after the late Mario Vargas Llosa, a Nobel laureate who died last year.

Bryce went into self-imposed exile in Europe in the 1960s.

He lived mainly in Spain and France, where he wrote and taught literature, before returning home several decades later.

Among his best-known works are *Don't Wait for me in April* and *A Sad Guide to Paris*. (**AFP**)

Brazilian Navy ship stranded at Macumba beach



A drone view shows the Brazilian Navy vessel Guarapari sitting stranded on the sand at Macumba beach after carrying out a manoeuvre known as abicagem, according to the Brazilian Navy, in Rio de Janeiro, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Venezuelan lawmakers advance mining reforms

AFP
Caracas

The National Assembly of Venezuela on Monday moved forward with mining reforms pushed by the US, which is anxious to secure access to the country's critical minerals.

The bill, according to a draft seen by AFP, would allow for private companies to become more involved in Venezuelan mining endeavours, as well as outline mechanisms for arbitration and dispute resolution between parties.

Orlando Camacho, a lawmaker on the Energy and Petroleum commission, said during the debate that the reforms "can help increase all the legal guarantees that allow us to give confidence to national and international investment."

Last week, US Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, who is in charge of mineral resources in the US, visited Venezuela to push for a liberalisation of the country's mining laws.

He said US mining companies were "eager to get started" in the South American country, two months after the US overthrow of longtime socialist leader Nicolas Maduro.

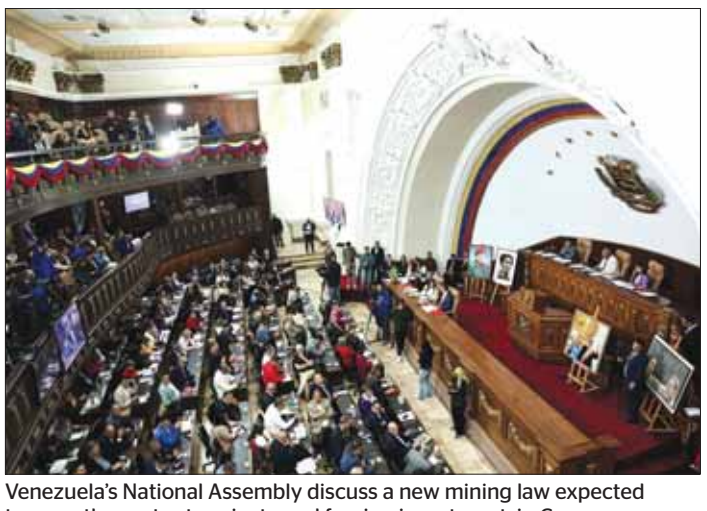
Since then, Washington's attention has been devoted largely to oil, of which Venezuela has the world's largest proven reserves.

But Venezuela is also rich in minerals such as gold and diamonds, as well as bauxite, coltan and other rare materials used to make computers and mobile phones.

Interim president Delcy Rodriguez last month overhauled the state-controlled oil sector to enable a wave of private investment, and she now has set her sights on updating the mining code.

Mining activity is concentrated in a territory known as the Orinoco Mining Arc, where armed groups are active.

Environmentalists have also condemned the expansion of illegal mining in the area, saying it has caused rampant deforestation and river pollution. Monday's legislative debate was the first round of two required by Venezuelan law, with the proposal now proceeding to public comment.



Venezuela's National Assembly discuss a new mining law expected to open the sector to private and foreign investment, in Caracas, Venezuela. **(Reuters)**

WORLD

‘South Korea cannot stop US from redeploying weapons to Mideast’

Reuters
Seoul


Patriot missile defence systems at a US army base in Pyeongtaek, South Korea, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

South Korea cannot stop Washington from redeploying some weapons stationed in the country, President Lee Jae Myung said yesterday, after reports that US Patriot missile defence systems were being sent to the conflict in the Middle East. Reports on shifting key US military assets have sparked concern in Asia about the potential gaps in regional defences if Washington diverts ships and missiles currently used to deter military flexingby China and North Korea to other theatres.

“It appears that there is controversy recently over US Forces in Korea shipping some weapons, such as artillery batteries and air-defence weapons, out of the country,” Lee said in a cabinet meeting, noting that while Seoul had expressed opposition, it was not in a position to make demands.

Lee insisted the removal of some US weapons from the country “does not hinder deterrence strategy towards North Korea,” noting South Korea’s defence spending and conventional capabilities far exceeded those of North Korea.

South Korea hosts a major US military presence in combined defence against nuclear-armed North Korea, with about 28,500 troops and surface-to-air defence systems, including the Patriot missile interceptors.

South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun said on Friday the US and South Korean militaries were discussing the possible redeployment of some US Patriot missile defence systems to be used in the conflict in the Middle East. South Korean media reported some missile batteries had been shipped out of the Osan Air Base and were likely to be redeployed to US military bases in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, though South Korean authorities have not confirmed these reports.

US Forces Korea also declined to comment on the relocation of military assets, citing operational security.

Reuters photographs at the Osan Air Base showed yesterday multiple mobile launchers on the tarmac that experts confirmed appeared to be Patriot PAC-2 and PAC-3 interceptors.

Military analysts said that while Lee was correct that South Korea is capable of deterring Pyongyang on its own, the presence of US weapons underscored Washington’s commitment to regional security.

“There is a risk that North Korea could miscalculate the relocation of some of these weapons as a pretext for low-level provocations to test the allies’ defence posture,” said Choi Gi-il, a military studies professor at Sangji University.

N Korea leader’s sister warns Seoul-US drills bring ‘terrible consequences’

AFP
Seoul

The powerful sister of North Korea’s leader warned of “terrible consequences” yesterday over annual South Korea-US military drills, weeks after Pyongyang dashed hopes of a diplomatic thaw with Seoul.

Seoul and Washington kicked off their springtime military drills “Freedom Shield” on Monday, which will involve about 18,000 Korean troops and run until March 19. It is unclear how many US troops will be involved at this time.

The nuclear-armed North, which attacked its neighbour in 1950 triggering the Korean War, has long described the exercises as rehearsals for invasion.

Kim Yo-jong, a powerful confidante of her brother Kim Jong-un, said the joint drills “may cause unimaginably terrible consequences,” Pyongyang’s Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

She was recently promoted to head the North Korean ruling party’s general affairs department — a role analysts describe as akin to a party secretary-general.

Her comments came after her brother recently described Seoul’s latest peace efforts as a “clumsy deceptive farce” and that North Korea has “absolutely no business dealing with South Korea”.

Kim Yo-jong went on to say the drills are taking place at “a critical time when global security structure is collapsing rapidly and wars break out in different parts of the world”.

She said the situation is caused by “the reckless acts of the outrageous international rogues”.

Pyongyang has condemned the ongoing Washington and Israeli attack on Iran as an “illegal act of aggression”, claiming it shows the “rogue” nature of the US.

North Korea and the US are longtime adversaries but Washington has been pushing to revive high-level talks with the North in recent months.

Reports and analysts have suggested the US is eyeing a potential summit between President Donald Trump and North Korea’s Kim Jong-un this year.

After largely ignoring those overtures for months, Kim Jong-un said last month that the two nations could “get along” if Washington accepted Pyongyang’s nuclear status.

Thai police arrest Myanmar man for fuel smuggling

Thai police said yesterday they had arrested a Myanmar national accused of trying to smuggle 120 litres of diesel out of Thailand, days after the country banned fuel exports due to the Middle East war.
Police in Kanchanaburi province stopped the 25-year-old man late Monday about 30m (100 feet) from the border with Myanmar, while he was hauling four 30-litre containers filled with diesel in the sidecar of a motorbike, a police statement said. He was charged with exporting goods without going through customs procedures and illegally entering Thailand.
Officers ordered the man to stop his vehicle at around 11:00pm (1600 GMT), finding him without identification and the large containers filled with fuel.
“Upon questioning, the individual stated that the diesel fuel was intended to be transported to Myanmar,” police said. The amount of fuel is equivalent to about one tank of a full-size pick-up truck. The war in the Middle East, triggered by US-Israel strikes on Iran on February 28, has caused disruptions to oil and gas supplies and price fluctuations that have rocked Asian countries heavily reliant on Gulf exports. (**AFP**)

‘Concrete barrier blamed for fatal S Korea jet crash’

Concrete structure had been built by ministry as it “sought to reduce costs”

AFP
Seou

A concrete barrier blamed for a deadly South Korean jet crash that killed 179 people in December 2024 had been built to cut costs, the state auditor said yesterday.

Jeju Air Flight 2216 was coming in to land at Muan International Airport from Thailand when it struck a flock of birds and was forced to make a belly landing.

While the pilots managed to put the aircraft down and slide it along the runway, it burst into a fireball after colliding with a concrete structure buried inside a mound at the end of the runway, killing 179 people on board.

Only two flight attendants seated in the tail section survived.

A government-commissioned simulation released earlier this year found that all passengers would have survived had the concrete structure supporting the localisers — a navigation antenna system that helps aircraft during landing — not been present.

The Board of Audit and Inspection said in a report that the concrete structure had been built by the transport ministry as it “sought to reduce costs”.

The report said the terrain where Muan airport’s runway and runway end safety area were constructed was sloping.

Instead of flattening the area — which would have required significant earthworks and higher expenditure — officials chose to install the localiser on a concrete structure elevated above the runway, the audit report said.

“This reduced the required volume of earthwork. The resulting height difference with the runway’s highest point was then addressed by building an embankment,” it said.

International aviation safety guidelines state that such navigation facilities must be made of frangible, or breakable, materials.

The simulation report said that if the localisers had been supported by a frangible structure, “the resulting impact would not have been severe enough to cause serious injuries”. The aircraft “would have slid for approximately 770m (840 yards) before coming to a stop” had the runway been free of obstacles, the study found.


This aerial picture shows the Bantargebang landfill following a landslide in Bekasi, West Java, on Monday. (**AFP**)

Indonesia landfill collapse kills seven, search called off

AFP
Jakarta

Indonesian rescuers have called off the search for victims of a landslide at the country’s largest open landfill after pulling seven bodies out from under debris, an official said yesterday.

Rescuers recovered three bodies on Sunday and four more on Monday, Jakarta search and rescue agency head Desiana Kartika Bahari said in a statement.

Six people were also rescued alive after the collapse on Sunday afternoon at Bantargebang, a landfill just 25km (16 miles) outside the capital, that buried trucks and food stalls.

Rescuers used backhoes, tracking dogs and thermal drones to search for victims, she said. Everyone has now been accounted for.

The collapse happened after hours of heavy rain in the area, local media reported.

To reduce rain intensity, the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) announced it would conduct a “weather modification operation,” which typically involves using helicopters to “seed” clouds with sodium chloride to encourage premature rainfall over the sea rather than over the capital.

Jakarta and its satellite cities, collectively known as Jabodetabek, are home to about 42mn people and generate an estimated 14,000 tonnes of waste daily.

Bantargebang, one of the world’s largest open landfills, spans more than 110 hectares and contains approximately 55 million tonnes of trash, according to a local environment agency official.

President Prabowo Subianto said last month that most of Indonesia’s landfills, which are being gradually phased out, would exceed their capacity by 2028.

The government will invest $3.5 billion in a project to build 34 waste-to-energy sites within two years that would incinerate garbage to produce electricity, he said. A landfill landslide killed 143 people in West Java in 2005, triggered by a methane gas explosion and heavy rain in the area.

China-North Korea trains to resume after six-year halt

AFP
Beijing

Passenger train services between China and North Korea will resume this week six years after their suspension due to the Covid-19 pandemic, rail authorities in Beijing confirmed yesterday.

Train journeys between the two countries were halted in 2020 as they imposed strict border closures to prevent the coronavirus from spreading.

While China has since fully reopened its borders, North Korea has proceeded more slowly, though direct flights and train services with Russia resumed last year.

But China Railway announced yesterday evening that regular train services between Beijing and Pyongyang would resume on Thursday.

The services will help in “promoting personnel exchanges, economic and trade cooperation and cultural exchanges between the two countries,” China Railway said.

Earlier yesterday, travel agents for an official ticketing booth in Beijing told AFP that anyone with a valid visa was now able to buy train tickets to the diplomatically isolated nation.

This would include Chinese people working and studying in North Korea, as well as North Koreans working, studying and visiting family abroad.


File photo shows a North Korean flag flutter from a train believed to be carrying North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, as it arrives in Beijing, China.(**Reuters**)

“It’s great to see the international train service resuming,” Rowan Beard, tours manager at Young Pioneer Tours, told AFP.

He confirmed his company, one of several foreign-run firms that specialises in travel to North Korea, could also organise tickets from Thursday.

“While it isn’t initially intended for tourists, it will provide another travel option once tourism to North Korea eventually returns, serving as an alternative to flying,” Beard said.

The statement by China Railways said the trains would run in both directions between Beijing and Pyongyang every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Entry and exit procedures would be completed at the Dandong border crossing and at Sinuiju in North Korea, it said.

Tickets are currently available for offline purchase at several Chinese cities, the statement added.

Prior to the official announcement, South Korea’s Unification Ministry said in a statement that it expected the services to resume Thursday, adding: “we will continue to closely monitor related developments”.

China’s foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said at a press conference before the announcement that “maintaining regular passenger train services is of great significance in facilitating people-to-people exchanges between the two sides”.

China is historically North Korea’s biggest backer and a crucial lifeline for its moribund economy, though Pyongyang has drawn closer to Russia since the start of the Ukraine war.

North Korea’s reclusive authorities have given mixed signals on whether further opening is on the cards.

Australia to deploy long-range reconnaissance plane to Gulf

Australia will deploy a long-range military reconnaissance plane to the Gulf to protect civilians, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said yesterday.

An E-7A Wedgetail aircraft and supporting defence force personnel will be sent for an initial period of four weeks to help “protect and secure the airspace above the Gulf”, Albanese told a news conference.

Australia also plans to provide advanced, medium-range air-to-air missiles to the United Arab Emirates “in response to a request”, the prime minister said.

The UAE, in which there are an estimated 24,000 Australians, has shot down more than 1,500 rockets and drones fired by Iran in reprisal following US-Israeli strikes, he said.

Albanese said he decided to send the advanced radar surveillance plane to the Gulf following a discussion with UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

“The first priority of my government is, and always will be, to keep Australians safe,” the prime minister said.

“Helping Australians means also helping the UAE and other Gulf nations to defend themselves against what are unprovoked attacks,” he added. “My government has been clear that we’re not taking offensive action against Iran, and we’ve been clear that we are not deploying Australian troops on the ground in Iran.” (**AFP**)

Thailand, Vietnam push remote work to save energy

AFP
Bangkok

Thailand and Vietnam encouraged public employees yesterday to work from home and take up other energy-saving measures as the Middle East war disrupted oil supplies and sent fuel prices swinging.

Thai authorities said government workers should shift to remote work where possible and asked that government offices set their air conditioners to 26C to conserve energy.

“The government wants all sectors to use resources wisely and effectively,” it said in a statement.

It also urged officials to avoid overseas trips.

Thailand said last week it had secured two months’ worth of oil supplies but was suspending exports to conserve its holdings.

It also capped the price of diesel at just under 30 baht ($0.94) per litre for a 15-day period.

In neighbouring Vietnam, the government scrapped duties on Monday on many imported petroleum products in an effort to prevent fuel shortages and stabilise the domestic market.

It also encouraged companies to allow employees to work from home “whenever feasible” to alleviate demand for fuel, the government said on its website.


Motorists queue to pump gasoline into their vehicles at a gas station in Hanoi, Vietnam, yesterday. (**AFP**)

Hanoi also recommended the public limit the use of personal vehicles, and instead opt for public transit, cycling or carpooling.

But thousands of motorbike riders queued for petrol yesterday at stations across the southeast Asian nation, where prices for unleaded gasoline have surged more than 20% since the start of the US-Israel war against Iran more than one week ago.

Vietnam has so far avoided mass shortages, but state media reported that dozens of smaller petrol stations have either temporarily closed or shortened their operating hours due to dwindling supplies.

India cuts gas supplies amid Mideast crisis

AFP
Mumbai

India ordered tighter controls over natural and cooking gas yesterday following import disruptions caused by the Middle East war, with restaurants warning it could spark widespread closures.

The world's most populous nation is the fourth largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) buyer, and second-largest buyer of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), such as that used for cooking — much of which is sourced from the Middle East.

"The ongoing conflict in the Middle East has resulted in the disruption of liquefied natural gas shipments through the Strait of Hormuz," the Ministry of Petroleum said in an order issued yesterday.

It said the new rules would "ensure equitable distribution and continued availability for priority sectors".

The ministry ordered that LNG supplies be prioritised to supply households, transport sectors and production of LPG.

"We are committed to ensure uninterrupted supply of affordable energy to our domestic consumers," petroleum minister Hardeep Singh Puri said in a social media post, adding there was "no reason to panic".

But other sectors, including fertiliser plants and tea industries, would receive 70 to 80% of consumption needs, "subject to operational availability", the ministry said.

To meet the gap, gas supplied to petrochemical facilities and power plants would either be fully or partially curtailed.

Indian industries including several ceramics and tile firms have already said they are facing a cutback in gas supplies that could impact production.

Restaurants and hotels across India also warned of disruptions to operations, after a separate ministry order on Monday that prioritised domestic LPG supplies to households.

The National Restaurant Association of India warned that the government order had resulted in LPG suppliers "across the country" signalling that supplies to eateries would be stopped.

"The restaurant industry is predominantly dependent on commercial LPG for its operations," it said in a statement. "Any disruption therein will lead to a catastrophic closure of majority of restaurants." PC Rao, head of a hotel industry association in the southern tech-city Bengaluru, said the "situation was dire".

"Supply of gas has been hit and many of the smaller establishments only have one to two days of stock left," Rao told AFP.

"The big ones probably have about 10 days worth remaining. Now, people will look to change or restrict their menus bearing in mind the situation."

IndiGo CEO resigns months after flight cancellation crisis

The chief executive of India's largest airline IndiGo has stepped down with immediate effect, the company said yesterday, months after mass flight cancellations by the carrier threw airports across India into disarray.

In a stock exchange filing, the airline's parent InterGlobe Aviation Limited said its board had taken note of the resignation of CEO Pieter Elbers, who will be relieved from his duties at the close of business yesterday.

Managing director Rahul Bhatia will "in the interim assume management of the affairs of the company" until a new chief executive is appointed, the filing said, adding that a replacement was expected "in short order".

The leadership change comes just months after IndiGo faced widespread criticism following a spate of flight cancellations and delays late last year that disrupted travel plans for thousands of passengers, particularly during peak travel periods. In January, India's civil aviation regulator imposed a fine of $2.45mn on IndiGo for poor roster planning that led to large-scale cancellations in December.

The airline has cited operational constraints and aircraft availability issues in the past for schedule disruptions, though it remains the country's dominant carrier. The operational meltdown came even though IndiGo had two years to prepare for the new rules aimed at giving pilots more rest periods in between flights to enhance passenger safety. IndiGo operates more than 2,200 daily flights with a fleet of over 400 aircraft, connecting more than 95 domestic and 40 international destinations. The airline carried about 124mn passengers in 2025, making it India's biggest carrier by market share. (**AFP**)



Motorists stand in a long queue at a fuel station, as concerns grow over fuel supply amid the US-Israel conflict with Iran, in Dhaka, yesterday. (**Reuters**)

Troops guard Bangladesh depots as fuel crunch hits Asia

AFP
Dhaka

The oil price spike caused by the war in the Middle East has sparked unrest in Bangladesh and exasperation at petrol pumps around Asia, where many economies are heavily dependent on fossil fuel imports.

Even as governments move to limit the impact on fuel prices, lines have formed at petrol stations in countries including Vietnam, Pakistan and the Philippines, although the situation remains stable elsewhere.

In Bangladesh — which imports 95% of its oil and gas needs — the military has been deployed at major oil depots, as police patrol in and around filling stations.

"We haven't received supply from the depot, but the bike riders weren't convinced and vandalised the station," said petrol station worker Ashrafuzzaman Dulal told AFP, describing violence on Sunday.

Yesterday his station Shahjahan Traders, one of the oldest in the capital Dhaka, had hung a banner apologising because its stock had run out.

The South Asian nation of 170mn people has started fuel rationing, sent students home and scrapped celebratory light displays over the energy crunch.

One man was killed on Saturday night in the southern Bangladeshi district of Jhenaidah after an altercation over refuelling with staff.

Following the 25-year-old's death, angry crowds torched three buses and vandalised a filling station, police said.

Yesterday, queues stretched for 1.5 kilometres (nearly one mile) through Dhaka's city centre. "My boss left the car here and took a rickshaw to reach his destination," Kamrul Hasan, who was waiting in a vehicle almost at the end of the queue, told AFP.

Filling station worker Akhtar Hossain said he had not stopped for hours.

"Even during the Gulf War, we didn't experience this sort of rush," Hossain told AFP.

Oil prices fell yesterday after US President Donald Trump said the US-Israel war on Iran could end "very soon".

The previous day, the price of benchmark crude had rocketed past $100 a barrel — its highest level since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The market instability came as Iran targeted the crude-rich Gulf with missile and drone barrages.

Maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz — a key Gulf waterway through which a fifth of global crude passes — has also all but halted since the war broke out.

Thousands of motorbike riders queued for fuel yesterday in Vietnam, where prices for unleaded gasoline have surged more than 20%.

Vietnam has so far avoided mass shortages, with the government scraping duties on many imported petroleum products.

A 57-year-old who gave his name as Tuan told AFP at a Hanoi petrol station that he was "so, so angry".

"I have been waiting in line for almost one hour. Then my turn came, and they said their system is down," he said as dozens of drivers waited but others gave up.

Vehicles also lined up in scorching heat at Philippine petrol stations this week, as officials warned against hoarding fuel, with similar scenes unfolding in Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Enrico Guda, a gas station attendant in Metro Manila, said the station had double its usual daily workload as people rushed to fuel up before prices jumped.

In Myanmar, which imports 90% of its fuel oil and has long suffered from a fragile energy supply chain owing to the civil war consuming the country, traffic curbs are in place. From Saturday, half of private vehicles have been ordered off the roads each day to preserve oil stocks.

"Some drivers depend on their vehicles for work and survival... the new system has made it harder for them to run their businesses," said Hla Htay, 56, a car rental business owner.

In the Myanmar frontier town of Tachileik, an AFP reporter saw signs cross-border supplies from Thailand had been cut — with some petrol stations shut last week after an up-to threefold price spike the day before.

In several other Asian countries, from Japan to Indonesia, as well as China, India and Afghanistan, panic appears not yet to have hit, apart from a few sporadic queues for petrol.

"I used to fill up regularly once a week, but now I try to fill up whenever I find a cheaper gas station," South Korean businessman Lee In-tae, 42, told AFP in Seoul.

UK under-16 social media ban fails as govt seeks talks

British MPs struck down proposals for a blanket ban on social media for children under 16, as the government backed a separate consultation on measures to protect young people online.

The Australia-style ban was part of a bill which passed in the UK's upper house of parliament, known as the House of Lords, in January.

It failed to secure enough votes in the House of Commons late Monday, after the government opposed it in favour of a consultation due in summer. However, more than 100 of the 404 Labour MPs abstained, as calls to restrict children's access to social media grow among politicians and the public. A YouGov poll in December found 74% of Britons supported a ban. Olivia Bailey, an education minister in the Labour government, urged more flexible measures, noting a "blanket ban could drive children towards less regulated corners of the Internet." (**AFP**)

High Court blocks challenge over sovereignty deal on Chagos Islands

Reuters
London

London's High Court refused permission yesterday for a legal challenge over Britain's deal with Mauritius to cede sovereignty of the Chagos Islands, home to the US-British Diego Garcia air base.

Three claimants including Bertrice Pompe, a British national born in Diego Garcia who last May unsuccessfully tried to block the deal, took legal action after Britain agreed last year to transfer sovereignty of the Indian Ocean archipelago.

Under the deal, Britain will retain control of the strategically important military base on Diego Garcia on a 99-year lease that preserves US operations there.US President Donald Trump said last month the deal was a "big mistake" and compared British Prime Minister Keir Starmer unfavourably to Britain's leader in World War Two, Winston Churchill, over limited support for US strikes on Iran, including the use of Diego Garcia. Trump had previously said he understood the deal was the best Starmer could make. Starmer has defended his actions, saying his decisions were guided by law and the "national interest".

Lawyers representing Pompe and two others — Misley Mandarin and his father Michel Mandarin, who are trying to establish a settlement on one of the islands — argued Britain's Foreign Office unlawfully failed to consult Chagosians. Judge Mary Stacey, in a written ruling, acknowledged the "long and shameful history to the treatment of the inhabitants of the Chagos Islands" from the 1960s and 1970s, when they were forcibly removed to make way for the military facilities.

But, she added, the legal challenge was effectively a rerun of arguments which had been dismissed by English courts in litigation about the islands over recent decades.

Britain's Foreign Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Lawyers representing the three claimants said they intended to challenge yesterday's decision at the Court of Appeal.

Pompe said in a statement: "How do the government sleep at night?"

UK working with allies to support Hormuz shipping

Reuters
London

Britain is working with allies on a range of options to support commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz in the face of Iranian threats, Prime Minister Keir Starmer's spokesperson said yesterday as the US-Israeli war with Iran roils oil prices.

US President Donald Trump has said the war could end "soon" but also said the US could escalate its attacks if Iran sought to block tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. After speaking to the leaders of Germany and Italy late on Monday, Downing Street said in a readout that they agreed on the "vital importance of freedom of navigation" through the Strait and "agreed to work closely together in the coming days in the face of Iranian threats."

"We're working with our allies on a range of options to support commercial shipping through the Strait as the threat picture develops," the spokesperson told reporters when asked about the readout.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday they would not let any oil out of the Middle East until US and Israeli attacks cease. Starmer's spokesperson said Energy Secretary Ed Miliband had spoken to oil majors BP and Shell in the last few days, adding that the safety of their vessels was their primary concern.

He added that finance minister Rachel Reeves had liaised with Lloyd's of London to ensure there was "appropriate insurance cover available to operators" including cover for war, revolution and terrorism.

HMS Dragon departs for Eastern Mediterranean

Reuters
London

British warship HMS Dragon departed for the Eastern Mediterranean yesterday, more than a week after Britain's air base in Cyprus was attacked by a drone in the aftermath of the US and Israel launching attacks against Iran.

Britain's government has been criticised for not being able to send a warship to the region sooner, with military vessels from allies Greece and France arriving within days of Iran launching retaliatory attacks across the Gulf.

On March 1 RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus was hit by an Iranian-made drone, thought to have been launched from Lebanon or Iraq.

The decision to deploy the destroyer was made a week ago but it has taken days to prepare it for the journey, adding to scrutiny of Britain's military readiness.

The government has defended its response, saying it had pre-deployed other assets to the region including radar systems, air defence, and F-35 jets.

HMS Dragon is a Type 45 air-defence destroyer equipped with the Sea Viper missile system and advanced radar designed to track and neutralise airborne threats, according to the Royal Navy's website.

The government has also cited its close co-operation with the US in preparation and in response to the conflict, despite criticism from Trump over Britain's support.

Trump has lambasted Prime Minister Keir Starmer for limiting Britain's military support for the strikes on Iran, plunging the relationship between the historically close military allies into crisis.



HMS Dragon, a Royal Navy Type 45 Daring-class air-defence destroyer warship, is guided by tug boats operated by Serco Marine Services, as it departs from HM Naval Base Portsmouth, on the south coast of England, yesterday. (**AFP**)

COMMENT

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GULF TIMES

War on oil: Asia faces energy crunch amid supply disruption

Asia's energy-importing economies are scrambling to contain the impact of a widening Middle East war that has upended oil and gas markets and is now battering ordinary buyers.

Oil and gas markets have been rocked by disruption to supply out of the Arabian Gulf.

Prices of both commodities have jumped as the US and Israel continue to strike Iran, and the Islamic Republic retaliates with missiles and drones across the Middle East.

On Monday, oil prices topped $100 a barrel for the first time since 2022, when they spiked in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The Strait of Hormuz, which is in near-paralysis now, is a chokepoint for the bulk of oil exports from the Gulf. Almost 90% of the crude and condensate transported through the waterway last year went to Asia.

During an emergency meeting on Monday, South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung became the latest to call for a swift cap on fuel prices.

Taiwan, which also depends almost entirely on energy imports, has already set a weekly limit on oil-price increases, while Japan's prime minister has said the country is examining measures to ensure gasoline prices do not exceed acceptable levels.

South Asia's price-sensitive buyers are among the worst hit. At least one province in Pakistan has curbed civil servants' travel and the government has directed officials to draw up an austerity and savings plan within 48 hours.

India has benefited from a US waiver providing access to Russian crude, but has struggled to alleviate pressure in liquefied petroleum gas, used for cooking, and liquefied natural gas, used from power production to manufacturing.

An inflation shock triggered by the US-Israel attack on Iran could wreck a fragile global economic recovery that had been expected to gain momentum this year

The historic energy crunch has left some countries, including South Korea, to consider the option of drawing on petroleum reserves.

Japanese refiners have also asked for such a measure. Group of Seven nations are preparing scenarios for the release of emergency oil stockpiles.

Such co-ordinated drawdowns are rare, though there were two in the immediate aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Asia's governments will have to stretch their budgets or risk unleashing an inflation shock as the deepening conflict in the Middle East pushes oil prices past $100 a barrel.

That could raise new credit risks for emerging markets, warned Fitch Ratings, as higher oil prices bloat subsidy and import bills and disrupt remittances, tourism and investment flows. It tagged India and the Philippines as among the most at risk, with net fossil fuel imports exceeding 3% of their gross domestic product.

According to Fitch, the strain is most acute in countries with thin financing buffers or wide current account deficits, such as Pakistan, and in economies that subsidise fuel.

Tourism and remittance flows from the Gulf — a critical source of foreign inflows for South Asia — also face disruption risks.

Surging oil prices following the Iran war are expected to impact China less than in past years as the country has built large crude stockpiles and diversified its energy sources, including renewables.

Oil tumbled yesterday after US President Donald Trump said the Iran war will end soon, while the conflict continues to disrupt crude production and refining in the Middle East. Still, prices remain up by more than 50% this year as fears a conflict would hinder supplies from the Middle East increasingly materialise.

A sustained increase in energy costs could trigger a surge in inflation and squeeze economic growth, raising fears of stagflation.

International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Monday a 10% rise in oil prices, if persistent through most of the year, would result in a 40-basis-point increase in global inflation.

An inflation shock triggered by the US-Israel attack on Iran could wreck a fragile global economic recovery that had been expected to gain momentum this year.

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'Qatar gave us hope, security, and a future – we stand with Qatar'

- **Dr Vahid Suljic, a Srebrenica genocide survivor credits Qatar for rebuilding life**
- **@Students_Qatar founder affirms Bosnian loyalty to Qatar**

For Dr Vahid Suljic, the meaning of safety, stability, and human dignity is not an abstract concept, it is something he understands through lived experience.

A survivor of the Srebrenica genocide, the worst atrocity in Europe since the Second World War, in which Serb forces systematically killed more than 8,000 Bosniak Muslim men and boys over several days, Dr Suljic knows what it means to lose everything. During those tragic days, he lost half of his family members.

"During the war, our childhood had only one purpose, survival," Dr Suljic recalls. "We were children, but we were surrounded by fear and loss. Many of us grew up without the sense of safety that every child deserves."

Today, after more than two decades of living in Qatar, he says the country has given him something priceless in return: security, opportunity, and a place he proudly calls home.

Earlier, his life took a remarkable turn when he arrived in Qatar as an international student, supported by a scholarship made possible through the vision and generosity of the Father Amir, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. "That opportunity changed my life forever," he said. "Coming to Qatar opened the door to education, knowledge, and opportunity. I will always remain deeply grateful to Qatar and to its leadership for giving young people like me the chance to rebuild our lives."

Over the past 20 years, Dr Suljic has built his life in Qatar through education, professional work, and community engagement. But beyond personal success, he says what stands out most is the culture of care, organisation, and stability that defines the country.

"Qatar is a country where people feel protected," he said. "The leadership, institutions, and society work together to create an environment where citizens and residents alike can live with dignity and confidence."

Dr Suljic has also dedicated himself to supporting the student community. He is the founder of @Students_Qatar, one of the country's largest student-focused platforms, which today connects more than 145,000


Dr Vahid Suljic

followers. Through the platform, he shares daily educational resources, scholarship opportunities, career guidance, and well-being support, helping thousands of students navigate their academic journeys in Qatar.

"Education transformed my life, and I believe in giving back," he said. "Students_Qatar exists to support students and highlight the incredible opportunities available in Qatar's education system."

Having lived in the country for more than two decades, Dr Suljic says he has witnessed how Qatar's leadership has built a nation recognised globally for its vision, stability, and commitment to human development. From world-class universities and healthcare to modern infrastructure and strong institutions, he says Qatar has created an environment where people from across the world can live, learn, and contribute with confidence.

"Qatar has shown the world that progress can go hand in hand with compassion," he said. "The country's leadership has built a system where people feel valued and supported."

Reflecting on the current tensions in the Gulf region, Dr Suljic emphasised that the Bosnian community in Qatar remains calm, confident, and deeply loyal to the country that welcomed them. "We are not leaving Qatar, we are staying," he said firmly. "This country gave us safety when we needed it most. It gave us opportunities, stability, and a future. Standing with Qatar is not a question for us, it is something we do with pride."

He added that residents continue to feel reassured because of Qatar's strong institutions, professional security forces, and highly organised governance. "We feel safe in Qatar," he said. "Even when the region faces challenges, the country demonstrates its ability to protect everyone who lives here. That sense of security is something we never take for granted."

Dr Suljic also praised Qatar's internationally respected role as a nation of dialogue and diplomacy, expressing confidence that the country will continue contributing to regional stability and peaceful solutions.

"Qatar has become a global symbol of constructive diplomacy," he said. "Its leadership believes in dialogue, co-operation, and building bridges. These values inspire confidence among people who live here."

He expressed heartfelt gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, whose leadership he says continues to strengthen Qatar's reputation as a country that protects and empowers people. "We are deeply thankful to His Highness Sheikh Tamim, to the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, and to all Qatari institutions for everything they do," he said. "Their vision and dedication have created a country where millions of people from different nations live together peacefully."

For Dr Suljic, who once experienced war and displacement as a child, the peace he has found in Qatar carries a profound meaning.

"When you have lived through conflict, you understand the true value of safety," he said. "In Qatar, people from many nationalities live side by side with respect and opportunity. That is something extraordinary."

And for him, and for many members of the Bosnian community, the message is clear: "Qatar welcomed us, protected us, and gave us the chance to rebuild our lives," he said.

"That is why today we proudly say: we stand with Qatar, we feel safe here, and Qatar will always be our home."



270,000 Afghans have returned from Iran, Pakistan this year: UN

AFP
Geneva

Some 270,000 Afghans have returned to their country from Pakistan and Iran so far this year, the UN said yesterday, warning that the escalating Middle East war risked pushing the numbers higher.

The UNHCR, the United Nations' refugee agency, said that 110,000 Afghans had returned from Iran and another 160,000 had returned from Pakistan since the start of 2026.

And the numbers seem to have risen since the Middle East war erupted on February 28.

Since then, there have been some 1,700 returns from Iran to Afghanistan each day, Arafat Jamal, the UNHCR's representative in Afghanistan, told reporters in Geneva.

Speaking from Islam Qala, on the Afghan-Iranian border, he said the situation there was "deceptively calm".

"Returns are orderly but freighted with tension and apprehension," he said, adding that with the hostilities elsewhere escalating, "I do fear there is more to come".

He pointed out that Afghanistan was "facing the ramifications of what is happening with Iran", while clashes have erupted along the Afghan border with Pakistan.

The new Middle East war, he warned, was "layering itself on top of an existing war on another frontier", Jamal said.

The UNHCR highlighted that the latest crises came after returns to Afghanistan had already been "high" in recent years.

More than 5mn Afghans had returned from neighbouring countries in the past two years, including 1.9mn returning from Iran last year alone.

Jamal warned that "many Afghan families are now facing cycles of displacement: first forced to flee Afghanistan, later displaced again inside Iran due to conflict, and now returning once more to Afghanistan".

"And upon return in Afghanistan, the triply-displaced enter a spiral of precarity and uncertainty."

The UNHCR and the UN children's agency Unicef said yesterday that they were working to strengthen their capacity to operate at the borders and within Afghanistan.

However, "given the scale of returns and the financial constraints facing humanitarian operations, additional support will be needed if arrivals increase," the UNHCR said, without specifying the amount needed.

Mideast war exposes Europe energy weakness: EU chief

AFP/Reuters
Paris

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron have called on European countries to boost the use of civilian nuclear power to secure the continent's energy independence, saying the Middle East war had exposed Europe's vulnerability.

They spoke at a nuclear energy summit which was briefly interrupted by Greenpeace protesters as the US-Israeli war with Iran entered its second week.

Von der Leyen said Europe's turn away from civilian nuclear power had exposed the continent's fossil fuel "vulnerability".

"It was a strategic mistake for Europe to turn its back on a reliable, affordable source of low-emission power," she said at the opening of the second Nuclear Energy Summit just outside Paris. "For fossil fuels, we are completely dependent on expensive and volatile imports. They are putting us at a structural disadvantage to other regions."

Germany, where von der Leyen is from, took a political decision under former chancellor Angela Merkel to phase out nuclear power plants owing to public opposition and safety concerns after the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

"The current Middle East crisis gives a stark reminder of the vulnerability it creates," Von der Leyen added. "We have home-grown low-carbon energy sources: nuclear and renewables. And together, they can become the joint guarantors of independence, security of supply, and competitiveness – if we get it right."

Macron said civilian nuclear power helped provide energy sovereignty.

"Nuclear power is key to reconciling both independence – and thus energy sovereignty – with decarbonisation, and thus carbon neutrality," Macron said. "We can see it in our current geopolitical context: when we are too dependent on hydrocarbons, they can become a tool of pressure, or even of destabilisation."

Von der Leyen said that "while in 1990, one-third of Europe's electricity came from nuclear, today it's only close to 15 %".

"In the last years, we see a global revival of nuclear energy. And Europe wants to be part of it," she said.

She said European Union would "create a €200mn ($230mn) guarantee to support investment in innovative nuclear technologies", unveiling a new strategy for small modular reactors. "We want this new technology to be operational in Europe by the early 2030s."

Small modular reactors are advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 300MW of electricity per unit, or about a third of the generating capacity of a traditional nuclear power reactor.

They are relatively simple to build, which makes them more affordable than large power reactors.

Nuclear energy fell into crisis after the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan, which reinforced fears highlighted by the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe.

However, the growing focus on energy sovereignty and the search for clean energies to counter global warming has reignited atomic interest.

The use of nuclear energy as an alternative to fossil fuels is highly controversial, however, with many environmental groups warning about safety risks and the disposal of nuclear waste.

The start of the summit was briefly interrupted by two Greenpeace activists who broke onto the stage as Macron greeted attendees and unfurled a banner reading "Nuclear power fuels Russia's war."

One of the activists shouted: "Why are we buying uranium from Russia?" before both were taken away by security personnel.

Greenpeace has accused France of maintaining ties with Russia's state nuclear corporation, Rosatom, despite Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, now in its fifth year.

In 2018, France's EDF signed a multi-million deal with a Rosatom subsidiary, Tenex, for reprocessed uranium from French nuclear power plants to be sent to Russia to be converted and then re-enriched before being reused in power production.

Greenpeace said that around 15 activists disrupted the arrival of officials heading to the event.

"This global summit on nuclear energy is completely out of touch with the current global situation, both in terms of geopolitical tensions and armed conflicts, and in the context of the fight against climate change," Greenpeace said.

Moscow supplies about 15% of uranium used in the EU, according to data from the Euratom supply agency for 2024, the most recent year available.

Canada provided about 34%, followed by Kazakhstan with 24%.

France imported 39% of its enriched uranium from Russia in 2025, customs data showed.

LV brings folklore and fur to the Louvre

Reuters
Paris

Louis Vuitton (LV) womenswear designer Nicolas Ghesquière took inspiration from folklore and travel for a fall/winter collection packed with shaggy coats, furry hats and frills, presented in a courtyard of the Louvre on the last day of Paris Fashion Week.

Models marched down a catwalk against a backdrop of jagged green shapes evoking mountains, carrying branches draped with handbags or hoisting huge wicker baskets overhead.

One wore a triangular red dress shaped like a tent.

"There are clothes that could transport you freely through the world, like nomadic people, almost – so there was really that idea of this universal folklore," Ghesquière told journalists after the show. "It's about the silhouette, it's about the architecture, but it's also about collective history, collective images that we all have."

Guests climbed a stairway to enter the huge glass show space in the Cour Carrée, one of the main courtyards of the Louvre, the world-famous museum that was formerly a royal palace.

The stark green set was designed by Jeremy Hindle, known for the dystopian TV series *Severance*.

Skirt sets in thick check fabric featured paintings of lambs by Ukrainian artist Nazar Strelyaev-Nazarko, while trousers featured fur trim along the seams or ended in frills just below the knee, like bloomers.

Accessories included backpacks, both large and miniature, and heels meant to resemble antlers.

Several models sported shearling hats inspired by Central Asia, while jackets and coats had exaggerated shoulders with fur epaulettes or fur sleeves with matching mittens, completely engulfing the models' arms.

"There were some cameos of some animals you could meet in the mountains, there was a wolf, there was a sheep, there was a rabbit," Ghesquière said.

Celebrities on the front row included actor Zendaya, K-pop star Felix, film director Baz Luhrmann, and American figure skater Alysa Liu, who won gold at the Winter Olympics last month.

Ghesquiere, womenswear designer at the LVMH-owned label since 2013, is among the few in fashion to have stayed in post as more than a dozen brands changed creative direction.

Louis Vuitton, known for its monogrammed leather bags, has been producing ready-to-wear collections for men and women since 1998 when Marc Jacobs was creative director.







All's fair

Models present creations for Louis Vuitton for the Women's Ready to Wear Fall/Winter 2026-27 collection show as part of the Paris Women Fashion Week, in Paris. **– AFP**

Right: Caravaggio's *Portrait de Maffeo Barberini,* bought by the Italian state for €30mn. **– AFP**

This photograph taken on February 27 shows Hindus and Muslims enjoying a meal as they break their fast during Ramadan, in Mithi of Tharparkar district, Sindh province, Pakistan. **– AFP**



A Greenpeace activist holds a sign reading 'Nuclear power fuels Russia's war', near French President Emmanuel Macron (left) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi (second left) during the Nuclear Energy Summit at the Seine Musicale venue in Boulogne-Billancourt, outside Paris. **– AFP**

Ramadan brings communities closer in southeast Pakistan

By Sameer Mandhro
AFP

Partab Shivani, a Hindu in Muslim-majority Pakistan, has fasted on and off during Ramadan for years, but this time is different as he practices abstinence for the entire holy month.

Every year, he and his friends in the southeastern city of Mithi arrange Iftar, when Muslims break their daily fast, to foster peace and solidarity between the two religions.

"I believe we need to promote interfaith harmony. First, we are humans – religions came later," Shivani, a 48-year-old social activist, told AFP, adding that he also reads the teachings of the Buddha.

"His message is about peace and ending war. Peace can spread through solidarity and by standing with one another. Distance only widens the gap between people," he added.

Ninety-six per cent of Pakistan's 240mn people are Muslim. Just 2% are Hindu, most of them living in rural areas of Sindh province where Mithi is located.

In Mithi itself, most of the 60,000 inhabitants are Hindu.

Many of the city's Hindus also observe Ramadan and Iftar has become a social gathering where people from both faiths happily participate.

"This has been a wonderful tradition of ours for a very long time," said Mir Muhammad Buledi, a 51-year-old Muslim friend who attended Shivani's iftar gathering. "It is a beautiful example of harmony between the two communities."

"I am a Hindu but I keep all the fasts during this month," said Sushil Malani, a local politician. "I feel happy standing with my Muslim brothers.

"We celebrate Eid together as well," he added. "This tradition in the region is very old."

Restaurants and tea stalls are closed across Pakistan during Ramadan.

Ramesh Kumar, a 52-year-old Hindu man who sells sweets and savoury items outside a Muslim shrine, keeps his push cart covered and closed until Iftar.

"There is no discrimination among us if someone is Muslim or Hindu. I have been seeing this since my childhood that we all live together like brothers," he said.

Locals say Mithi's peaceful religious coexistence can be traced to its remote location, emerging from the sand dunes of the Tharparkar desert, which borders the modern Indian state of Rajasthan.

At two Muslim shrines in the middle of the city, Hindu families arrange meals, bringing fruit, meals and juices for their Muslim neighbours to break their fasts.

"We respect Muslims," said Mohan Lal Malhi, a Hindu caretaker of one of the shrines.

Mohan said his parents and elders taught him to respect people regardless of religion or colour, and the traditions pass from one generation to the next.

"You will see a (Sikh) gurdwara, a mosque, and a shrine standing side by side here," Mohan said. "The atmosphere of this area teaches humanity."

Ig Nobel prizes moving to Europe because it's safer

AFP
Paris

The tongue-in-cheek Ig Nobel awards will be held in Europe for the first time this year because the United States has become "unsafe" for international prize-winners to visit, the organisers have announced.

The awards, which celebrate the sillier side of science, have held raucous ceremonies that see the winners showered with paper aeroplanes at universities in Massachusetts since 1991.

Like the Nobels that they satirise, Ig Nobel laureates hail from all over the world.

However, international academics have reported problems travelling to the US since President Donald Trump's second term began in early 2025.

"During the past year, it has become unsafe for our guests to visit the country," Ig Nobel founder Marc Abrahams said in a statement on Monday. "We cannot in good conscience ask the new winners, or the international journalists who cover the event, to travel to the USA this year."

The 36th edition of the Ig Nobels will be held in the Swiss city of Zurich on September 3, the organisation said.

Italy buys rare Caravaggio portrait for €30mn

AFP/Reuters
Rome

Italy has paid €30mn for a Caravaggio painting of the future pope Urban VIII, the culture ministry said yesterday, a work that will enter the Barberini museum collection in Rome.

Painted around 1598, the work depicts Monsignor Maffeo Barberini, an influential cleric who later became Pope Urban VIII, one of the great patrons of the arts of his time.

The portrait was painted by Italian master Caravaggio when the nobleman born in 1568 was in his 30s, years before he became pope.

"This is a work of exceptional importance," Culture Minister Alessandro Giuli said in a statement, adding that it was "one of the most significant investments" ever made by the state for an artwork.

Maffeo Barberini was elected to the papacy in 1623 and his pontificate lasted until his death in 1644.

The painting was authenticated in 1963 by the art critic Roberto Longhi, a great specialist in the work of the 16th-century artist, whose full name was Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.

Giuli described the purchase as part of a broader effort to strengthen Italy's public cultural heritage and prevent major works from disappearing into private collections.

The acquisition comes a month after the culture ministry bought Antonello da Messina's *Ecce Homo* for $14.9mn, securing the rare work by the 15th-century Renaissance master just as it was due to be auctioned in New York.

The previous owners of the Caravaggio work, who were not specified, had allowed the portrait to be exhibited to the public for an exhibit at Palazzo Barberini – the noble family's historic home in central Rome – which ended in February 2025.

The museum's director, Thomas Clement Salomon, told AFP at the exhibition's opening in November 2024 that the fact it was being displayed was "exceptional".

"It has never been lent to an exhibition, it has never been seen in a museum, so it is an absolute preview," he said.

In the painting, a seated Barberini is clutching a letter in his left hand, with his right pointing forward, towards the viewer.

Around 65 paintings in the world have been "securely attributed" to Caravaggio, according to the ministry statement, while portraits are very rare, with only three "known and firmly accepted".

The culture ministry said it would look to buy more artworks in the coming months "with the aim of making available to scholars and enthusiasts certain masterpieces of art history that would otherwise be destined for the private market".

QATAR

Ramadan reset: How the holy month can restore balance to body and mind

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

Every year, Ramadan arrives as more than just a religious observance. It offers a rare opportunity to pause, reset, and restore balance in daily life. Far from being merely a period of abstaining from food and drink, the holy month can become a time for physical recovery, mental clarity, and spiritual renewal.

In an exclusive interview, therapeutic and community nutrition consultant Moudhi al-Hajri explained that fasting hours in Qatar typically range from 12-13 hours, a duration that allows the body to recalibrate several vital processes when approached correctly.

Yet she warns that the spirit of Ramadan is often lost in the rush of preparation that precedes it.


Moudhi al-Hajri

Supermarkets fill with crowds stocking excessive amounts of food, turning the month into a period of abundance rather than moderation.

"The food we consume in Ramadan is essentially the same food available throughout the year; the real difference lies only in the timing of its consumption, not in its type or quantity".

According to Moudhi al-Hajri, fasting should naturally lead to reduced food intake. However, the opposite often occurs the moment the Maghrib call to prayer signals the end of the fast. Many people rush to eat large quantities of food as if their bodies had endured severe deprivation.

She explains that the body enters a state of balance during fasting hours. "The truth is that during fasting hours, the body enters a state of internal regulation: blood sugar, fat, and cholesterol levels are calm and balanced, and the body begins to cleanse itself. The imbalance only occurs when we surprise it with large quantities of food all at once".

To maintain this balance, al-Hajri recommends breaking the fast gradually. Starting with a date and water or a glass of milk allows the digestive system to awaken gently. Performing the Maghrib prayer before continuing the meal gives the stomach time to adjust.

A light soup with one or two healthy, non-fried samosas can follow. The main meal is best eaten after Taraweeh prayers and should include a balanced combination of carbohydrates and protein. Later in the evening, a small dessert, no larger than the size of a thumb, paired with coffee, is sufficient to satisfy cravings without excess.

A lighter late meal consisting of salad and protein can follow, while Suhoor, the pre-dawn meal, should focus on complex carbohydrates, protein, and hydration.

Beyond nutrition, al-Hajri emphasises that physical activity remains essential during Ramadan. "Just as important as regulating your diet", she says, explaining that while fasting encourages fat burning, movement enhances the process. Taraweeh prayers themselves offer gentle physical activity, which can be complemented with light exercise to maintain fitness and support muscle recovery.

Sleep, however, is another area where many people fall short. Late nights spent watching television series until dawn can undermine both the health and spiritual benefits of Ramadan. "Therefore, it is wise to regulate your sleep and wake times to maintain energy and focus, especially for employees and students".

For al-Hajri, Ramadan's benefits extend well beyond the physical. "It's a month to reorganise your emotions, alleviate stress and worries, and cultivate inner tranquillity".

Constant social gatherings throughout the month can be exhausting, she adds. A more balanced approach, limiting visits to weekends or occasional evenings, allows individuals to preserve both their energy and their focus.

Ultimately, Ramadan offers a powerful opportunity to rethink habits and priorities. "If it is received with calmness and awareness, a person will emerge from it lighter in body, purer in spirit, and more balanced in life".

She added: "If a person emerges from Ramadan with a deeper understanding of their dietary and psychological habits, they can transform this month from a temporary experience into a balanced and sustainable lifestyle".

Local farms strengthen food security with surplus vegetable production

By Ayman Adly
Doha

Qatar's local farms are producing a surplus of vegetables during the peak agricultural season, with farmers saying current output is sufficient to meet domestic demand and help strengthen the country's food security.

As this time of year marks the peak of the local agricultural season, the diversity of agricultural products and high production volumes have resulted in supplies that exceed the domestic market's needs. Accordingly, many local farms supply markets daily with around 17 varieties of vegetables, including tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, eggplant, okra, and beans, as well as leafy greens, corn, figs, and honey. Much of the produce is delivered to Mahaseel Company, which distributes it to major markets and commercial complexes. Farmers stress that such supplies will continue to be delivered at stable prices, with no increases.

Besides, farmers noted that Qatari produce stands out for its quality and variety, while the relevant authorities continue to monitor and regulate market prices. Many farms also operate under annual supply contracts with Mahaseel, the main supplier to the local market, helping maintain price stability.

Engineer Abdulrahman al-Obaidan, chairman of Al-Waha Agricultural Services Company, confirmed that local farms can strengthen food security through local vegetable production, noting that current output exceeds domestic demand. He added that farms continue to supply major vegetables such as tomatoes, zucchini, eggplant, and leafy greens, and that production is expected to remain available in markets until the end of the agricultural season in June.

Nasser al-Khalaf, CEO of Agrico Agricultural Development, expected that agricultural production would continue throughout the year without significant challenges. The company produces a range of vegetables, particularly cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, and mushrooms, and operates greenhouses that enable year-round production.

Agrico also produces tilapia fish and has recently begun producing table eggs as part of its expansion in local food production. He noted that price stability depends largely on the availability and cost of production inputs, but no price increases are expected over the next two months.

Basel al-Yafei, manager of Samsama Farm, confirmed the uninterrupted production and supply chains, highlighting that the current period represents the peak of the agricultural season. Farms can meet market demand while maintaining stable supply prices, as part of their commitment to supporting national food security.

Dr Rashid Ahmed al-Kuwari, owner of Oyoun Farm, said that his farm continues to follow its planned production schedule and supplies markets daily with around 17 types of vegetables. Part of the production is delivered to Mahaseel under contractual agreements, while other quantities are supplied to different entities or sold directly to consumers at the farm. He stressed that the abundance of production during the peak season allows local farms to meet market demand. However, production is expected to gradually decline from April until mid-June as the agricultural season comes to an end.





Strong manufacturing base boosts Qatar's local supplies

By Ayman Adly
Doha

With over 1,000 factories operating in Qatar and many other manufacturing facilities, the country can easily supply the local market with a wide range of national products across sectors such as food and beverage, plastics and rubber, building materials, chemicals and household necessities.

The manufacturing sector in Qatar has been promising, with ever-expanding business opportunities, as the government offers the necessary support and incentives to encourage the private sector to make further investments in this area. However, around 78% of the country's manufacturing output is related to the petrochemical industry, which includes fertilisers, methanol, polythene, and petrochemical derivatives, and normally benefits from the country's rich natural gas reserves.

In the meantime, the country also has several factories that produce the necessary goods to keep the local market thriving. These include construction cement, steel reinforcement bars, ceramic tiles and precast concrete, among other related products that steadily fuel the needs of the building and construction boom in the country.

In addition, Qatar produces around 1.5mn metric tonnes of aluminium per year, which guarantees a steady supply for automotive components, construction materials, packaging, electrical products, and other sectors. Such industries are continually expanding, and there will be more investment opportunities in the near future due to the steadily increasing demand locally, regionally, and internationally.

Besides, plastic manufacturing is another promising field in Qatar, expected to grow at 12% over the coming few years, with products including industrial packaging materials, pipes and fittings, insulation materials, and plastic containers. Some of these are considered end products, and others are used to feed other production fields. Mostly, these serve the local market needs.

When it comes to food production and related industries, Qatar has more than 200 facilities and plants that with more than 8,500 workers that process various food products including dairy products, bottled water, juices, packaged foods, processed meat and poultry, bakery products, frozen foods and various other food and beverage products that guarantee steadily uninterrupted supply chain to the local market on daily basis regardless of the regional tension or any undesired circumstances. Accordingly, the number of varieties of locally produced and manufactured food exceeds 1,810. Sales of these products have also been increasing steadily over the past few years due to consumer confidence in their quality and reasonable prices.

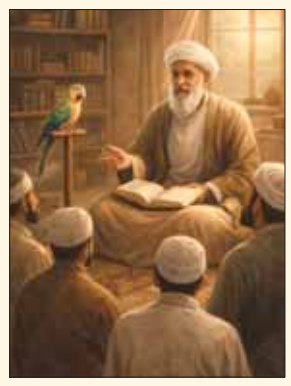
Further, the production of household items and consumer goods is a growing industry in the country, driven by population growth, urban development, and the expansion of retail outlets. Locally produced products include plastic containers, detergents and household cleaning products, kitchenware and utensils, and some furniture and home accessories, with potential for more products to meet increasing local demand.

For other vital products, there are estimates of more than 140 locally manufactured pharmaceutical products, including intravenous infusion solutions, generic medicines, clinical nutrition products, dialysis solutions, and topical medical drugs, among other drugs and related products that meet the needs of government and private healthcare facilities across the country.

Most light industries and specialised manufacturing facilities are classified as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the private sector, which mainly supply goods for the local market and serve as a support supply chain for larger industries. Over the years, the country has established an efficient system built on successful experiences that can overcome challenging circumstances and maintain its strong economy and high living standards, even amid tough regional tensions.

Tale from a bygone era: the lesson of the sheikh and the parrot

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter



The Majlis was of its regular audience, men and young adults eager to listen carefully to what the Hakawati (storyteller) was about to narrate. They waited for him to perfume his beard and moustaches with musk, then he cleared his throat, said: "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah". Then said: "A long time ago in Ramadan in old Qatar, there was a venerable sheikh who taught his students the true faith, instilling in their hearts the meaning of 'There is no Allah but Allah', and nurturing them upon it as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had done. He was patient and loving, and he was keen for the faith to become a part of their souls before it became mere words they uttered.

One day, one of the students presented the sheikh with a small parrot. The sheikh was known for his love of keeping birds and cats, so he grew fond of the parrot and took it with him to his lessons. The parrot learned to say "There is no Allah but Allah" and repeated it day and night without tiring. As the days passed, the students, in a moment of sorrow, found their sheikh weeping bitterly. When they asked him the reason for his grief, he replied that his cat had killed the parrot. The students were astonished and said: "Why are you crying over this?! If you wish, we can bring you a better parrot." The sheikh smiled sadly and said, "I don't weep for the parrot itself, but for something far greater. When the cat attacked it, the parrot screamed, forgetting the remembrance of Allah it had been repeating. The faith it uttered didn't move its heart; it died noisily, but without holding fast to its beliefs."

This was because it had only repeated the words, not understood them in its heart, nor felt them. The sheikh looked at his students and said seriously, "I fear we might be like this parrot. We live our lives repeating 'There is no Allah but Allah' with our tongues, and when death comes, we forget the remembrance of Allah if our hearts haven't truly known Him."

UDST partners with QC for Ramadan Iftar initiative



Reinforcing its commitment to social responsibility and community care, the University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) partnered with Qatar Charity (QC) during the holy month of Ramadan to deliver a dedicated Iftar meal initiative supporting campus workers.

Through this year's initiative, 500 Iftar meals were distributed to essential campus workers across multiple colleges and departments. The programme reflects the University's appreciation for the individuals whose daily contributions sustain the campus environment.

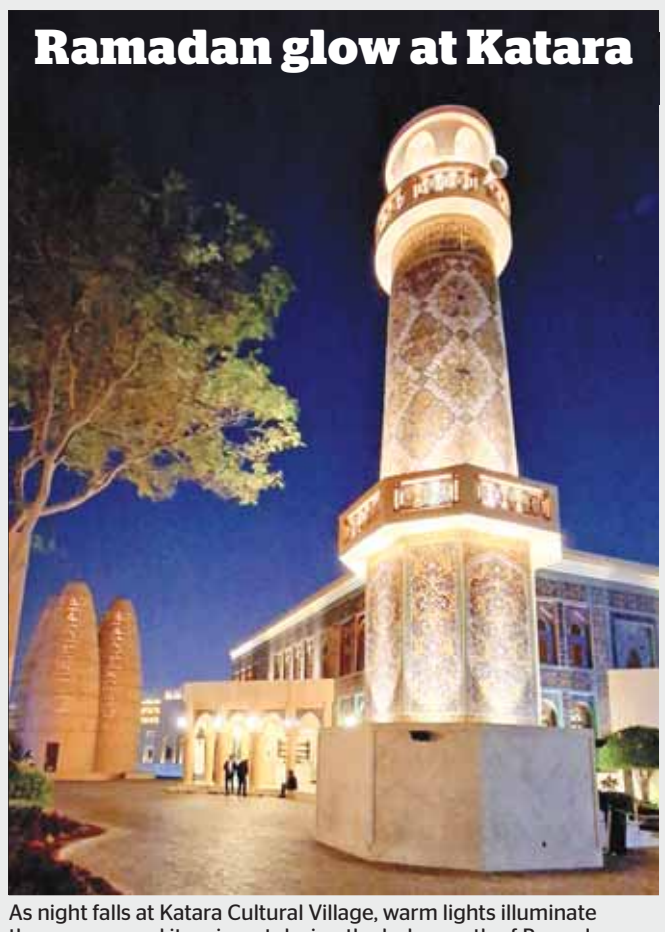
The initiative was implemented in collaboration with the Qatari Students Association, where student volunteers organised logistics, prepared meal packages, and supervised the distribution process. This active role reflects the commitment of UDST students to promoting a culture of social responsibility and empowering them to translate the values of solidarity and generosity into practical initiatives that serve the community and strengthen the spirit of compassion.

Dr Salem Al-Naemi, president of UDST, said: "Ramadan represents an opportunity to strengthen community connection and reaffirm our shared responsibility toward one another. We proudly acknowledge Qatar Charity and our student volunteers for their commitment and collaboration in ensuring the continued success of this annual event. At UDST, we believe that community engagement is an essential component of education."

For workers fasting during Ramadan while maintaining shift-based responsibilities, access to a shared Iftar moment can be limited. By organising on-campus meal distribution, UDST aimed to ensure inclusivity and appreciation for those serving throughout the month.

Ahmed Yousef Fakhroo, executive director, Communications and Community Impact at Qatar Charity, noted: "Providing Iftar meals to campus workers is a gesture that carries noble humanitarian values and aligns with Qatar Charity's mission to promote solidarity and support those who contribute greatly to our communities. We also commend the efforts of the Qatari Student Association for their active involvement and outstanding organisation, as such joint initiatives strengthen community bonds and reinforce the concept of social responsibility."

Ramadan glow at Katara



As night falls at Katara Cultural Village, warm lights illuminate the mosque and its minaret during the holy month of Ramadan. Intricate Islamic designs and soft lighting create a calm and peaceful setting for prayer, reflection and gatherings. The glowing architecture and quiet courtyards capture the spiritual atmosphere that fills evenings in Qatar during Ramadan. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen