



Qatar Insurance

Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

9%
QAR 9.9B

Net Profit Before the Impact of Piller Two Taxes

19%
QAR 874M

Net Profit Profit attributable to QIC shareholders

9%
QAR 791M

Earnings Per Share:

10%
QAR 0.188

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Qatar intercepts eight ballistic missiles, drones

The Ministry of Defence announced that Qatar was subjected yesterday to an attack involving nine ballistic missiles and a number of drones launched from Iran. In a statement, the ministry stated that Qatar Armed Forces successfully intercepted all drones and eight ballistic missiles, while one missile fell in an uninhabited area. **(QNA)**

Qatar to send urgent aid for displaced families in Lebanon

GT Report

Qatar has announced an urgent humanitarian response to support families affected by the sharp military escalation in Lebanon and the resulting large-scale displacement. The assistance, provided through the Qatar Fund for Development, is being delivered in co-operation with Qatar Charity and the Qatar Red Crescent. In a statement, Qatar said the relief intervention will target more than 40,500 displaced families across Lebanon. The aid package includes the distribution of more than 12,000 food baskets, along with essential non-food items such as blankets, mattresses, hygiene kits, diapers and basic household supplies. The response also includes hygiene kits containing core personal and household sanitation items aimed at helping displaced families cope with worsening humanitarian conditions. The announcement underlines Qatar's continued humanitarian support for Lebanon at a time of heightened instability and growing civilian need.

PM, German FM discuss regional developments

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani has discussed recent military tensions in the region during a meeting with German Minister of Foreign Affairs Johann Wadephul.

The talks took place at the Amiri Diwan yesterday and focused on the recent military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions for regional and international security.

HE Sheikh Mohammed reiterated Qatar's condemnation of the Iranian attacks on its territory, stressing that such actions are unacceptable under any justification.

He noted that Qatar has consistently sought to distance itself from regional conflicts and has worked to streamline

dialogue between Iran and the international community.

HE the Prime Minister also warned against the irresponsible targeting of vital infrastructure, particularly facilities linked to water, food and energy supplies, saying such actions could expose populations across the region to serious risks.

He stressed the need for an immediate cessation to any escalation and called for a return to dialogue, urging all sides to prioritise reason and diplomacy in order to contain the crisis and safeguard regional stability. Wadephul expressed Germany's condemnation of the Iranian attack on Qatari territory, describing it as a blatant violation of Qatar's sovereignty, its airspace and international law, including the United Nations Charter. **(QNA)**



Cabinet slams attacks, pledges full defence

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The government issued its strongest rebuke yet of Iran following military strikes that reached Qatari soil, warning it will take all necessary measures to defend its sovereignty while calling for an immediate halt to escalation across the region.

The condemnation came yesterday as Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting at the Amiri Diwan – a session that followed a dramatic and dangerous uptick in regional hostilities. Missiles or projectiles linked to Iranian military activity had struck Qatari territory, hitting civilian and vital facilities in what the Cabinet described as a flagrant violation of national sovereignty and the principles of good neighbourliness.

Following the meeting, HE the Minister of Justice and Minister

of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi delivered a statement outlining the government's response. HE the Prime Minister opened the session by condemning the military escalation and its widening repercussions. He emphasised that Qatar's security and stability – grounded in the grace of Allah, the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, and the unity of Qatari society – remain firm. He noted that the Amir has directed that all services continue without interruption across every sector.

He also praised the Qatar Armed Forces for demonstrating a high level of readiness and efficiency in protecting the nation's airspace, commended the security services for maintaining public order, and expressed pride in the composure and cohesion shown by members of the community throughout the crisis.

The Cabinet's full statement, directed to the UN Security Council, made clear that Doha intends to pursue both firm defence and urgent diplomacy in equal measure.

Amir, Erdogan, Swedish PM, Dutch king review situation

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call yesterday from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who inquired about the situation in Qatar in light of the recent developments following the continued Iranian aggression.

He reiterated his country's solidarity and full support for all measures taken by Qatar to safeguard its sovereignty, security, and stability. His Highness the Amir also received phone calls from Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and King Willem-Alexander of The Netherlands, during which they expressed their countries' solidarity with Qatar in the wake of the recent Iranian aggression and reaffirmed support for its security and stability.

Kristersson conveyed Sweden's condemnation of the continued Iranian aggression and voiced appreciation for the care and attention extended by the competent authorities in Qatar to Swedish residents, while the Amir thanked him for Sweden's support and solidarity with Qatar and its people.

King Willem-Alexander expressed reassurance regarding the situation in Qatar following the Iranian aggression, stressing that The Netherlands backs Qatar and stands in full solidarity with it, considering the aggression a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of Qatar and other countries in the region. He praised the role of the Qatar Armed Forces in repelling the aggression, and lauded the efforts of the relevant authorities in dealing with the developments, as well as Qatar's role as a fair and reliable mediator in regional and international issues, while His



Highness the Amir thanked him for his support and reassured him of the care and well-being of Dutch nationals in the country. During these calls, the parties reviewed developments in the region and their repercussions on regional and international security and stability, stressing the importance of de-escalation, giving priority to political solutions through dialogue and diplomatic means, and supporting international efforts aimed at consolidating security and stability and preserving regional and international peace, affirming that dialogue remains the only way to address crises and achieve lasting stability. **(QNA)**

Qatari women driving a new economic frontier

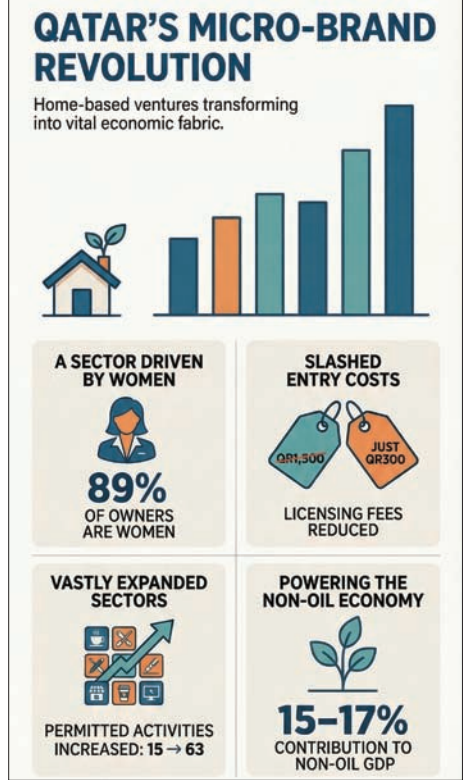
By Santhosh Perumal
Business Reporter

When a Qatari baker turned her homemade cookies into a storefront business last year, she was following a quietly powerful trend reshaping the country's entrepreneurial landscape.

Across Qatar, thousands of home-based businesses – run mostly by women from spare bedrooms, small studios and family kitchens – are evolving from informal micro-ventures into recognised brands, and in doing so, contributing meaningfully to the nation's economic diversification.

The numbers tell a compelling story. Around 89% of home-based business owners in Qatar are women, according to Qatar Development Bank. Licensing fees have been slashed from QR1,500 to QR300, and the government has expanded permitted home-business activities from 15 to 63 sectors. Digital platforms have dissolved old barriers to market access, while programmes like the National Home-Based Business Programme are helping entrepreneurs scale up. Together, these shifts are turning what was once considered a supplementary income stream into a vital thread in Qatar's SME fabric – a sector that already contributes roughly 15–17% of non-oil GDP.

Innovation, it turns out, is space agnostic. Fast-growing home-based businesses are increasingly becoming an integral part of Qatar's small and medium enterprise sector – but experts say niche specialisation and strong digital branding will be essential to sustaining an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is itself an economic multiplier. **To Page 2**



RAMADAN THOUGHT



As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert. The thirsty one thinks it to be water, until he comes up to it, he finds it to be nothing; but he finds Allah with him, Who will pay him his due (Hell). And Allah is Swift in taking account. **(Qur'an 24:39)**

Prayer times

Fajr...4.30; Zuh...11.44; Asr...3.08; Maghrib...5.44; Isha...7.14

Fasting times

Iftar today 5.44pm
Imsak tomorrow..... 4.19am

Qatar residents stay calm amid regional tensions

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Residents across Qatar say that while regional tensions have raised concerns, daily life in the country continues with a sense of calm and stability, reflecting the confidence many people place in the nation's institutions, security systems and leadership. Interviews with residents from different backgrounds reveal a common sentiment: awareness of the broader geopolitical situation exists, but it has not significantly disrupted daily routines or the general sense of



Andrea Savina Carvalho

security within the country. For Francis, a Filipino expatriate living and working in Qatar, the



Francis

prevailing mood remains steady. He said: "From my perspective, the overall mood in Qatar remains

“What reassures me is Qatar’s strong governance, modern infrastructure, and proactive approach to security,” says a Filipino expatriate

calm and steady. People are continuing with their normal routines, going to work, running businesses, and spending time with their families. “There is a strong sense of confidence in the country's stability and in the leadership's ability to manage the situation responsibly.” Despite developments across the region, Francis believes

the country's preparedness and infrastructure provide reassurance for residents. “Yes, 100%. I do feel confident. Qatar has strong security systems, reliable infrastructure, and well-organised institutions. Even during regional tensions, daily life and business operations continue smoothly, which reflects the country's preparedness and stability,” he said. **To Page 3**



Gulf states hold customs meeting to ease trade amid ongoing challenges



GCC countries have convened the fifth extraordinary meeting of the Executive Council of the Customs Union, held via video conference. Qatar was represented by a delegation led by HE Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Jamal, Director-General of the General Authority of Customs and Chair of the Executive Council of the GCC Customs Union. The meeting focused on the efforts of member states to provide necessary customs support amid current challenges, aiming to facilitate the smooth movement of goods across the region. Discussions also highlighted measures to maintain the efficiency of joint customs operations and ensure the continuity of supply chains within the Gulf. Participants approved an exceptional mechanism to regulate customs clearance and transit procedures for goods during the current circumstances. The initiative is designed to overcome obstacles faced by the trading community, speed up clearance processes, and improve the flow of goods across border points. Officials said the regular meetings underscore the pivotal role of the Customs Union in supporting GCC integration and promoting co-ordination among member states in all customs-related matters. **(QNA)**

Qatar, Albania discuss regional escalation in phone call

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi has discussed the recent military escalation in the region with Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Ferit Hoxha. HE al-Muraikhi received a phone conversation from the Albanian minister, during which the two sides reviewed the developments of the ongoing tensions and the serious repercussions they could have on regional and global stability. HE al-Muraikhi reiterated Qatar's condemnation of the recent Iranian attacks on Qatari territory, stressing that such actions cannot be accepted under any justification. He also noted that Qatar has consistently sought to remain neutral in regional conflicts and has worked to facilitate dialogue between Iran and the international community. He emphasized the need for an immediate halt to escalation, urging all parties to return to diplomacy in order to contain the crisis and safeguard regional security. For his part, Ferit Hoxha called for de-escalation and the use of diplomatic channels and negotiations to prevent further instability. **(QNA)**

Turkiye's V-P meets Qatar's ambassador

Vice-President of the Republic of Türkiye Dr Cevdet Yilmaz met yesterday with ambassador of the State of Qatar to Türkiye Faisal bin Abdullah al-Hanzab. During the meeting, they discussed co-operation relations between the two countries. **(QNA)**



Qatar residents stay calm amid regional tensions

From Page 1

He added that Qatar's governance and track record in managing challenges play a key role in boosting public confidence.

"What reassures me is Qatar's strong governance, modern infrastructure, and proactive approach to security. The country has demonstrated in the past that it can manage regional challenges while maintaining safety, stability, and economic continuity," Francis said.

In workplaces and communities, he observed that people remain composed and focused on their responsibilities.

"In my workplace and community, people remain calm and focused on their responsibilities. While people are aware of the regional developments, most continue their daily routines with confidence and professionalism," he added.

Another long-term resident (16 years), an Asian expatriate, who requested anonymity, also noted that authorities have worked to maintain a sense of normalcy.

"From what I've observed, Qatar has done its best to maintain a sense of normalcy for residents despite the regional tensions," the resident said. "Authorities regularly share updates and alerts, which help keep people informed and reassured."

According to the expatriate, these communications have played a key role in maintaining trust and stability. "It gives residents confidence that the situation is being managed carefully, and many of us feel that things could have been much more difficult if it hadn't been handled the way Qatar has approached it so far."

Having witnessed the country's development over more than a decade and a half, the expatriate believes Qatar has demonstrated resilience during challenging times.

"Qatar has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to remain resilient during challenging times. The country has strong systems in place and has proven in the past that it can remain self-sufficient while ensuring that businesses and essential services continue to operate smoothly," the resident said.

Adding to the views of long-term residents, Indian-Portuguese Andrea Savina Carvalho, a human resources executive and life coach who has lived in Qatar for 36 years, said her connection

to the country spans nearly her entire life.

"It always has been home," Carvalho said, explaining that her father was born in Qatar and that she arrived in the country on April 19, 1990. "The rest is history. I've not known any other home."

Having witnessed the country's development and its response to major challenges over the decades, she said her confidence in Qatar's leadership remains strong even during uncertain times in the region.

"I have watched the leadership grow and evolve. If no one went hungry during the blockade or unattended during Covid, this phase is just another block on the road."

For Carvalho, the country's resilience during past crises provides reassurance that stability will continue. She added that despite holding a different nationality, Qatar remains the place she considers home.

"Yes, Qatar is home," she said when asked about her plans for the future. "I may have a different passport, but it's the only home I've known. I didn't just grow old here; I was moulded into the person I am today."

Carvalho said the country has provided her with a life marked by respect and dignity, reinforcing her decision to remain in Qatar. "I'm blessed with a life of respect and dignity."

Reflecting on the international perception of Qatar during periods of regional tension, Carvalho also shared a message for people outside the country: "Qatar is more than just what the news channels show. I am a resident of a nation of love, and a country that accepts all and defends all."

Students living in the country also appear to share a similar perspective. A university student said the initial days of the situation created some uncertainty, but that feeling quickly subsided as government measures became clear.

"From the perspective of the people whom I have interacted with, they are concerned but not worried," the student said, explaining that the early sense of fear gradually faded as residents saw evidence of preparedness.

"Being worrisome and scared about the ongoing situation was present on the first day. But after evidence of the government capabilities, both militarily and socially, for example, ensuring food price stability, warning systems in place, and even misinformation control, then

the worry declined," the student said.

Despite global economic concerns linked to geopolitical developments, the student believes the situation is not unique to Qatar.

"This is a situation that will affect everyone globally, not just people living in Qatar," the student said.

Among students and young residents, maintaining routines has helped provide a sense of stability.

"Different people deal with the situation variably, but the majority of the people I have seen are trying to create a sense of their routine schedules," the student said. "Whether it's attending classes online or continuing their student jobs."

Confidence in the country's institutions has also played a role in shaping attitudes.

"I feel confident particularly because of how I have witnessed the detailed measures in place from both the school I am in and the government," the student said.

Meanwhile, a Filipino teacher working in Qatar said the general atmosphere among residents is one of cautious awareness rather than panic.

"From what I observe, people are concerned but still calm," the teacher said. "Life is continuing as normal. There is awareness of the situation, but there is also trust that things are being managed well."

The teacher believes the country's preparedness and communication systems have helped reassure residents.

"Qatar has strong systems in place for safety and communication, and the government is quick to respond when needed. This gives residents reassurance that the country is prepared for different situations," the teacher said, noting that clear communication from authorities also contributes to residents' confidence.

"The organisation of the country and the clear communication from authorities give me reassurance. Qatar has handled major events and challenges in the past very well."

Within the workplace environment, the teacher stressed that colleagues and students continue to support each other. "In my workplace, people remain focused on their responsibilities while staying informed about the news. We also check in on each other and our students and share updates as needed. Overall, the atmosphere is supportive and calm."

PM discusses regional developments with UK, SA ministers

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received phone calls from the UK Foreign Secretary, Yvette Cooper and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa Ronald Lamola.

During the call, they reviewed the latest developments in the military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions on regional and international security and stability, as well as ways to resolve disputes through peaceful means. HE the Prime Minister reiterated Qatar's con-

demnation of the Iranian attacks on Qatari territory, stressing that such actions are unacceptable under any pretext or justification. His Excellency affirmed that Qatar has always been keen to distance itself from regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue between Iran and the international community.

HE Sheikh Mohammed also warned against the irresponsible targeting of vital infrastructure, particularly facilities related to water, food, and energy, emphasizing that such actions set a dangerous precedent and could expose the peoples of the region

to multiple risks. He stressed the importance of an immediate cessation of all escalatory actions, a return to the negotiating table, the prioritisation of reason and wisdom, and intensified efforts to contain the crisis in a manner that preserves regional security.

For their part, the Minister of International Relations and Co-operation of South Africa and UK Foreign Secretary underscored the importance of de-escalation, calling for the exercise of restraint and a return to negotiations and diplomatic channels to prevent further instability. **(QNA)**

Qatar stresses Iranian attacks affect children's rights on life, education

QNA
Geneva

Qatar has strongly condemned Iran's aggressive armed attacks on its territory and other countries in the region, saying they have had direct effects on children's right to life, health, education and security, and demanded that these attacks be stopped.

This came in the statement of Qatar, delivered by Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar in Geneva Abdulaziz Mohammed al-Mansoori, during his participation in the interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed

Conflict, Item 3, within the framework of the 61st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Al-Mansoori stressed that Qatar has given great attention to the protection of children in areas of armed conflict by supporting international efforts and cooperating with United Nations organizations and mechanisms concerned with children, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, by hosting the Analysis and Documentation Center affiliated with the Office in Doha, and providing support to it to implement its activities aimed at protecting children in conflict areas through research, training and technical support.

He pointed out that in the con-

text of strengthening the role of education in protecting children, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) in Qatar, in co-operation with Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, launched in September the first phase of the global campaign to protect children in armed conflict under the slogan "Prove It Matters," in partnership with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and the Unesco Regional Office in Doha.

Al-Mansoori indicated that this campaign aims to consolidate the values of peace, and highlight the voices of children in education and protection issues through many innovative educational activities.

Qatar affirms commitment to boosting Int'l co-operation against drug problem

QNA
Vienna

Qatar affirmed its commitment to strengthening international co-operation to address the global drug problem, stressing that confronting this phenomenon requires a comprehensive approach that combines prevention, treatment, law enforcement, and development.

This came in Qatar's statement delivered by ambassador of Qatar to Austria and Qatar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Vienna Jassim Yaqoob al-Hamadi, during the 69th session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) held in Vienna. The ambassador said that the World Drug Report 2025 and the report submitted by the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reflect a worrying situation regarding the evolution of global drug markets, which are expanding in size, scope, and complexity, while rates of drug use and the number of re-



lated victims continue to rise. He pointed out that illicit activities related to the production, manufacturing, and trafficking of drugs have become more mobile and technologically advanced, with the increasing use of the dark web and cryptocurrencies in the drug trade, in addition to growing links between drug trafficking, corruption, money laundering, organized crime, and terrorism.

Ambassador al-Hamadi said that these challenges should not lead the international community to despair, but rather call for confronting reality with strong political will, noting that the three international drug control con-

ventions already provide a comprehensive legal framework, adding that what is needed is their effective implementation and the establishment of comprehensive shared priorities.

He highlighted Qatar's contributions to supporting regional and international initiatives to combat drugs through its support for international organizations and specialised programs, which enhances countries' capacity to confront this cross-border phenomenon. He emphasized the importance of safeguarding international multilateralism and strengthening the role of the UN system, including UNODC, being a key pillar in reinforcing international cooperation and solidarity among states in addressing the world drug issue.

In Qatar's statement before the 69th session of the CND in Vienna, al-Hamadi called on the international community to renew its joint commitment to building a drug-free world by dismantling criminal networks, cutting off their sources of funding, and breaking the cycle of suffering and destruction associated with this phenomenon.

Qatari women driving a new economic frontier

From Page 1

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 13.1% of women in Qatar are engaged in early-stage entrepreneurship. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry first granted licenses for home-based business activities in December 2016, laying the regulatory groundwork for what has since become a significant and growing segment of the economy.

Over the past decade, both the government and the private sector have moved to support this trend, helping micro-entrepreneurship play a vital role in economic diversification and social empowerment. Small beginnings, nurtured in the right ecosystem — involving policy support, financing and mentorship — carry the potential to grow into businesses that shape the nation's economy.

Futuristic initiatives such as the National Home-Based Business Programme and entrepreneurial training through the Bedaya Center for Entrepreneurship and Career Development have helped create pathways for women to start and scale businesses while balancing professional and personal responsibilities.

"The segment has to be approached strategically — home-based entrepreneurship will not

merely be supplementary but can become a vital component of Qatar's innovation and SME ecosystem," a QDB source said.

The NHBPP, an initiative developed by Qatar Chamber to empower youth and women, helps transform home-based businesses into SMEs. Beginning with 400 registered businesses, the programme stimulates, engages and empowers young people, housewives, families and individuals who prefer to work from home.

Gone are the days when home businesses struggled with market visibility due to the high costs of marketing. Digital transformation and e-commerce have made it considerably easier for home entrepreneurs to reach customers across Qatar and beyond. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook Marketplace and other online channels now serve as critical sales and marketing outlets for home-grown brands, particularly in fashion, food, beauty products and digital services. The ease of online interaction reduces operational costs and enables quick adaptation to customer demand and trends.

In Qatar's relatively tight-knit social environment, word-of-mouth recommendations can significantly accelerate growth. "Digital platforms have transformed entrepreneurship. A venture

launched from home now pervades geographical borders," one analyst noted.

Qatar's ongoing diversification continues to open doors for creative and knowledge-based industries — consulting, digital services, wellness, education and specialised culinary businesses among them. "Entrepreneurs must focus on digital branding and niche specialisation," said a top official at a public relations agency. "The high purchasing power in Qatar and residents' affinity for unique products and personalised services make a strong ground for specialised niches." That branding and niche strategy, sources say, is what transforms home-based entities from small informal ventures into recognisable micro-brands with the potential to scale into successful SMEs.

Challenges remain, however. Home-based entrepreneurs often face limited scalability — operating from residential premises can restrict production capacity, storage and logistics. Awareness gaps also persist. While licensing options exist, many aspiring entrepreneurs remain unclear about the processes, permitted sectors or compliance requirements — an area that observers say demands more targeted attention if the sector is to fulfil its considerable potential.

Commerce minister tours retail outlets, monitors goods availability



HE Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal al-Thani, Minister of Commerce and Industry, conducted a field visit yesterday, to a number of retail outlets across the country as part of ongoing efforts to monitor market conditions and ensure the availability of essential goods and products for consumers. During the visit, His Excellency reviewed product availability levels at retail outlets and verified that sufficient stock is maintained in stores and warehouses to ensure the continuous supply of goods to consumers. His Excellency affirmed that supply and distribution chains are operating smoothly, noting that

the relevant departments at the ministry are continuously monitoring market activity and stock levels in co-ordination with suppliers and retail outlets, thereby contributing to market stability and the availability of goods. His Excellency also expressed appreciation to all relevant entities for their co-operation, as well as to factories, suppliers, and retail outlets for their ongoing efforts to ensure the steady availability of goods and products for consumers. He emphasised that the ministry will continue to conduct inspections and field visits to ensure market stability and to meet consumer needs under all circumstances.

talabat Qatar introduces ‘Hero Meals’ in partnership with QRCS

Talabat has partnered with Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) to launch ‘Hero Meals’, which enables customers to donate meals to riders directly through the app. As part of the initiative, participating restaurants will offer specially curated meal options available within the ‘Hero Meals’ collection on the talabat app. Customers can support riders by adding a Hero Meal to their order in just a few taps. The donated meals will be distributed to riders, offering a simple and meaningful way for customers to show appreciation during the holy month. Francisco Miguel De Sousa, managing director of talabat Qatar, said: “With Hero Meals, we are happy to launch an initiative that allows our customers to directly support the riders who serve our commu-



nity every day. Partnering with Qatar Red Crescent Society ensures that this campaign is delivered with credibility and meaningful impact.” Eng Ibrahim bin Hashem al-Sada, managing director – secretary-general of QRCS, stated: “We at QRCS give priority to partnership with the private-sector companies that cherish corporate social responsibility (CSR) as

a central component of their business model. For years now, talabat Qatar has been working closely with us to promote community service and welfare. This initiative is just another example, which we really appreciate.” Customers can participate by opening the talabat app, navigating to the ‘Hero Meals’ collection, and adding a rider meal to their order.

Qatar Charity delivers Ramadan food baskets to sponsored orphans, vulnerable families in Sudan

Despite the exceptional circumstances currently affecting the region, Qatar Charity has continued implementing its Ramadan Iftar project in Sudan by distributing food baskets to sponsored orphans and needy families in Red Sea State, as part of its campaign “Good Starts with You.” Qatar Charity’s field team delivered Ramadan food baskets to mothers of orphans at the Eastern Secondary School in Port Sudan, where families expressed deep appreciation for the unwavering generosity of donors in Qatar. Beneficiaries emphasised that, despite the region’s challenges, this support continues to reach them at the most critical times during the holy month. The Ramadan baskets distributed by Qatar Charity include essential food staples such as sugar, flour, oil, powdered milk, rice, and lentils. Distribution is being carried out simultaneously across Red Sea, Kassala, River Nile, and Northern States. Families of sponsored orphans in Red Sea State conveyed their gratitude to donors and benefactors from Qatar, noting that this assistance has significantly alleviated their hardship, especially during a period of severe economic difficulty that has left many families unable to afford Ramadan essentials. Aisha Mohammed, a mother of three sponsored children, shared that obtaining food has become extremely challenging due to the war and soaring prices. She said that Qatar Charity consistently provides them with sufficient supplies at the right time, bring-



ing relief and joy to her family and her orphaned children. Iman Mohammed Ibrahim, from one of the sponsored families, affirmed that Qatar Charity continues to lead blessed humanitarian efforts, offering ongoing assistance to vulnerable families. She prayed that God reward the organisation and its donors abundantly for their generosity. Nahed Mohamed Idris, a mother of sponsored orphans in Port Sudan, expressed her gratitude to the people of Qatar for supporting orphan families with Ramadan food supplies.

Likewise, Asma Abdel-Muttalib, a mother of a child sponsored by Qatar Charity, said she received the food basket at a time of urgent need, adding: “We ask God to reward you abundantly in this blessed month.” Qatar Charity launched its Ramadan Iftar project at the beginning of the holy month by distributing food baskets to displaced families at the Peace and Happiness Shelter Centre in the Dar Al-Salam area of Port Sudan. Distribution efforts are ongoing across River Nile, Northern, and Kassala States in eastern Sudan.

A healing for the heart

Allah Almighty Says in the Qur’an (what means): “We send down of the Qur’an that which is healing and mercy for the believers.” [Qur’an 17:82]

And also (what means): “O mankind! There has come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and mercy for the believers.” [Qur’an 10:57]

It is narrated on the authority of An-Nu’maan Ibn Basheer, may Allah be pleased with him, who said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, say: “That which is lawful is plain and that which is unlawful is plain and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which not many people know. Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honour, but he who falls into doubtful matters falls into that which is unlawful, like the shepherd who pastures around a sanctuary, all but grazing therein. Truly, every king has a sanctuary, and truly Allah’s sanctuary is His prohibitions. Truly in the body there is a morsel of flesh which, if it be whole, all the body is whole and which, if it be diseased, all of it is diseased. Truly it is the heart.” [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Diseases of the heart are a mixture of suspicions and lusts which can lead our souls into turmoil and despair. However, Allah Almighty has provided us with a special prescription that will cleanse and heal our diseased hearts: The Qur’an.

The Qur’an provides the healing for many types of ailments:

1. It contains proofs and clear evidences which separate right from wrong.
2. It adequately and clearly negates our doubts.

No book on this earth other than the Qur’an provides such comprehensive proofs and testimonies in relation to exalted matters of monotheism, confirmation of Allah’s attributes, the Day of Judgment, Prophethood and refutation of incongruous doctrines and degenerate opinions.

Although the Qur’an offers a genuine cure for the evils of suspicions and doubts, its benefit depends to a large extent on comprehending its essence and purpose. Those who are blessed with such faculties would have the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, as clearly and easily as they can distinguish between day and night. They would know

for certain that all other knowledge and concepts prevailing among people are either traditions or false presumptions; however fanciful and appealing they may appear, these would be unable to offer a substitute for the Truth or genuine matters as encapsulated in the Qur’an and would provide no benefit.

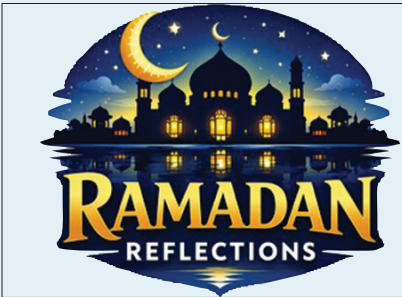
In fact, the knowledge obtained by theologians could be found in the Qur’an with a much better elaboration and explanation, for the theologians are inclined to affectation, wordiness and perpetuating perplexity. They assume that their attitudes help in refuting suspicions and doubts, but contrary to their presumption, these suspicions and doubts are better served by their efforts. If healing and guidance, knowledge and certainty could not be obtained from the Qur’an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, sallallaahu ‘alaihi wa sallam, it would be impossible to obtain them from the utterances of those perplexed sceptics.

The Qur’an draws its ability of healing the diseases of lusts by its wisdom and fair exhortation, through the renouncement of earthly pursuits and the pursuance of the Hereafter. It draws upon parables and narrations containing lessons to be pondered. If the heart assimilated these qualities, it would certainly be inclined towards good deeds and renounce the evil ones.

The Qur’an also eliminates spiritual diseases which corrupt our intentions and prompt us towards ill deeds; hence the heart heals and returns to its normal nature, where its facultative and self-acquired deeds excel. The body also returns to its normal functioning by rejecting whatever contradicts the right guidance, just like an infant who accepts nothing but milk. In this course of affairs, the heart feeds on faith and the Qur’an which provides it with reprimands, consolation, support, gladness, joy and invigoration to establish its authority, as a body is nourished by what develops and strengthens it.

The heart and the body would not flourish without adhering to the Qur’an. Even if they attained some of the desired results from another source, the attainment would be very minor and would not serve the purpose and desired end result.

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



Ministry of Interior stresses families’ key role in safety compliance

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Interior (MoI), in a series of social media posts, has highlighted the co-operation of family members and their adherence to instructions issued by the relevant authorities to protect everyone and to face emergencies.

An MoI statement said: “The co-operation of family members and their adherence to the directives issued by the relevant authorities help protect everyone and enhance the community’s ability to address the emerging developments with awareness and responsibility.”

The statement further noted: “During emergencies, the older family members and those with medical conditions require greater care and attention at home. Make sure to check on them regularly.”

Meanwhile, MoI has once again emphasised the importance of adhering to traffic rules and public safety measures to protect lives and property and to reinforce the principle of collective responsibility and compliance with safety guidelines.

The statement said: “Adhering to traffic regulations and general safety is a civilised behaviour that protects lives and property. It reflects awareness of the principle of social responsibility and the co-operation of the members of society in following safety instructions.”

Furthermore, the ministry cautioned motorists that making loud noise from vehicles violates traffic law and disturbs others. “Your commitment to traffic rules and regulations reflects your awareness and helps maintain safety.”

It stated that motorists must comply with the instructions and regulations and refrain from making



loud noises from vehicles to maintain public peace.

The ministry also stressed the importance of adhering to workplace safety guidelines and taking national alerts and warning messages seriously.

The statement said that it is important for everyone to adhere to all instructions at their workplace and follow the directions of the workplace security and safety team to enhance everyone’s safety, which also reflects institutional discipline in the work environment.

MoI and other government entities have been regularly issuing directives and awareness messages to ensure public safety and security since the outbreak of regional tensions.

They have time and again advised the public to rely only on official communication channels for the right information.

Triumph Bonneville T120 models recalled

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in co-operation with Alfardan Motorcycles, Qatar’s Ducati dealership, has announced the recall of Triumph Bonneville T120 - Bonneville T120 Black - Speed Twin 900V4 2025 models.

The recall is due to the possibility that due to excessive heat to alternator connector, the battery warning display appears which may cause the bike to

power off. 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 ministry 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 has urged 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)

Over QR4mn generated at SJC auctions

The Department of Evictions and Judicial Auctions at the Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) conducted several online auctions on March 8, generating QR4,366,733 with a total of 3,159 bids submitted. The proceeds were allocated to settle 770 related cases. The auction offered 38 units, but one unit was

sold for QR773,183 to benefit a related case. The vehicle auction offered 90 vehicles, with 78 sold for a total of QR488,900 to benefit 376 cases, and the equipment auction offered 38 pieces of equipment, all of which sold out for a total of QR3,104,650 to benefit 393 related cases.



Iran warns of long war that would ‘destroy’ world economy

AFP
Tehran

Iran warned yesterday it was ready for a long war of attrition that would “destroy” the world economy, after firing on two commercial ships and threatening vessels transiting through the Strait of Hormuz.

As Tehran tightened its chokehold on the crucial sea passage for the global fuel trade, the International Energy Agency announced a record release of 400 mn barrels of oil reserves by its members in a bid to tame prices.

Oil prices have surged since February 28, when the US and Israel attacked Iran, killed its supreme leader and plunged the Middle East into war.

“This is a major action aiming to alleviate the immediate impacts of the disruption in markets,” IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol told reporters. “But to be clear, the most important thing for a return to stable flows of oil and gas is the resumption of transit through the Strait of Hormuz.”

US President Donald Trump told reporters at the White House that “very quickly” there would be “great safety” for oil tankers in the strait, through which 20% of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas supplies transit.

In an interview with Axios, he said the war could end “soon” and US forces had “practically nothing left to target”.

CIVILIANS PORTS THREAT

With the conflict now in its 12th day, Iran’s Revolutionary Guard vowed to target “economic centres and banks” that it deems linked to US and Israeli interests, prompting more international firms to evacuate employees from Dubai.

The US and Israel “must consider the possibility that they will be engaged in a long-term war of attrition that will destroy the entire American economy and the world economy,” Ali Fadavi, advisor to the Revolutionary Guards’ commander-in-chief, told state television.

Iran said it had struck the Libe-



Tankers sail in the Gulf, near the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from northern Ras al-Khaimah, near the border with Oman’s Musandam governorate, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in UAE, yesterday. (Reuters)

rian-flagged container ship Express Rome and the Thai bulk carrier Mayuree Naree because they had entered the Strait of Hormuz “after ignoring the warnings of the IRGC naval forces”.

Oman’s navy rescued 20 crew members, but efforts were underway to find three more. Pictures shared by the Thai navy showed black smoke pouring out of the vessel. Iran also threatened to target regional ports if its own were attacked after the US accused Iran of using civilian ports in the strait for military operations and warned that it would consider them legitimate targets.

GULF AIRPORT, FUEL TANKS HIT

Analysts say a prolonged closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which also carries a third of the fertiliser for world food production, would have a devastating effect on the global economy, particularly in Asia and Europe.

French President Emmanuel Macron urged G7 leaders to act to restore navigation there “as soon as possible”, while the UN asked for all parties to allow humanitarian cargo to transit.

Iran has amplified the economic fallout by targeting US allies in the Gulf. Yesterday, drones fell near Dubai airport, injuring four people, the city’s government said.

Drones also hit fuel tanks at Oman’s Salalah port, Oman News Agency reported.

FIREBALL IN BEIRUT

Lebanon was drawn into the war last week when Hezbollah group attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Israeli strikes yesterday hit an apartment building in central Beirut.

AFPTV’s live broadcast captured the sound of an air strike followed by a fireball erupting.

An AFP correspondent saw destroyed walls in the building’s seventh and eighth floors, with damaged cars nearby and security forces present at the scene.

When the strike hit, “I ran from room to room, pulled my wife and daughter out of the rooms and hid them behind a wall, then the second strike hit”, said Fawzi Asmar, owner of a bakery on the street where the strike took place.

Lebanon said the death toll in 10 days of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah during the Middle East war had reached 634, while more than 800,000 people have registered as displaced. The Israeli-US attacks came weeks after Iranian authorities crushed mass protests, although the US and Israel say they are not necessarily seeking to topple the Islamic republic.

Erdogan says conflict must stop before whole region dragged in

Reuters
Ankara

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday that the war in Iran must be stopped before the whole Middle East region is “thrown into the fire”, adding that diplomacy must be given a chance.

Nato air defences have in the last week intercepted two Iranian missiles headed toward southern Turkey, where there are air and radar bases used by Nato and the US, and the alliance has since beefed up defences there.

“This war must be stopped before it grows and the region as a whole is thrown into the fire. If diplomacy is given a chance, it

is very possible to achieve this,” Erdogan told lawmakers in parliament.

“In light of the sensitivity of the period we are in, we are speaking very carefully. We are acting with caution to protect Türkiye from the fire that is surrounding it,” he said, adding that Ankara was engaged with all sides in seeking an end to the war.

Türkiye had offered to mediate between the sides before the US-Israeli strikes on Iran began 12 days ago. Since then, Erdogan has repeatedly called for diplomacy to end the conflict, while also warning that Turkey would respond to any threats to its national security.

Ozgur Ozel, chairman of

Turkey’s main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) told Reuters in an interview yesterday that Erdogan had avoided criticising US President Donald Trump by name in order to maintain their good personal rapport, adding that this had only emboldened the US leader.

Erdogan has criticised US, Israeli and Iranian actions and has called the US-Israeli air campaign a “clear violation” of international law.

But in his comments, like many other world leaders, he has refrained from mentioning Trump by name. Erdogan’s good personal ties with Trump have helped ease bilateral US-Turkish tensions over the last year.

Iran mourns slain commanders under heavy security presence

AFP
Tehran

Thousands of people in Tehran defied ongoing bombardments yesterday to publicly mourn commanders killed by US-Israeli strikes, in the largest gathering since the start of the war.

In the otherwise mostly deserted Iranian capital, the funeral crowds gathered at the symbolic Enghelab Square, offering a stark contrast to the vacant avenues in surrounding areas.

Mourners paid their respects under a ubiquitous security presence as special forces, heavily armed and wearing balaclavas, remained on high alert throughout the ceremony.

One officer was clad in a black scarf bearing the image of late supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, killed on the first day of the US-Israeli strikes on February 28, after 36 years in power.

Armed forces chief of staff Abdolrahim Moussavi, Revolutionary Guards chief Mohammad Pakpour, defence minister Aziz Nassirzadeh and influential security adviser Ali Shamkhani



A screen displays a portrait of Iran’s new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei during the funerals of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) commanders, army commanders and others killed in United States and Israeli strikes on Iran, at Enghelab Square in Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)

were also killed in simultaneous strikes. Yesterday, trucks carrying the coffins of the top officials and their entourage formed a procession through central Tehran.

An AFP journalist saw one small coffin bearing a picture of its victim, a two-month-old baby, alongside the Iranian flag.

Revolutionary Guards personnel stood guard over the sombre occasion, taking place under a grey sky and unusually cold temperatures, just days before the springtime celebration.

The mourners, many of them

women dressed in black chadors, bore flags and flowers to a soundtrack of religious music.

Teenagers, meanwhile, held up pictures of Ali Khamenei alongside images of his son and successor, Mojtaba Khamenei, who was injured in the same raid that killed his father, his wife and his mother. The 56-year-old has yet to make any public appearances since being selected for the top post at the weekend.

The procession progressed along avenues lined by buildings with blown-out windows and damaged facades.

UN urges ‘exemptions’ to get aid through Strait of Hormuz

The UN aid chief warned yesterday that the Middle East war was impacting aid routes and called for “exemptions” so humanitarian supplies could get through, AFP reported from Geneva. The war in the Middle East has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, while fuel supply disruptions are sending freight rates soaring. UN aid chief Tom Fletcher warned that the escalating war and its impact on the strait was having “a direct impact on our humanitarian supplies, including going to areas of key need in sub-Saharan Africa”. “I’m worried that further escalation will damage other supply routes,” he told reporters in Geneva, warning that the war was pushing up prices and driving “more people into greater need”. “We’re appealing to all the parties to try and secure those routes, including the Strait of Hormuz, for our humanitarian traffic... so we can reach anyone, anywhere, on the basis of greatest need.” “We’re living through a moment right now of grave peril,” Fletcher said. “We’re seeing these crises escalate rapidly and increasingly collide in dangerous ways,” he said, calling

for “calmer heads to prevail”. The last two weeks of fighting are further confirmation that “we’re living in a time of brutality, impunity and indifference”, he said, cautioning that “the rules-based scaffolding meant to restrain the worst excesses of war is cracking”. “Human ingenuity is being applied to find ever more sinister ways to kill at scale, while civilians are subjected to ever more abject violence.” The UN aid chief warned that such violence was taking a heavy toll at a time when humanitarians were already on their knees. “We’re seeing violence reverberate across borders, displacement, economic shocks, soaring humanitarian needs — and we’re seeing the consequences spread faster than we can respond,” he said. “Humanitarian action (is) overstretched, under sustained attack and under-resourced.” When Fletcher launched the UN’s annual Global Humanitarian Appeal for 2026 last December, he requested \$23bn to help 87mn of the world’s most vulnerable people, with a heavy focus on dire conflict situations like those in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Haiti and Myanmar.

Israel strikes central Beirut as death toll tops 630

AFP
Beirut

Israel carried out a strike in the heart of Beirut yesterday for a second time since Lebanon was dragged into the Middle East war, as the death toll in the country climbed past 630.

In New York, around 30 countries backing the UN peace-keeping force in Lebanon voiced concern over the fighting in the country, which became a front in the wider conflict last week when Hezbollah attacked Israel in retaliation for the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Israel, which had kept up strikes in Lebanon even before the war despite a 2024 ceasefire with Hezbollah, has since launched air raids across the country and sent ground troops into border areas — an offensive that has killed 634 people, including 91 children, according to authorities.

Israel’s UN envoy Danny Danon said yesterday that Israeli forces would continue to operate in Lebanon “as long (as) there



Emergency personnel and residents gather at the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted a building in the Aisha Bakkar neighbourhood of Beirut, yesterday. (AFP)

will be a threat against us”.

Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency (NNA) said “the enemy targeted an apartment in the Aisha Bakkar area” in central Beirut, a densely populated neighbourhood close to one of the city’s biggest shopping malls.

AFPTV’s live broadcast captured the sound of an air strike followed by a fireball erupting in an apartment in a multi-storey residential building.

An AFP correspondent saw destroyed walls on the building’s

seventh and eighth floors, with damaged cars nearby and security forces present at the scene.

When the strike hit, “I ran from room to room, pulled my wife and daughter out of the rooms and hid them behind a wall, then the second strike hit”, said Fawzi Asmar, owner of a bakery on the same street. Samer Knio, a civil defence paramedic, said glass and debris fell on his team as they were evacuating casualties “but God protected us”.

Lebanese authorities said yes-

terday that about 816,000 people had been registered as displaced, with around 126,000 staying in collective shelters.

Some residents fear being caught in Israeli air raids targeting people sheltering nearby.

“We don’t know who they’re targeting. Maybe someone related to something, maybe not,” Amal Hisham, 46, said. “Who do I blame? Who do I not blame?”

The health ministry announced an initial toll of four people wounded in the apartment strike — the second in central Beirut after Israel a seafood hotel days ago, saying it was targeting Iranian foreign operations officers.

Iran later said the raid killed four of its diplomats.

Senior UN officials and member states called yesterday for an end to fighting in Lebanon at a Security Council meeting in New York.

Jerome Bonnafont, the French ambassador to the UN, told reporters before the meeting that “we troop-contributing countries to the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, joined by several other member states, express our deep alarm at the escalation of hostilities in Lebanon”.

Firms evacuate Dubai financial district amid retaliation fears

AFP
Dubai

US group Citi, consultancies Deloitte and PwC and other firms in Dubai have closed offices or asked employees to evacuate yesterday after Iran threatened US and Israel-linked economic assets in the Middle East.

The evacuations at the heart of the Middle East’s financial hub come as the Gulf but especially the UAE has borne the brunt of Iran’s attacks in response to US-Israeli strikes.

Iran’s military threatened yesterday to attack US and Israeli economic targets in the region, including banks, after overnight attacks reportedly hit an Iranian bank.

Employees were asked to evacuate Citi offices in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) and in Oud Metha, a source with knowledge of the evacuations told AFP. British consulting group PwC will close offices in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and another Gulf state for the remainder of the week as a “precaution”, a second source with knowledge told AFP.

Deloitte, another British consultancy, told its staff to vacate their DIFC offices yesterday afternoon, a third source with knowledge told AFP.

Employees at two other companies in DIFC told AFP their offices had been evacuated as a precaution.

They all spoke on condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the matter.

Iran’s central operational command, Khatam al-Anbiya, said “the enemy has



Exteriors of buildings in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), as banks step up precautions after Iran threatened Gulf banking interests linked to the US and Israel, in Dubai, yesterday. (Reuters)

given us free rein to target economic centres and banks belonging to the US and the Zionist regime”.

It urged people across the region to re-

frain from going within one kilometre of banks. Tehran has targeted US assets in the Gulf but also civilian infrastructure including airports, ports, hotels and landmarks. Earlier yesterday, drones fell near Dubai airport, injuring four people, while attacks hit three ships in or near the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has targeted Gulf energy infrastructure and choked shipping in the strait — which normally carries nearly 20% of global oil production — prompting wild swings in prices.

“Two drones fell in the vicinity of Dubai International Airport a short while ago, resulting in minor injuries to two Ghanaian nationals and one Bangladeshi national,” the Dubai Media Office said.

“Air traffic is operating as normal.”

UAE presidential adviser Anwar Gar-

gash said Iran “is lying when they claim to be targeting US bases in the Gulf” and slammed the attacks on “civilian infrastructure... with no regard for civilians and innocent people”.

A container ship and a bulk carrier were hit off the coast of the UAE, one off Dubai and the other off the northern Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah by unknown projectiles, according to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO).

A projectile hit a third ship off Oman, in the Strait of Hormuz, which caused a fire that was later extinguished, the UKMTO said. And drones struck fuel tanks at Oman’s Salalah port yesterday, state media said, with private maritime security company Vanguard Tech reporting the suspension of the port’s operations after the attack.

Jordan slams Israel’s continued closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque

QNA
Amman

Jordan strongly condemned yesterday the continued closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli occupation authorities, preventing worshippers from entering and performing religious rituals in the holy month of Ramadan. Official spokesperson for Jordan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Ambassador Fouad al-Majali, said the measure constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law, the existing legal and

historical status quo, and the right to unimpeded access to places of worship. He affirmed Jordan’s absolute rejection and strong condemnation of what he described as an illegal and unjustified measure, as well as the continuation of Israeli authorities’ provocative actions against worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque. The spokesperson stressed that the Israeli entity has no sovereignty over occupied Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites. He called on the Israeli entity, as the occupying power, to immediately reopen the gates of Al-Aqsa Mosque and refrain

from obstructing worshippers’ access to the site, urging the international community to adopt a firm position obligating Israel to halt its ongoing violations against holy sites in Jerusalem and to respect the sanctity of places of worship. Al-Majali reiterated that Al-Aqsa Mosque, with its entire area of 144 dunams, is an exclusive place of worship for Muslims, adding that the Directorate of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem Affairs, affiliated with Jordan’s Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, is the legal authority responsible for administering the affairs of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Ethiopia floods kill 48: police

AFP
Nairobi

Flooding caused by heavy rains in the Gamo area of southern Ethiopia has left at least 48 people dead, police said yesterday. “The number of bodies recovered from the natural disaster that struck three districts of Gamo Zone has reached 48,” the South Ethiopia Regional State Police Commission said in a statement on X. There were reports of 95 missing persons, and

rescue operations were ongoing, it said. It was unclear whether this figure included the bodies already found. There has been heavy flooding across east Africa in recent days. Dozens were killed in neighbouring Kenya after torrential rain hit the capital Nairobi and other areas on Friday. Multiple studies have tracked the increasing frequency of extreme wet and dry periods in east Africa in the last 20 years. Scientists have long warned that human-driven climate change is increasing the likelihood, length and severity of severe weather events such as torrential downpours.

South Africa deploys soldiers into Johannesburg crime hotspots

AFP
Johannesburg

Soldiers moved into gang-violence hotspots in Johannesburg yesterday to support police efforts to tackle rampant crime, described by President Cyril Ramaphosa as one of the biggest threats facing South Africa. Around a dozen armoured vehicles rolled into suburbs in western Johannesburg, South Africa’s economic powerhouse, to kick off a deployment announced by Ramaphosa a month ago. Armed and uniformed soldiers backed by police conducted house-to-house searches, lifting mattresses and opening cupboards as they asked about drugs and weapons, AFP reporters saw. The areas — including Riverlea and Westbury — are plagued by regular shootings and murders linked to turf wars between gangs. “It’s a good thing! Now we can sleep in peace,” smiled Cecil Witbooi, a 50-year-old resident of Westbury. His street — lined with small, run-down houses — was a regular battleground between rival gangs, he said. “Is this the real deal?” an elderly man shouted at a passing army convoy in Riverlea. A woman was murdered in a nearby apartment block this week, he said. Dozens of residents gathered outside a block of crumbling apartment buildings to watch as the convoy pulled in and uniformed soldiers stepped out,



A South Africa Police Service (SAPS) officer searches a house during a joint operation with South African National Defence Force (SANDF) soldiers in Westbury, Johannesburg, yesterday. (AFP)

some with their faces covered. Children ran around excitedly and even posed for photos inside armoured vehicles. Standing near a wall covered in graffiti of gang insignia, mother-of-three Shai-Anne Fisher, 31, said she hoped the deployment would “bring change”. “There’s lots of crime, shootings... Children are getting massacred,” she said. “This is uplifting us.” But others were doubtful. “It’s nice they’re here, but they’re not going to do anything,” shrugged 42-year-old Eugene, who only gave his first name for fear of reprisals. “Once the criminals get caught, the judges let them out again,” he said. A young woman showed a scar on her leg, where she was hit by a bullet two months earlier. Another resident, who asked for anonymity, said South Africa needed more than an army deployment. “If they can give people jobs,

it will help,” she said, estimating that 90% of the block’s residents were unemployed. The national joblessness rate hovers near 32%, according to government figures. With children as young as 12 recruited into gangs, stricter laws are needed to keep perpetrators in prison, she said, claiming some police officers were in cahoots with criminals. South Africa’s high crime rate includes on average 60 murders a day, many linked to turf battles between gangs involved in drugs and illegal mining. “Organised crime is now the most immediate threat to our democracy, our society and our economic development,” Ramaphosa said in a state of the nation address last month. The military deployment will last a year and cover five of the nine provinces, including the Western Cape, home to tourist hub Cape Town, according to a plan presented to parliament.

French aid worker killed in DR Congo air strike

AFP
Goma

A French aid worker for the UN children’s agency has been killed in an air strike in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in a city controlled by the M23 militia. Since taking up arms again in 2021, the M23 has seized swathes of the mineral-rich Congolese east with Rwanda’s backing, unleashing a fresh spiral of violence in a region long plagued by fighting. Despite Rwanda and the DRC signing a peace deal at US President Donald Trump’s urging in early December, in the latest attempt to end the conflict, clashes between the M23 and Congolese army have continued. Humanitarian sources reported that several buildings had been targeted in overnight drone strikes, which UN peacekeeping force Monusco said also killed two civilians. The strikes’ origin remained unclear. The Congo-



A general view of a private residence damaged by a drone strike, that killed aid worker Karine Buisset, a French national working for Unicef, in Goma, yesterday. (AFP)

lese army, stationed some several hundred kilometres from Goma, regularly launches long-range drone strikes on the M23’s positions in the east. According to security sources, the M23 likewise makes use of explosive drones at the front. The sound of bomb blasts and buzzing drones rang out in several residential neighbourhoods

of Goma, a large provincial capital near the border with Rwanda which the M23 seized in a lightning offensive in early 2025, witnesses said. European Union crisis management commissioner Hadja Lahbib said on X that “a drone strike hit a residential building in Goma” where aid workers and EU Civil Protection and Humanitar-

ian Aid staff live. French President Emmanuel Macron said on X that “a French Unicef humanitarian worker has been killed in Goma. I extend the nation’s support and sympathy to her family, loved ones and colleagues”. He urged “respect for humanitarian law and for the personnel who are on the ground and committed to saving lives”. Unicef Executive Director Catherine Russell said the agency was “devastated and outraged by the killing of our colleague Karine Buisset in a reported drone attack”. “Civilians, including aid workers, must never be targeted,” she said on X. Humanitarian sources and rescuers at the site said Buisset was killed during an overnight strike on a house where she was staying. The building is in Himbi, a residential neighbourhood of Goma on the shores of Lake Kivu where many expatriates, staff members and headquarters of humanitarian organisations are based.



Well-wishers visit the family of Thaar Hamayel, 30, who was killed on Sunday during a settler attack on the Palestinians in the village of Abu Falah near Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank. (Reuters)

Israeli settler violence rises in West Bank under Iran war curbs

Reuters
Abu Falah, West Bank

Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank are taking advantage of curbs on movement imposed during the war on Iran to attack Palestinians, with military roadblocks preventing ambulances reaching victims quickly, rights groups and medics say. Settlers have killed at least five Palestinians in the West Bank since the US and Israel began airstrikes against Iran on February 28, according to the Palestinian health ministry. A sixth man died after inhaling teargas fired during an attack, according to Israeli rights group B’Tselem. Israel’s military blocked many West Bank roads with iron gates and mounds of earth on the first day of the war, and has largely shut crossings with Israel. The Israeli military says the curbs are pre-emptive measures while it is carrying out airstrikes on Iran and against Lebanese group Hezbollah, which has fired missiles at Israel in solidarity with Tehran. Palestinians in remote West Bank villages say the roadblocks have left them increasingly exposed to settler violence. The Israeli military has also continued to carry out the raids it frequently conducts in Palestinian cities and towns during peacetime to arrest Palestinians, often without charge, they say. The Israeli military said they do not prevent medical teams from treating wounded civilians and it enables freedom of movement for medical teams in the West Bank. A spokesperson for the Yeshu Council, which represents Jewish settlements, did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment on the attacks. Malak Beirat’s husband, Thaar, was one of two Palestinians who residents and the Palestinian health ministry say were shot dead by settlers before dawn on Sunday in Abu Falah, north of the city of Ramallah. “Thaar loved life. I never expected he would die,” said Beirat, fighting back tears as she sat with



Malak Beirat, 26, mourns her husband Thaar Hamayel after he was killed during an attack by Israeli settlers on the Palestinians in the village of Abu Falah near Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank. (Reuters)

her two children. Witnesses told Reuters that when over 100 settlers gathered on the outskirts of Abu Falah, a local WhatsApp group rallied men to protect the small village. The initial confrontation involved stone throwing, but armed settlers arrived later and began shooting, they said. Beirat’s husband was shot dead while trying to protect a house from attack, a man who helped defend the village said. Blood could still be seen on Monday in olive groves at the scene of the attack, where villagers have erected two Palestinian flags at the spots where the two men were killed — one for each victim. A third Palestinian died after the attack. B’Tselem said his death was probably caused by the effect of teargas fired by Israeli troops deployed to the village during the attack. The Israeli military says an investigation has been launched into the incident and that it condemns “violence of any kind”. Medics say the new roadblocks have led to delays in reaching injured Palestinians. “There are obstacles — and even attacks by settlers and the military on the (medical) crews,” said Ahmed Jibril, spokesman for the Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance service. There have been over 109 re-

ports of settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank since the start of the war with Iran including shootings, physical assaults, property damage, and threats, said Israeli monitoring group Yesh Din. All the reported killings of Palestinians by settlers this year were in the last week, B’Tselem said. Settlers shot dead Amir Muhammad Shanaran in a village near the city of Hebron on Saturday, and brothers Muhammad and Fahim ‘Azem were shot dead in Qaryut southeast of the city of Nablus last Monday, the Palestinian health ministry said. “Taking advantage of the war, armed settler militias, often operating with support from the army, continue to attack and harass Palestinian communities across the West Bank in an effort to force them out,” B’Tselem said. In three of the settler shootings, the settlers were wearing Israeli army uniform, Yesh Din said. The Israeli military said the incidents were under investigation. Palestinians accuse the military of protecting settlers rather than villagers. Israel’s military denies this. Israeli indictments of settler violence are rare. The UN says nearly 700 Palestinians were displaced by settler violence from the start of 2025 through early February 2026.

Drone strikes kill dozens across southern Sudan

AFP
Khartoum

Dozens of civilians have been killed in drone strikes across southern Sudan over the past two days, medical sources told AFP, as some of the heaviest fighting of the nearly three-year war grips the region. Sudan has been riven by conflict since April 2023, when a power struggle between the regular army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) plunged the country into a war that has killed tens of thousands and displaced millions. In White Nile state, which lies just east of the southern Kordofan region — an area now hit almost daily by drone attacks — a strike on a village killed 17 civilians yesterday, a medical source at the local hospital told AFP. Among the dead was a health worker stationed at the village

clinic near the city of Ed Dueim, the source added, speaking anonymously for security reasons. At least nine others were wounded and are being treated in hospital, the source said. In West Kordofan state, at least 40 people died on Tuesday when a pick-up truck carrying mourners to a funeral was hit on the road between the towns of Abu Zabad and El-Fula, a medical source at Abu Zabad Hospital said. “Most of the victims were women,” the source said, requesting anonymity for safety reasons. A group of relatives had been “on their way to El-Fula for a funeral, which is why several members of the same family died”, resident Hamad Abdallah said, adding they had all been “buried in the same place”. Abdallah had on Sunday helped bury 20 people, including four relatives, after another drone strike blamed on the army hit the local market.



US President Donald Trump speaks to the media, as he heads to Marine One to travel to Ohio and Kentucky, from the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday. (Reuters)

US war on Iran will end ‘soon’, Trump tells Axios

AFP
Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday again signalled there could be a swift ending to the war on Iran, saying there is little left in the country for American forces to attack.

There is “practically nothing left to target” and the war will end “soon,” Trump was quoted as saying in an interview with news outlet Axios. “Any time I want it to end, it will end.”

Trump has given repeated mixed messages about the timing and aims of the war that began on February 28 but has increasingly hinted at ending it soon as global oil prices spike.

Accusations that the White House launched the war without preparing for consequences, including Iranian disruption of oil tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, are putting the 79-year-old Republican under political pressure.

Iran fired on two commercial ships in the Gulf yesterday, setting at least one vessel on fire.

Speaking to reporters as he left the White House for a trip focused on the US economy, Trump insisted that “you’re going to see great safety, and it’s going to be very, very quickly” in the Strait.

Trump said US forces “took

As Iran war rages, Trump pivots to cost of living in trip to Kentucky and Ohio

President Donald Trump sought to assure Americans yesterday that rising gas prices because of the Iran war are a temporary phenomenon, as he travelled to Kentucky and Ohio to refocus on domestic issues with fellow Republicans urging him to address rising concerns among Americans over the cost of living. Trump’s campaign trip is his first since the start of the US-Israeli military operation in Iran on February 28. It offers him a chance to sharpen his economic message ahead of the November midterm elections, when his fellow Republicans will

out” most of Iran’s mine-laying ships in “one night”, though adding that he did not believe Tehran had placed any of the devices in the waterway yet.

The US leader also doubled down on his claims that Iran was near defeat, saying Iran’s navy, air force, air defences and leaders were “gone”. But he added that “we’re not finished yet.”

Trump’s administration has previously also said that ensuring Iran cannot develop and nuclear weapon and eliminating Tehran’s

ballistic missile programme are also among its war goals. It has not explicitly said that regime change is among them, despite the killing of Iranian leader Ali Khamenei. Trump would not comment yesterday when asked if he would declare victory while new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei, the late leader’s son, was still in power. Before Trump spoke, the US military warned Iranians that it considers civilian ports in the Strait of Hormuz to be legitimate

targets, alleging the Tehran government was using the facilities for military operations.

The “Iranian regime is using civilian ports along the Strait of Hormuz to conduct military operations that threaten international shipping,” the US military’s Central Command said in a statement.

The US has already been accused of hitting an Iranian elementary school in the first hours of the war.

The *New York Times* reported that a US military investigation had found an American Tomahawk missile struck the school because of a targeting mistake.

Asked by reporters about the *Times* report yesterday, Trump said: “I don’t know about it.”

Speculation is mounting that Trump may seek a quick exit in an attempt to save his party from further damage ahead of November midterm elections for control of Congress.

However, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said yesterday that “this operation will continue without any time limit, as long as necessary, until we achieve all the objectives.”

And Iran says it is ready to fight back.

Just yesterday, the Revolutionary Guards said they had struck a Liberia-flagged vessel and a Thai bulk carrier in the Hormuz maritime chokepoint.

Trump says he is not worried about Iranian attacks on US soil

Reuters
Washington

President Donald Trump said yesterday he was not worried about Iran-backed attacks on US soil, as the Federal Bureau of Investigation warned of Iranian drones potentially striking the US West Coast, ABC News reported.

The US and Israel carried out strikes on Iran nearly two weeks ago, launching the Gulf region into a war. Tehran has carried out retaliatory strikes in response to the US-Israeli strikes that killed top Iranian officials, including the country’s supreme leader.

When asked yesterday if he was worried that Iran may increase its retaliation to include strikes on US soil, Trump told reporters, “No, I’m not.”

ABC News later reported that the FBI had warned police departments in California that Iran could retaliate for US attacks by launching drones at the West Coast.

“We recently acquired information that as of early February 2026,

Iran allegedly aspired to conduct a surprise attack using unmanned aerial vehicles from an unidentified vessel off the coast of the United State Homeland, specifically against unspecified targets in California, in the event that the US conducted strikes against Iran,” the FBI wrote in an alert distributed at the end of February, according to ABC News.

“We have no additional information on the timing, method, target, or perpetrators of this alleged attack.”

Spokespeople for the FBI, Los Angeles Police Department, California governor and Los Angeles mayor did not immediately respond to requests for comments.

Reuters reported earlier this month that Iran and its proxies could target the US with attacks in response to US strikes.

A threat assessment produced by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis at the Department of Homeland Security said Iran and its proxies “probably” pose a threat of targeted attacks on the US, although a large-scale physical attack was unlikely.

Mexico considering social media restriction for minors

AFP
Mexico City

Mexico is considering implementing an Australia-style social media restriction for minors, Public Education Secretary Mario Delgado told AFP.

Several nations are toughening up age restrictions on social media platforms as concerns grow over excessive screen time for children and their exposure to harmful content online.

Delgado said the government had launched consultations with a range of civil society groups, including teachers and parents’ representatives, with a view to developing regulatory proposals by June.

Australia has since December required TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat and other top social media services to remove accounts held by under-16s, or face heavy fines.

French lawmakers in January approved a social media ban for under-15s, although it still needs to be ratified by the Senate.

Britain, Spain, Denmark, India, Indonesia and Portugal are studying similar restrictions.

“The state has the responsibility

for the guardianship and education of minors. And that’s where we should think about setting certain limits,” Delgado told AFP.

“What Meta, Facebook and TikTok are interested in is having followers, and there are no filters on content that could affect children’s emotional health,” he said, citing their exposure to violent or pornographic content and cyberbullying. Delgado insisted, however, that any ban needed to come “from the grassroots, from the lived experiences of parents, different communities, and teachers.”

“We want them to tell us what these limits should be and how to regulate them,” he stressed.

He added that tech companies would be given a voice in the debate, which aims to promote a “responsible, critical, and conscious” digital culture, rather than prohibit.

Australian officials say that country’s ban has already reduced cyberbullying and increased student concentration in schools.

“I personally like the Australian model,” Delgado said, while adding that, as the father of a teenager, he understood the challenges of curbing children’s social media use.

Republicans grapple with affordability pitch as election looms

Reuters
Doral

US House Republicans hope to enact one last piece of signature legislation addressing affordability concerns to try to set them apart from Democrats before the November midterm elections, a time when voters traditionally punish the party of the sitting president. But unifying the party, which holds a slim 218-214 majority in the House, is proving challenging even as they agree that bringing down the cost of living for American families is their No. 1 priority. Concerns about cost may only grow in salience as retail gasoline prices, the most visceral signal of price fluctuations to regular Americans, have spiked to near-two-year highs following the joint US-Israeli attacks on Iran.

Party leaders hope to agree on a

legislative package on affordability issues like healthcare and housing that would be able to pass the Senate by a simple majority through a manoeuvre called “budget reconciliation.” This would allow them to circumvent Democrats and that chamber’s 60-vote filibuster, yet the near-unanimity required is proving elusive.

Legislation on easing housing prices by cutting regulations, encouraging more factory-built housing and limiting how many units investment groups can buy is making progress in Congress, raising hopes of bipartisan success. But members of the hardline House Freedom Caucus have voiced opposition to the legislation, suggesting that House Speaker Mike Johnson may ultimately have to steer a more partisan path through the reconciliation process.

“I would have loved to unveil that package this weekend. But

we’re not there yet, because I’ve got a few pockets of people who have concerns about different aspects of it,” Johnson told reporters during a Republican retreat this week at Trump’s Doral golf club near Miami, where lawmakers gathered behind closed doors in hopes of reaching a consensus. Some top House Republicans doubt their party can find the votes to advance a reconciliation bill focused on affordability issues ahead of the Nov. 3 election. “I would love that. But I just don’t think it will ever happen,” said Representative Jason Smith, chairman of the House Ways & Means Committee, a key architect of last year’s tax legislation.

“I know the members of my conference,” the Missouri Republican added. “If two Republicans vote against this bill, it won’t pass, because we have a smaller majority.”

Senate Democrats push for answers on strike targeting Iran girls’ school

Reuters
Washington

Nearly every US Senate Democrat signed a letter sent to US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth yesterday requesting a “swift investigation” of air strikes on a girls’ school in Iran that killed scores of children and any other potential US military actions causing civilian harm.

Reuters reported on March 5 that US military investigators believe it is likely that US forces were responsible for the strike on the school on February 28, as US and Israeli forces launched attacks on Iran.

“The results of this school attack are horrific. The majority of those killed in the strikes were girls between the ages of 7 and 12 years old. Neither the United

States nor the Israeli government has yet taken responsibility for this attack,” the letter, signed by 46 senators, said.

The correspondence was signed by every member of the Senate Democratic caucus except John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, a senator known for outspoken opinions and occasional defiance of the party. His office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The letter asked for answers to a series of questions, including whether US forces conducted the strikes, what steps the military has taken to prevent and mitigate civilian harm and what role artificial intelligence tools have played in operations.

The Department of Defense did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the letter. Hegseth has vowed to restore a “warrior ethos” to the US

military and referred to rules of engagement, directives typically given to military forces during a conflict, as “stupid” in a recent press conference.

Iran’s UN ambassador said on Tuesday the US-Israeli strikes had killed more than 1,300 civilians.

No Republicans signed the letter. Members of President Donald Trump’s party, who hold a 53-seat majority in the Senate, have almost unanimously backed his strategy on Iran, with only a handful expressing doubt about any aspect of the war.

The lawmakers’ comments came as they awaited a request the White House is expected to make for more funding for the war. Several congressional aides have said they expect Trump to ask for \$50 billion, although others have said that estimate seemed low.

COSCO Shipping suspends operations at Panama’s Balboa port

Reuters
Panama City

China’s COSCO Shipping has suspended operations at Balboa port which is located at the entrance to the Panama Canal, according to local newspaper *La Prensa*, which published a notice to clients from the shipping and logistics conglomerate.

Balboa is one of the two ports at the centre of a year-long saga involving Washington, Beijing and the Panamanian government. The move follows a ruling by Panama’s Supreme Court in late January that annulled the contract to operate

the port held by a unit of Hong Kong’s CK Hutchison. APM Terminals, a unit of Maersk, recently began temporarily operating the port for a period of up to 18 months.

In the notice to clients obtained by *La Prensa*, COSCO said empty containers must be returned to the Manzanillo International Terminal or the Colon Container Terminal, both in Colon province.

It did not specify the reason for the suspension or say whether the measure was temporary or permanent.

COSCO did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

CK Hutchison had unveiled a plan in March 2025 to sell 43 ports in 23 coun-

tries, including the Balboa and Cristobal ports near the Panama Canal, to a consortium led by BlackRock and Italian Gianluigi Aponte’s family-run shipping firm MSC.

The deal quickly became entangled in US-China geopolitical tensions, drawing praise from Washington and criticism from Beijing amid the two countries’ broader trade dispute and calls by US President Donald Trump for greater US control over the canal. Amid scrutiny from Beijing, CK Hutchison said in July that it was in talks with the consortium for them to add a Chinese “major strategic investor” to the bid. COSCO was identified by sources as the investor.



Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker Atlantic Rainbow transits the Panama Canal near the Culebra Cut, in Panama City, yesterday. (Reuters)

Trump LatAm allies step up fight against crime

AFP
Asuncion

Latin American governments including those in Paraguay and Ecuador took steps Tuesday towards cracking down on drug cartels, days after the launch of a broad regional military coalition with US President Donald Trump.

Paraguay's Congress ratified an agreement with Washington allowing the temporary presence of US military personnel in the country, while Ecuador's government said it was planning a "very strong" offensive against drug cartels.

The two are among 17 Latin American and Caribbean countries led by right-wing or centre-right governments that have signed up to Trump's "Americas Counter Cartel Coalition."

Trump has offered to support military action against cartels with US missile strikes on narco kingpins.

Three of the countries worst affected by drug trafficking – Mexico, Colombia and Brazil, all of which have left-wing governments – were excluded from the alliance.

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

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

"We are going to hit them (drug traffickers) with full force... in this alliance we have with other countries, especially the US," Ecuador's Interior Minister John Reimberg told Telem Amazonas TV channel.

Reimberg said the "very strong

offensive" would begin Sunday in coastal provinces most affected by drug violence and reiterated his call to residents to "stay home."

He did not specify whether US ground troops would be involved in the offensive.

Saturday's "Shield of the Americas" summit in Florida brought together some of Trump's closest allies, from Argentina's President Javier Milei to El Salvador's Nayib Bukele, who has arrested tens of thousands of people in a crack-down on gangs.

President Santiago Pena of Paraguay, which is traversed by rivers used to smuggle cocaine through South America, also attended.

On Tuesday, Paraguay's Congress ratified an agreement with Washington allowing the temporary presence of US military personnel in the country.

The deal, signed in Washington in December, also notably guarantees US forces in Paraguay immunity from prosecution in that country.

The opposition has slammed the treaty as a "surrender of sovereignty" and "unpatriotic."

The government has defended it as necessary to combat drug trafficking.

Meanwhile, Guatemala, which is plagued by gang-fuelled extortion, announced plans for an weapons-buying spree after Washington lifted a nearly 50-year-old arms embargo on the Central American country.

The embargo was adopted in 1977 at the height of the country's civil war, which left around 200,000 dead or missing between 1960 and 1996, according to the UN.

Announcing plans for around \$50mn in defence spending this year, Defence Minister Henry Saenz said: "Now we will be able to buy from the best market in the world (the US)."



Chile's President Jose Antonio Kast wearing the presidential sash, flanked by Senator Paulina Nunez, gestures during his swearing-in ceremony, at the Congress, in Valparaiso, yesterday. (Reuters)

Hard-right Chile leader sworn in on promise of change

AFP
Valparaiso

Chile's most right-wing president in over three decades, Jose Antonio Kast, was sworn in yesterday on a promise to tackle surging rates of violent crime and carry out mass migrant deportations.

Chile becomes the latest Latin American country to lurch to the right as voters back law-and-order candidates to fight the spread of organised crime.

"Things are going to change," Kast told reporters minutes before taking the oath of office to succeed leftist Gabriel Boric.

Kast, 60, trounced Jeannette Jara, a communist from Boric's coalition, in December's run-off to clinch the presidency on his third attempt.

He is Chile's most headline leader since the brutal 1973-1990 dictatorship of general Augusto Pinochet – whom Kast greatly admires.

The ultraconservative Catholic father of nine was sworn in before Congress in the central coastal city of Valparaiso, to cries of "long live Chile!" from right-wing lawmakers.

Several leaders from across the region attended his inauguration, including Argentina's firebrand Javier Milei, gang-busting Daniel Noboa of Ecuador and exiled Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado.

Kast gives US President Donald Trump another ally in Latin America, where the Re-

publican leader is reasserting American dominance in places like Venezuela, where he overthrew Nicolas Maduro at gunpoint.

Kast was among a dozen leaders from the region who travelled to Florida last week for the launch of Trump's Americas Counter Cartel Coalition.

He borrowed from Trump's playbook on the campaign trail, vowing to deport hundreds of thousands of mostly Venezuelan undocumented migrants and seal the northern border.

He represents "a conservative right-wing unlike anything seen since the return to democracy" in 1990, Rodrigo Arellano, a political analyst at Chile's University of Development, told AFP.

Martina Vivar, a 20-year-old occupational therapy student, said she felt "rage" faced with the victory of Kast's "campaign of fear and terror, just like during the dictatorship."

Boric was Chile's youngest-ever leader when he was elected four years ago following a months-long revolt over inequality, which brought over one million demonstrators into the streets in 2019 and 2020. Attempts to draft a new constitution to reflect the protesters' demands ended in failure, however.

Chile's new leader has promised to move fast to tamp down a rise in murders, kidnappings and extortion in what remains nonetheless one of Latin America's safest countries.

He wants to give the police more firepower, deploy troops to crime hotspots and deport large numbers of undocumented migrants,

whom many Chileans blame for violence.

His proposals have resonated in a country which takes pride in being a stable and orderly outlier on a continent throttled by organised crime.

"My expectations are hopeful with Kast. We've had a lot of vandalism and crime in Chile for many years," Jose Miguel Uriona, a 65-year-old vendor in Valparaiso, told AFP.

The run-up to Kast's inauguration was clouded by a clash with Boric over a Chinese project to link Hong Kong and Chile via a submarine fibre optic cable.

Washington claims the project is a threat to regional security. Kast argued that Boric had withheld information about the project, which Boric denied.

On the campaign trail, Kast dodged questions about his admiration for Pinochet and his blanket opposition to abortion, including in cases of rape and risk to the mother's life.

His cabinet choices have tapped into nostalgia for the Pinochet era among many Chileans, sparking an outcry from the opposition and rights groups.

He named two lawyers that defended Pinochet's rule to the defence and justice portfolios, and the incoming women's affairs minister is an evangelical anti-abortion activist.

University of Chile political scientist Alejandro Olivares warned that Kast's cabinet has "very little experience in negotiation and political manoeuvring" which could thwart his agenda.

Colombia and Venezuela to repair gas pipeline after years of inactivity

Colombia and Venezuela have agreed to repair a damaged section of a binational pipeline that will allow Bogota to import natural gas from its neighbour, Colombia's energy ministry said yesterday. The Antonio Ricaurte gas pipeline has been inactive for years. A roadmap for re-establishing operations was outlined in a meeting of Colombia's mining and energy ministries, environmental licensing authority and Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA. The announcement comes two days before Colombian President Gustavo Petro is slated to meet with Venezuelan Interim President Delcy Rodriguez. PDVSA will carry out the repairs in compliance with environmental regulations and will follow the pipeline's original route, Colombia's energy ministry said in a statement. The pipeline stretches 225 kilometres between both countries and has a transport capacity of 500mn cubic feet of gas. (Reuters)

Guatemala appoints election tribunal amid corruption fears

Reuters
Guatemala

Guatemala's opposition-controlled Congress elected new members to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) late Tuesday, part of a sweeping judicial overhaul that international observers warn risks being hijacked by corruption networks.

The appointment of five titular and five alternate magistrates for the 2026-2032 term is a pivotal step in a series of leadership changes across the country's top courts and the prosecutor's office. The new TSE will oversee the 2027 general election to replace President Bernardo Arevalo, who won the presidency unexpectedly in 2023 on an anti-corruption agenda. He is barred from seeking re-election.

Arevalo, a social democrat, has framed these appointments as a chance to purge the justice system of corruption. However, his agenda has clashed with the recent selection of controversial figures to the Constitutional Court (CC), the nation's highest judicial authority.

Experts say the process is critical to restoring public trust, which has eroded since the 2019 shut-



Lawmaker Allan Rodriguez of the Vamos party speaks to the media after Guatemala's Congress elected new magistrates to the electoral tribunal, in Guatemala City. (Reuters)

down of the UN-backed anti-impunity commission, CICIG.

"One of the biggest obstacles Guatemala faces is the co-optation of the judiciary... which has allowed organised crime and corruption networks to permeate," Ana Maria Mendez, Central America director at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), told Reuters.

Earlier this year, US officials warned that the

candidate lists for the TSE were vulnerable to influence from "criminal organisations and drug traffickers."

The stakes remain high as Arevalo prepares to select a new attorney general by May. Current chief Consuelo Porras, who has been sanctioned by the US and the European Union for alleged corruption, is seeking a third term. Arevalo has described her bid for re-election as a "mockery of the Guatemalan people." Porras in 2023 was at the centre of what the US and others claimed was an effort to prevent Arevalo from taking office.

A recent study by a local NGO found that over 93% of criminal cases in Guatemala failed to reach an effective resolution in the 2024-2025 period. Meanwhile, the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Margaret Satterthwaite, urged the government to bar any candidates facing credible allegations of human rights abuses or corruption.

The Constitutional Court has also faced scrutiny for rulings that paralysed Arevalo's Movimiento Semilla party. Recent re-appointments to the court include Dina Ochoa and Roberto Molina, both of whom have faced criticism from international observers regarding their impartiality and past ties to political and military elites.

Brazil closes probe into blocked X accounts

A top judge in Brazil ordered on Tuesday the closure of a probe into billionaire Elon Musk's social media platform X, ending a longstanding legal feud that soured US-Brazil ties. Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes opened the investigation into Musk in 2024 by alleging "obstruction of justice" and other crimes over online disinformation. According to police reports, supporters of Brazil's right-wing former president Jair Bolsonaro used their blocked X accounts to spread disinformation and fuel political polarisation. Moraes, who has waged a crusade against disinformation, had ordered X to suspend the accounts of several Bolsonaro supporters accused of spreading disinformation and online hate speech. Prosecutors requested the case be shelved after finding no evidence of "disobedience" on the platform's part, but rather "operational failures" that were corrected. Moraes granted the request. "No evidence was gathered to support the initial theory of the deliberate use of the social network X to attack the authority of the Brazilian Judiciary," Moraes said in the ruling obtained by AFP. Moraes has played a central role in a string of court decisions on social media regulation and Bolsonaro's sentencing to 27 years in prison for attempting a coup. The judge has repeatedly incurred the ire of US President Donald Trump, who condemned a "witch hunt" against his ally Bolsonaro and imposed sanctions and punitive tariffs on Brazil. (AFP)

Bolsonaro brand fuels Flavio's rise in Brazil opinion polls

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

Even Flavio Bolsonaro didn't seem to take his presidential candidacy very seriously when his father, Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro, tapped him as a political heir from behind bars.

However the bespectacled 44-year-old senator, who is pitching himself as a more measured member of the far-right dynasty, has surprised many with a surge in opinion polls ahead of October elections.

"They always asked for a more moderate Bolsonaro, I've always been like this...balanced and level-headed," Flavio said after being tapped to lead his father's powerful conservative base.

Jair Bolsonaro, 70, has been barred from

running and was jailed last year on charges linked to a failed coup attempt.

Flavio's presidential bid received a cool reception from conservatives and the market. He also sparked confusion saying he might abandon the ticket for a "price," in what was seen as a bid to negotiate amnesty for his father.

But conservatives knew Flavio was not going anywhere and his ticket grew "even more than Bolsonaro supporters themselves believed," said political scientist Claudio Gonçalves Couto of the Getulio Vargas Foundation.

"I think it's the family brand that counts. This name (Bolsonaro) still has strength with a large segment of the electorate."

Leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, 80, who beat Jair Bolsonaro by a razor-thin margin in 2022, is seeking a fourth term



Flavio Bolsonaro, son of former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro. (AFP/File photo)

in the election.

Pollsters Datafolha said Flavio's support had doubled in the first round since a previous survey in December.

Their data, released Saturday, showed a

statistical tie in the second round with Lula scoring 46% and Flavio 43%.

Back in December Lula led by 15 points.

Both men face high levels of rejection from voters in the sharply polarised nation.

"I don't trust the Bolsonaro family. In the second round, I would vote for Flavio Bolsonaro because I vote for any candidate who opposes Lula," said sales director Bruno Cayres, 38.

Critics associate Lula, who has served almost 12 years in office over three terms, with major corruption scandals and a failure to reign in rampant crime.

Supporters point to social welfare programmes, and record unemployment under his government. Opinion polls have shown that crime and violence are the leading concerns of Brazilians, followed by corruption and the economy.

Several names were floated to lead from the right, including Jair's third wife and former first lady of Brazil Michelle Bolsonaro – who faced family criticism for lukewarm support of her stepson, Flavio.

Seen as a market-friendly favourite, Sao Paulo governor Tarcisio de Freitas has denied seeking the presidency.

The younger Bolsonaro, who was elected as a Rio de Janeiro deputy at 21, defends typical conservative positions, such as gun rights and Christian values.

During his time as a Rio legislator he was accused of involvement in a kickback scheme in which he took a portion of his aides' salaries, but the case was dismissed.

A hard-liner on security issues, he stirred controversy when he suggested on X that the US could bomb boats in Rio de Janeiro to fight drug trafficking.



‘Thai cargo ship attacked in Strait of Hormuz’

AFP
Bangkok

A Thai bulk carrier travelling in the crucial Strait of Hormuz was attacked yesterday, with 20 crew members rescued so far, the Thai navy said.

Photos shared by the Royal Thai Navy showed heavy black smoke billowing from the hull and superstructure of the Thai-registered Mayuree Naree, with life rafts floating in the water.

The vessel “was attacked while transiting the Strait of Hormuz” after departing Khalifa port in the United Arab Emirates, the navy said in a statement.

“The specific details and cause of the attack are currently under investigation,” it added.

The Omani navy had rescued 20 sailors and “efforts are cur-

rently underway to rescue the remaining three crew members”, it said.

Iran has launched strikes against its oil-exporting neighbours, threatening shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and plunging the global energy economy into crisis.

It was not immediately clear whether the incident was one of three commercial ships that the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre earlier said had been hit in the Gulf on Wednesday.

Ship-tracking websites showed the Mayuree Naree just off the Omani coast in the Strait of Hormuz, moving slowly at little more than one knot.

The carrier is 178m long and displaces 30,000 tonnes, they said, adding it was on its way to Kandla in India.

The Thai navy said it is owned



Smoke rising from the Thai bulk carrier 'Mayuree Naree' near the Strait of Hormuz after an attack yesterday. (AFP)

by a Thai transport company, Precious Shipping.

AFP sought comment from the firm in Bangkok but did not receive an immediate response.

Phuket airport runway reopens after Air India Express plane fault

Reuters
Bangkok/New Delhi

The sole runway of Thailand's Phuket airport reopened late on Tuesday, Phuket's governor said, after an Air India Express plane suffered a problem with its nose wheel when landing, causing the runway to close for several hours.

The incident is the latest in a series of challenges involving Air India Express and parent company Air India in recent months.

Phuket is one of Thailand's busiest gateways, with hundreds of flights daily, including from the Middle East, Europe and Asia, as well as domestic routes.

Phuket Airport said earlier that

Air India Express Flight AXB938 arriving from Hyderabad suffered damage to its landing gear as it hit the runway.

The plane “experienced an issue with the nose wheel at Phuket Airport,” a spokesperson for Air India Express said, adding: “The crew followed all standard protocols, and guests were deplaned”.

The Air India Express spokesperson later said nose wheels had been installed on the aircraft and that the incident would be investigated.

An image posted on X by Thai state broadcaster MCOT showed part of the aircraft landing gear, with wheels missing, in direct contact with the runway, with a long, swerving skid mark on the tarmac.

Air India Express, the budget

arm of Air India, has a fleet of over 100 Boeing and Airbus aircraft.

In March last year, India's aviation watchdog reprimanded Air India Express for not changing the engine parts of an Airbus A320 in a timely fashion and for falsifying records to show compliance.

From January to November last year, Air India Express reported 95 technical defects, India's civil aviation ministry said, the second highest among India's airlines over the period.

Parent Air India, a full-service carrier, has come under intense scrutiny in the last few months after a series of safety lapses and a deadly crash in Ahmedabad last June that killed 260 people.

North Korea respects Iran’s choice of new supreme leader

AFP
Seoul

North Korea respects Iran's choice of a new supreme leader, state media said yesterday, accusing the US and Israel of undermining regional peace.

Pyongyang, a longstanding US adversary, has previously condemned the US-Israeli attack on Iran as an “illegal act of aggression”.

Defying US President Donald Trump's desire to have a say in who runs Iran, the Islamic republic on Sunday named Mojtaba Khamenei to replace his father, longtime ruler Ali Khamenei, who died in an Israeli air strike on February 28.

“We respect the rights and choice of the Iranian people to elect their supreme leader,” Pyongyang's unnamed Foreign Ministry spokesperson was quoted as saying by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The official said the United States and Israel are “destroying the regional peace and security foundations and escalating instability worldwide”.

The spokesperson accused

Washington and Israel of violating Iran's “political system and territorial integrity”, and attempting to “overthrow its social system”.

Such actions “deserve worldwide criticism and rejection as they can never be tolerated,” the official added.

Pyongyang's state media also said yesterday that North Korea's leader oversaw another test-firing of strategic cruise missiles from the naval Choe Hyon destroyer.

North Korea carried out a similar missile test from the vessel last week, claiming the country was in the process of “arming the Navy with nuclear weapons”.

During the occasion, Kim stressed the importance of expanding a “powerful and reliable nuclear war deterrent,” KCNA said.

Images released by state media showed Kim overseeing the launch remotely via video footage with his teenage daughter, Ju-ae, who is now widely regarded as his heir apparent.

There, Kim said “important successes” have been made in the practical deployment of “strategic and tactical strike means”.

South Korea's spy agency has said Pyongyang appears to have begun the process of designating Ju-ae as leader Kim's successor,



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and his daughter Kim Ju-ae watching a televised test-firing of strategic cruise missiles from the destroyer Choe Hyon, at an undisclosed location in North Korea on Tuesday. (AFP)

with the North frequently releasing photographs of the young daughter accompanying her father on official duties.

The test came as Washington and Seoul kicked off their spring-time military drills “Freedoms Shield” on Monday, to which Pyongyang responded by warning of “unimaginably terrible consequences”.

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

Seoul says can deter threats from North

AFP
Seoul

South Korea said yesterday it could deter threats from the North even if the US relocated some of its military assets to the Middle East amid the war in Iran.

Washington, Seoul's key security ally, stations about 28,500 troops and a range of air and missile defence systems in the South to help deter aggression from the nuclear-armed North.

The Washington Post reported this week that the US was moving parts of its Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system from South Korea to the Middle East, citing unnamed officials.

“Regardless of whether certain USFK assets are deployed overseas, there is no issue whatsoever with our deterrence posture against North Korea, given the level of our military capabilities,” the defence ministry said in a statement to AFP yesterday, referring to the US Forces Korea command.

It declined to confirm the report.

The THAAD missile defence system is designed to intercept

short, medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles using hit-to-kill technology.

It was installed in South Korea in 2017, a move that sparked strong protests from China.

President Lee Jae Myung has said his government is unhappy with the reported asset move but acknowledged there was little it could do about it.

“The government is opposing the USFK's withdrawal of some air defence weapons for its own military needs,” he said on Tuesday.

“But the stark reality is that we are unable to fully implement our opinions”.

A photo taken by Yonhap news agency last week and released on Tuesday appeared to show parts of the THAAD battery being dismantled in Seongju County, about 220 kilometres (136 miles) south of Seoul.

A presidential official told AFP it was “inappropriate” to comment on questions regarding any military asset redeployment and cautioned against media speculation.

“Speculative reports on militarily sensitive matters are undesirable in light of our security interests... and our relations with key Middle Eastern countries,” he said.

China warns on US’ AI military use

AFP
Beijing

China warned the United States yesterday that the excessive use of artificial intelligence (AI) in its military could plunge the world into a Terminator-like dystopian future.

US President Donald Trump's administration has sought the unconditional use of AI startups in the military.

The Pentagon has confirmed Elon Musk's Grok system is cleared for use in a classified setting, and blacklisted Anthropic after it refused to allow its Claude AI model to be used for mass surveillance and autonomous lethal warfare.

“Such choices as the unrestricted application of AI by the

AI military use can create Terminator world

military, using AI as a tool to violate the sovereignty of other nations, allowing AI to excessively affect war decisions, and giving algorithms the power to determine life and death, not only erode ethical restraints and accountability in wars, but also risk technological runaway,” a spokesman for China's defence ministry, Jiang Bin, said yesterday.

“A dystopia depicted in the American film *The Terminator* could one day come true,” he said. *The Terminator*, released in 1984 and starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, depicts an apocalyptic future in which AI-controlled robots fight humans.

The Pentagon's row with Anthropic erupted days before the US military strike on Iran. Claude is the Pentagon's most widely deployed frontier AI model and the only such model currently operating on the Defense Department's classified systems.

Anthropic infuriated Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth by insisting its technology should not be used for mass surveillance or fully autonomous weapons systems.

Trump subsequently ordered every federal agency to cease all use of Anthropic's technology.

Hours later, Hegseth designated Anthropic a “Supply-Chain Risk to National Security” and ordered that no military contractor, supplier or partner “may conduct any commercial activity with Anthropic”, while allowing a six-month transition period for the Pentagon itself.

Japan markets Fukushima in SKorea for first time since 2011

AFP
Seoul

A tourism video promoting Japan's tsunami-hit Fukushima region is airing on billboards across Seoul, in what a Japanese official called a first since the 2011 nuclear accident.

The 30-second clip was produced by Japan's Reconstruction Agency, a government body that deals with the aftermath of the 2011 disaster.

It featured several well-known sites and carried captions reading: “Now time to visit Fukushima with 15 years of recovery.”

The Fukushima catastrophe unfolded in March 11, 2011 when a powerful earthquake and tsunami that killed thousands of people triggered one of the world's worst nuclear accidents.

“As we reach the turning point



Pedestrians walk past a billboard showing a promotional video for tourism in Japan's Fukushima region, in downtown Seoul yesterday. (AFP)

marking the 15th anniversary of the earthquake, we hope this will showcase Fukushima's recovery and the appeal of its food and tourism,” a representative of the Japanese embassy in Seoul told AFP yesterday, adding it will run

through to Sunday.

More than 9.4mn South Koreans visited Japan in last year, making them the largest group among all foreign visitors to the country, according to official Japanese data.

But overnight stays by South Koreans in Fukushima are still only about one-tenth of pre-tsunami levels, according to Japan's broadcaster NHK.

Since 2013, South Korea has maintained a ban on seafood imports from eight Japanese prefectures, including Fukushima, due to concerns about radiation contamination.

China banned imports of Japanese seafood in 2023 after Japan started releasing treated wastewater from the crippled Fukushima plant into the sea.

Beijing later resumed some imports but then reportedly reversed course in November as part of an ongoing diplomatic rift with Tokyo.

Ramadan’s 21st night in Surabaya



Indonesian women offer late night Taraweeh prayers on the 21st night of the holy month of Ramadan at the AI Akbar mosque in Surabaya. (AFP)

Japan aims to sell eight times more chips in 2040

AFP
Tokyo

Japan has set a new sales target for domestically produced microchips, with the country aiming for an eightfold increase by 2040 compared with 2020 levels.

In its 1980s heyday, the Asian country boasted around half the share of the global semiconductor market, the government says.

It has since been overtaken by Taiwan and other countries, with development of the Japanese chip industry hampered by slow digitisation among businesses and trade frictions with the US.

Japan currently holds less than 10 % of the global chip market – but the government is investing heavily in new factories in a bid to change that.

In a strategy meeting on Tues-

day, Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae's administration said it aims to boost sales of Japan-made chips to 15tn yen (\$95bn) by 2030, and 40tn yen (\$250bn) by 2040.

The 2040 target compares with sales of around 5tn yen in 2020, according to figures from the ministry of economy, trade and industry.

The computing power of chips has increased dramatically as makers cram them with more microscopic electronic components.

That has brought huge technological leaps to everything from smartphones to cars, as well as the advent of artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT.

So Japan wants a piece of the action, with the government saying it expects the global semiconductor market to grow to 190tn yen (\$1.2tn) by 2035.

Newly founded Japanese chip-

maker Rapidus is building a plant in the country to make cutting-edge “two-nanometre” chips, with mass production slated for 2027.

And Taiwan's TSMC, the world's biggest contract chipmaker, said last month that it will produce advanced three-nanometre semiconductors at a factory currently under construction in Japan.

Globally so far, logic and memory chips – the “brain” and “data storage” of AI – have driven market expansion, the Japanese government said in a document titled “draft investment roadmap”.

But “Japan has been unable to take advantage of this growth sufficiently”, it said.

“We will secure the capacity to domestically develop and produce cutting-edge, next-generation semiconductors that will be crucial to this AI era,” it said.

India eases investment rules amid warming relations with China

AFP
Mumbai

India on Tuesday relaxed foreign investment rules for land-bordering countries including China, the latest sign of warmer relations between New Delhi and Beijing.

The cabinet said the changes would result in greater investment flows and boost “India’s competitiveness as preferred investment and manufacturing destination”.

The new rules will apply to all investment from neighbouring countries that share a land border with India — including Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and Myanmar — but are widely seen as courting Chinese or Chinese-backed investors.

Under the new rules, entities that have “non-controlling” foreign ownership of up to 10% will be allowed to invest without prior government clearance.

Investment proposals from firms in specific sectors including electronic components, capital goods, and “polysilicon and ingot-wafer” will also now be “processed and decided” within 60 days provided “majority shareholding and control” remains with resident

Indian citizens or companies controlled by resident Indian citizens.

“It is expected that the new guidelines will provide clarity and ease of doing business in India,” the cabinet said in a statement, adding that the new rules would also “facilitate investments” that contribute to “access to new technologies” and “domestic value addition”.

The changes mark a partial stepdown from curbs introduced in April 2020, which the government said were needed to prevent “opportunistic” takeovers or acquisitions of Indian companies due to the pandemic.

While China was not specifically named in the 2020 directive, it was widely seen aimed at Beijing after bilateral relations nosedived including a deadly border clash later that year.

Ties between the geopolitical rivals have slowly thawed since 2024, when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Chinese President Xi Jinping at a summit in Russia.

And last October, direct flights were resumed between the two nations, which the Indian government said would boost people-to-people contact and aid the “gradual normalisation of bilateral exchanges”.



People queue to buy liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders for domestic use, at a gas agency office in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

India tells consumers not to panic over gas shortages

Reuters
New Delhi

India yesterday asked consumers not to panic about gas supplies and conserve energy wherever possible, as the world’s second-largest importer of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) struggles to meet domestic demand. The federal government has invoked emergency powers ordering refiners to maximise production of LPG and cut sales to industry to avoid a shortage for its some 333mn homes with LPG connection.

The government’s measures have increased local LPG output by 25%, said Sujata Sharma, a joint secretary in the federal oil ministry.

Despite the steps, restaurants, hotels, and industries across sectors are beginning to feel the strain from the tighter supplies of LPG, mainly used as cooking fuel.

“Panic booking (of LPG cylinders) and hoarding behaviour have been driven by misinformation,” Sharma said. India’s crude oil, LPG, and Liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies have been disrupted due to global shipping constraints after the US and Israel’s war with Iran halted traffic through the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

India consumed 33.15mn metric tonnes of

cooking gas last year, with imports accounting for about 60% of demand. About 90% of those imports came from the Middle East. India also imports about half of its 190mn standard cubic metres per day (mscmd) of gas consumption.

Sharma said LNG imports of 47.4 mmscmd have been hit due to supply constraints and force majeure by its top supplier Qatar. India has begun diverting gas supplies from non-priority sectors to key users.

India is securing crude and LNG from alternative sources with two LNG cargoes already on their way, Sharma said. Indian refiners have bought millions of barrels of Russian oil floating on the high seas after Washington granted a 30-day sanctions waiver.

Most Indian refineries are operating at full capacity, she said.

“The Middle East conflict has posed challenges for the world, but India’s fuel demand is being met. The Government is continuously monitoring the global situation and taking necessary steps to ensure uninterrupted fuel supplies and protect households and priority sectors,” she added.

Meanwhile the Coal Ministry said yesterday India has sufficient coal supplies to meet what is expected to be an unprecedented surge in demand during the summer months, after gas

supply disruptions due to the US-Israeli war on Iran.

The overall coal stock available in the country is about 210mn metric tonnes, which would be sufficient for about 88 days of consumption, the ministry said in a statement.

The South Asian country still relies on coal for three-fourths of its electricity generation, even as it ramps up renewable energy generation at a record pace.

The statement comes as India expects to boost its coal power usage to meet the summer demand after the conflict in the Middle East hit its supplies of natural gas, mainly from Qatar.

The country’s power plants had 54.05mn tonnes of coal, enough for about 24 days at the current rate of consumption, the ministry said. Pithead stock at Coal India, which produces three-quarters of India’s output, was around a record 121.4mn tonnes as of March 9.

“Coal production and supply continue to be higher than consumption in fiscal year ending March 31,” the statement said.

Higher domestic production has also led India to open up exports for neighbouring countries and test increased blending of domestic coal in power plants traditionally designed to be operated with imported coal.

UK wildlife to replace historical figures on future banknotes

Images of animals will feature on the next series of banknotes from the Bank of England, as the central bank shifts away from historical figures such as William Shakespeare, Winston Churchill and Jane Austen over the coming years.

“Nature is a great choice from a banknote authentication perspective and means we can showcase the UK’s rich and varied wildlife on the next series of banknotes,” Victoria Cleland, the BoE’s chief cashier, said.

Bank of England banknotes have featured monarchs since Queen Elizabeth first appeared on one in 1960, while Shakespeare was the first historic figure to appear in 1970.

King Charles’ portrait will continue to appear on the next series of notes as well, the BoE said. The BoE held a consultation on a change to the design of banknotes in July 2025, inviting views from the public.

The theme of nature was supported by 60% of the 44,000 responses, narrowly beating the category of “architecture and landmarks” on 56% and “notable historical figures” on 38%. Other categories included “arts, culture and sport”, “innovation” and “noteworthy milestones”.

The new notes will feature wildlife native to the United Kingdom and will not include household pets, the BoE said. It plans to run a second consultation in the coming months asking for the public’s views on specific animals to feature on the notes taken from a list created by British wildlife experts.

The BoE is not the only producer of banknotes in the United Kingdom. Notes are also produced by seven commercial banks in Scotland and Northern Ireland. (Reuters)

Sri Lanka court orders sailors’ bodies be handed to Iran embassy

A Sri Lankan court has ordered that the bodies of 84 sailors killed in an attack on an Iranian warship off the island nation’s coast last week be handed over to the embassy of Iran, local media reported yesterday. The court order was issued yesterday following a request from the Galle Harbour Police in the southern port city of Galle, the media reports said. The bodies are currently at the morgue in Galle’s National Hospital. Sri Lanka has also granted 30-day entry visas to 208 crew members from a second Iranian vessel who were taken in by the South Asian country after the vessel experienced engine problems in the same region, Deputy Defence Minister Aruna Jayasekera told Reuters. The Sri Lankan foreign ministry is in touch with the Iranian embassy in Colombo about the crew and the mission is in turn consulting Tehran, Jayasekera said. “We are expecting a response from Tehran over the next few days,” he said. (Reuters)

Australia shuts some Middle East embassies, expects Iran war to intensify

Australia has closed its embassies in Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv as well as its consulate in Dubai, the foreign minister said yesterday, amid fears the conflict in the Middle East could intensify. Foreign Minister Penny Wong said at least nine cities where Australian embassies and consulates are located have experienced missile and drone attacks. “Iran’s reprisal attacks continue at scale and at a depth that we have not seen before,” she told parliament. The conflict was “likely to intensify and continue in the near term”, she said. “Our missions in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Tel Aviv have all had to physically close in the last week.” Australia has also directed dependants of diplomatic officials in the United Arab Emirates and Israel to leave. “The dangerous and destabilising attacks by Iran put civilian lives at risk, including Australian lives, and we continue to support Australians affected as limited commercial flights resume and we expand consular efforts,” Wong said. More than 3,200 Australians have returned from the Middle East on 23 commercial flights. About 115,000 citizens were in the region when the conflict began. (Reuters)



A Bangladeshi craftsman weaves fabric on a traditional handloom inside a workshop in Tangail. (AFP)

UK ends centuries-old hereditary seats in parliament upper chamber

Reuters
London

Britain’s parliament has approved legislation to remove the remaining hereditary peers from the House of Lords, ending a centuries-old system of aristocratic seats in the upper chamber that the government says should not be secured by birth.

The House of Lords passed the Hereditary Peers Bill on Tuesday evening, fulfilling a reform launched more than 25 years ago and a key manifesto pledge from Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s Labour government to modernise the upper chamber.

Angela Smith, the leader of the upper chamber, said in a statement on Tuesday that the Lords played a “vital role within our bi-cameral parliament, but nobody should sit in the House by virtue of an inherited title”.

“Getting this bill through is a major first step towards reform of the Lords, with further changes to follow — including on members’ retirement and participation requirements,” she added.

Before the reform, 92 hereditary peers could still sit and vote in the upper chamber, a number retained as an interim compromise after more than 600 were removed in 1999 under Tony Blair, the former Labour prime minister, who had labelled the hereditary system an “anachronism”.

Under the system, around 15 Conservative



An inside view of the House of Lords chamber at the Houses of Parliament, in London. (Reuters/File Photo)

hereditary peers would secure life peerages, and it will be up to the party to decide whom to nominate.

The ornate red and gold chamber in the Palace of Westminster currently has about 800 members in total, mostly appointed for life by the prime minister on the advice of political parties or an independent commission, alongside Church of England bishops and, until now, some by birthright.

Critics have long called for an overhaul of the appointments system, saying it had led to cronyism and created the largest upper chamber in the world, larger than the 650 elected members of parliament who sit in the lower house.

The Lords can amend but not block legislation, and changes it makes to bills can be overruled by the elected lower chamber.

British police ban pro-Iranian march

British police have banned a pro-Iranian march that had been due to take place in London on Sunday, citing the possibility of “extreme tensions” with counter-protesters and the risk posed by Tehran during the Iran war. The annual Al Quds march is organised by the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), which police said was supportive of Iran’s clerical rulers. The threshold to ban a protest is high in Britain. The police said it was the first time the power had been invoked in 14 years but described the risk of public disorder as “severe”.

The ban, which required the approval of interior minister Shabana Mahmood, also applies to any counter-protest marches. The IHRC had said on X that the march was to be in support of “Palestinian liberation”. “IHRC strongly condemns the decision by the Metropolitan Police to ban the Al Quds Day March,” it said in an e-mailed statement yesterday, adding that it was seeking legal advice. The police, who have been under scrutiny over their handling of pro-Palestinian protests in London since the Gaza war began, said previous Al Quds marches had resulted in arrests of people suspected of supporting terrorist organisations and anti-semitic hate crimes. “We have taken into consideration the likely impact on protests of the volatile situation in the Middle East, with the Iranian regime attacking British allies and military bases overseas,” police said in a statement late on Tuesday. (Reuters)

Bangladesh sari weaving tradition hangs by a thread

AFP
Tangail

Bangladesh’s Tangail sari is fighting for survival as weavers warn that automation and economic pressures are pushing the centuries-old craft to the brink despite its global acclaim.

The detailed designs and fine textures of the garments made in the central Tangail city won Unesco recognition in December as intangible cultural heritage reflecting “local social and cultural practices”.

But it has brought little relief to crowded local workshops where a shift to automated looms, evolving fashion choices, unstable yarn prices and a lack of government support have squeezed weavers at every turn.

Ajit Kumar Roy, who spends the day interlacing warp and weft threads while paddling the shuttle back and forth, says the honour has done little to ease his daily hardship.

“It’s all hard work,” the 35-year-old weaver told AFP as he worked the handloom he has operated for nearly two decades.

“Hands, legs and eyes must

move together. If I make a mistake then there is a problem.”

Men typically lead the weaving, dyeing and design work, while women prepare threads, apply rice starch and add finishing touches.

Once considered a well-paying profession, weaving has suffered from a market slump that began during the Covid-19 pandemic and never recovered. Roy said his factory owner used to run 20 handlooms but now has only 10.

“Some factories have shut down entirely,” Roy said.

With demand falling and costs rising, many weavers have aban-

doned the craft, turning to driving or construction work to survive.

“We earn 700 taka (\$6) per sari, and it takes at least two days to make one. How can a family of four live on 350 taka a day?”

Raghunath Basak, president of a local sari traders’ association, whose family has preserved Tangail weaving for generations, fears the craft may end with him.

His ancestors migrated in search of weather and water suitable for weaving before settling in Tangail, nestled in a low-lying floodplain near the Jamuna River.

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GULF TIMES

US consumer inflation unchanged but price shocks from Iran war loom

Consumer inflation in the United States remained stable at 2.4 percent in February, official data showed Wednesday, with price shocks from the US-Israel war on Iran yet to be reflected in the data. US President Donald Trump has made lowering prices a key part of his agenda, with the world's largest economy still battling years of higher-than-usual inflation after the Covid pandemic. The consumer price index (CPI) rose 2.4 percent year-on-year, the same increase as reported a month prior. The index rose 0.3 percent month-on-month, with both figures in line with market expectations. Energy prices jumped 0.6 percent between January and February, following a 1.5-percent fall the previous month. The White House was quick to laud the new data, saying it expected price shocks from the war to be "temporary."

"The American economy is strong and once we are past temporary disruptions from Operation Epic Fury, we will see even greater economic progress," said White House spokesperson Kush Desai. But price shocks to global oil markets from the US-Israel war on Iran were not reflected in Wednesday's data, as the strikes began the last day of the month. Markets will be buoyed by the steadiness in February's figure, but investors are likely to treat it as more of a baseline to compare expected future price increases against.

The White House was quick to laud the new data, saying it expected price shocks from the war to be "temporary."

"February CPI readings as expected were subdued but given the disruption to energy supplies from the Iranian conflict the focus is on the extent and duration of the boost to inflation in the coming months," said Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide. She said that Nationwide expected inflation to rise to more than four percent (year-on-year) "in the coming few months, before easing back in the following months." Wednesday's data released by the Labor Department showed price increases in medical care, education, apparel, airline fares and household furnishings. Prices for used vehicles and vehicle insurance, communications and personal care were down. Core CPI, which excludes volatile energy and food prices, rose 2.5 percent over last year in February.

February's year-on-year inflation figure was near its lowest levels over the past 12 months, but consumers in the United States continue to grapple with prices that have remained stubbornly high post-pandemic. US inflation hit a high of 9.1 percent in June 2022, and while it has dropped from those levels, years of elevated prices have battered households across the country. The Federal Reserve, which has a dual mandate to address inflation and unemployment, raised interest rates to control flaring prices and while it is now in a rate-cutting phase, they remain at elevated levels. The new CPI figure will be a factor in the Fed's discussion at a meeting to set rates next week. The Fed's preferred inflation gauge, the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index, will be released later this week. The central bank has a long-term goal of two percent for US inflation, but is also battling weakness in the labor market. The United States unexpectedly lost jobs in February while unemployment edged up, government data showed last week, piling pressure on Trump's economic agenda as crucial midterm elections approach. Affordability has been a key issue, and the weaker jobs numbers have turned up the heat on criticism of Trump's economic policies. The US-Israel war on Iran has roiled global oil markets, with traffic through the key Strait of Hormuz almost at a standstill and strikes hitting oil facilities across the region. That pressure is showing at US pumps, with the national average price for a gallon of gasoline on Wednesday up by 22 percent compared to last month, according to motor club AAA. Still, analysts looked at February's CPI figure as encouraging in the long term, saying it firmed the view that headline inflation was trending downwards, outside of geopolitical shocks. "This pre-war inflation reading isn't entirely stale, as it shows that key pillars of disinflation are in place," said Bernard Yaros, lead US economist at Oxford Economics. — AFP

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Anthropic has strong case against Pentagon blacklisting: legal experts

- Pentagon's use of obscure law against Anthropic is unprecedented
- Anthropic claims blacklisting violates free speech and due process rights
- Government could argue Anthropic policies create uncertainty

Reuters
New York

Anthropic's lawsuit challenging its Pentagon blacklisting is likely to test the reach of an obscure law aimed at guarding military systems against sabotage, and legal experts say the artificial intelligence lab appears to have a strong case that President Donald Trump's administration overstepped. Anthropic said in its lawsuit filed on Monday that the Defense Department's decision to exclude the company from military contracts by designating it as a supply chain risk violated its free speech and due process rights and was aimed at punishing the company for its views on AI safety in warfare. The designation could cut Anthropic's 2026 revenue by multiple billions of dollars and cause reputational harm, company executives said Tuesday. In labeling Anthropic as a supply chain risk, the Pentagon invoked a rarely used law that allows it to bar companies from certain contracts if they risk exposing military information systems to enemy infiltration. The law has never been tested in court or used against a US company, according to a Reuters review of legal databases. Courts often defer to the executive branch's judgment on national security, and that will likely be the centerpiece of the government's defence. But five national security law experts told Reuters the Pentagon may have overstepped. "It's not at all clear that the statute can even apply to an American company where there's no foreign entanglement," said University of Minnesota Law School professor Alan Rozenshtein. The Defense Department said it does not comment on pending litigation.

'EXQUISITE' TECHNOLOGY Anthropic, which is incorporated and headquartered in the US, said it is not an "adversary," which the Trump administration has defined in executive orders to mean China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Cuba and Venezuela, according to Anthropic's lawsuit. The company also said Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth gave no explanation for how Anthropic's Claude AI tool constituted a supply chain risk despite its continued use by the US military and Hegseth's own praise of Claude as "exquisite" technology that the Defense Department would "love" to work with during a February 24 meeting with Anthropic cited in the lawsuit. The military has used Claude as recently as last month during strikes on Iran, according to Reuters reports. Hegseth designated Anthropic a national security supply chain risk on March 3 after the company refused to lift restrictions on Claude that prohibit the military from using it for autonomous weapons or domestic surveillance. In a February 27 social media post announcing the designation, Hegseth accused Anthropic of cloaking itself in the "sanctimonious rhetoric of 'effective altruism'" to "strong-arm the United States military into submission." Anthropic has said AI is not reliable enough for autonomous weapons and that it opposes domestic surveillance as a matter of principle. The Pentagon has said that

Anthropic's restrictions could endanger American lives.

'SURVEIL, DENY, DISRUPT' Under US law, a supply chain risk is a threat that an adversary could sabotage, infiltrate or disrupt a federal information technology system or network. The law, known as Section 3252, invoked by the Pentagon, allows the defense secretary to exclude companies from certain contracts to guard against the risk that an "adversary" may "sabotage, maliciously introduce unwanted function" or otherwise "subvert" a military information system to "surveil, deny, disrupt, or otherwise degrade" its function. The Pentagon separately designated Anthropic a supply chain risk under a similar law that could eventually broaden contract exclusions to the civilian government. Anthropic filed a separate legal challenge to that designation on Monday. The Pentagon can only exclude companies under 3252 as a last resort, and other defense contractors are not required to stop working with them entirely. Reuters could not identify any other companies that have been publicly designated supply chain risks under 3252, although the obscure government procurement statute does not require public disclosure of designations.

'BAD BLOOD' Amos Toh, a national security law expert at the left-leaning Brennan Center for Justice, said nothing about Claude's usage policies appeared to pose foreign sabotage or subversion risks. "These are basically safety protocols. You can debate whether these protocols are acceptable or not, but they run directly counter to the risk that the law is designed to regulate," Toh said. Anthropic's lawsuit said that the supply chain risk designation punishes the company for its views on AI safety in violation of the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which protects free speech and expression. Legal experts said Trump and Hegseth's public attacks on Anthropic, including a social media post in which Trump called it a "RADICAL LEFT WOKE COMPANY," could bolster this argument. "A lot of things Hegseth has said and the Pentagon has done undermine their case and suggest there was personal animus and bad blood between the parties, and that the Pentagon had it out for Anthropic," said Joel Dodge, a law expert at Vanderbilt University.

Anthropic also said Hegseth's supply chain risk order violated its Fifth Amendment right to due process by imposing "draconian punishments" without any "meaningful process," factual findings or opportunity for Anthropic to challenge them.

SECOND-GUESSING THE PRESIDENT Courts are generally reluctant to question federal agency decisions but are especially deferential to the executive branch's judgment on national security matters. This would likely be the centerpiece of the government's defence, according to legal experts, who said Justice Department lawyers could cite a long line of cases where courts have found that it is generally not the place of judges to second-guess how the president and the military he commands defend the country. The government could similarly argue that the president and his cabinet secretaries have broad authority to choose suppliers and that the military cannot rely on a vendor whose usage policies constrain military action. The Justice Department could also cite legal precedent stating that contract decisions are not First Amendment violations if they are supported by legitimate policy or operational reasons. Eric Crusius, an attorney and government contract specialist who is not involved in the case, said the government is trying to impose the "death penalty" on Anthropic and will need to show "there was no alternative and that they meticulously considered other options prior to pulling the trigger."

'ARBITRARY AND CAPRICIOUS' Anthropic said in its lawsuit that Hegseth's decision violated the Administrative Procedure Act, a law that allows courts to overturn actions that are found to be "arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law." Legal experts said the apparent contradictions in the government's position are strong evidence that Hegseth's decision was arbitrary. "The government was simultaneously threatening to use the (Defense Production Act) to force Anthropic to sell its services, using its services in active military operations, and saying it's too dangerous to use them in government contracts," said University of Minnesota Law School professor Alan Rozenshtein. "Not all of these things can be true," he said.





Israeli lockdown of Al-Aqsa flayed

The foreign ministers of Qatar, Jordan, the UAE, Indonesia, Pakistan, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have jointly condemned Israel's continued closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque – known also as Al-Haram Al-Sharif – to Muslim worshippers, calling the move a flagrant violation of international law at one of Islam's holiest sites during the sacred month of Ramadan.

In a strongly worded joint statement, the eight ministers described security restrictions on access to the Old City of Jerusalem and its places of worship as discriminatory and arbitrary, adding that such measures breach international humanitarian law, violate the historical and legal status quo, and undermine the fundamental principle of unrestricted access to places of worship. The ministers affirmed their absolute rejection of what they termed illegal and unjustified measures, and condemned Israel's continued provocative actions at Al-Aqsa against worshippers.

They were unequivocal on one point: Israel holds no sovereignty

over occupied Jerusalem, nor over its Islamic and Christian holy sites.

The statement reiterated that the entire Al-Aqsa compound – spanning 144 dunams – is a place of worship exclusively for Muslims, and that its lawful administrator is the Jerusalem Endowments and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs Department, operating under Jordan's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, which holds exclusive jurisdiction over the mosque's affairs and the regulation of entry to it.

Israel was called upon, as the occupying power, to immediately lift the closure of Al-Aqsa's gates, remove all access restrictions to the Old City, and cease obstructing Muslim worshippers from reaching the mosque.

The ministers further urged the international community to adopt a firm and unified position compelling Israel to halt its ongoing violations against Islamic and Christian holy sites across Jerusalem – and to respect the sanctity of those sites without exception.

Fears of fuel shortage in Pakistan as tankers wait to fill up

Govt downplays fears of another rise in prices

AFP
Sheikhupura

Tanker drivers in Pakistan said they were facing long waits at depots due to a shortage of fuel, as the government played down fears of another rise in prices.

The US-Israeli war with Iran has disrupted shipping and damaged oil and gas facilities in the Middle East, raising global oil prices as countries scramble to deal with concerns over supply.

Dozens of tankers, which supply fuel across Pakistan, were seen parked at the side of the road on Tuesday at depots near Lahore, the capital of Punjab, the country's most populous province.

Pakistan depends on oil and gas from the Gulf, and vessels transporting fuel were given naval escorts this week to ensure continuity of supplies during the Middle East crisis.

Last week, the government in Islamabad hiked prices by about 20%, triggering long lines and



Pakistan State Oil tankers line up along a road before entering a fuel storage facility in Sheikhupura district in Lahore on Tuesday. (AFP)

panic buying at filling stations across the country.

Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik said in an interview broadcast late on Tuesday that there will be "no immediate significant changes" in the cost of fuel.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday announced an austerity plan designed to save fuel, including slashing the working week for government employees to four days and shutting schools.

Qatar partakes in extraordinary GCC meeting on consular affairs



Qatar participated in an extraordinary meeting of Their Excellencies deputy ministers of foreign affairs responsible for consular affairs in the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), along with officials from the GCC General Secretariat. During the meeting held virtually, Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE Director of the Consular Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdullah al-Subaiey. Participants discussed the consular procedures in place, mechanisms for providing joint consular support to GCC citizens within member states and in countries where some GCC states do not maintain diplomatic missions, as well as coordination on GCC consular affairs. (QNA)

Virtual meeting with Pakistani commerce minister

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs Dr Ahmad bin Mohammed al-Sayed held discussion with Minister of Commerce of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Jam Kamal Khan. During the meeting held virtually, they discussed ways to enhance and develop trade and investment co-operation between the two countries, in addition to a number of topics of mutual interest. (QNA)

Meloni criticises US war as part of dangerous trend

Reuters
Rome

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni yesterday delivered her strongest criticism yet of the US-Israeli war on Iran, describing it as part of a growing and dangerous trend of interventions "outside the scope of international law".

Her remarks to parliament came after repeated accusations from the opposition that her right-wing government had been too soft toward its allies. Most other European nations, with the notable exception of Spain, have withheld direct critique of the US and Israeli attacks, largely calling for restraint.

Meloni - who has close ties with US President Donald Trump - also said Iran must not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons, as that would end the international non-proliferation framework with "dramatic re-

percussions for global security", leaving Italy and Europe exposed to a potential nuclear threat from Tehran.

The US and Israel traded air strikes with Iran across the Middle East as the war stretched into its 12th day, a conflict that has halted the flow of one-fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies.

Addressing parliament on the crisis, Meloni drew parallels between the Middle East conflict and Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which she said triggered a broader global destabilisation.

"It is in this context of structural crisis in the international system, in which threats are becoming increasingly frightening and unilateral interventions outside the scope of international law are multiplying, that we must also place the American and Israeli intervention against the Iranian regime," she told the Senate.

Meloni said Rome was providing air-defence assets to Gulf coun-



Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (right) and Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Antonio Tajani attend a session at the Italian Parliament yesterday. (AFP)

tries hit by strikes from Tehran.

"This is not only because these are friendly nations and strategic partners of Italy, but also because there are tens of thou-

sands of Italian citizens in that area whom we must protect, not to mention the fact that there are about 2,000 Italian soldiers stationed in the Gulf."

German parliament Speaker visits Kyiv

Speaker pledges support for Kyiv

AFP
Kyiv

Germany's parliament Speaker Julia Klöckner stressed Berlin's ongoing support for Ukraine amid the Middle East war during a visit to Kyiv yesterday.

"We are not losing sight of you in Ukraine – on the contrary," Klöckner told the Ukrainian parliament, becoming the first representative of Germany to address the chamber.

"No democracy should become accustomed to a neighbouring state denying its right to exist. That is why we are offering Ukraine political, financial, humanitarian and military support."

Klöckner, 53, was set to meet President Volodymyr Zelensky during her visit, according to her office.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (left) shakes hands with the President of the Bundestag Julia Klöckner before a press conference in Kyiv yesterday. (AFP)

The trip "will focus on Germany's ongoing support for Ukraine, the geopolitical situation and the resilience of parliamentarianism in times of war", the Bundestag said in a statement.

German politicians have repeatedly called on the international community not to lose sight of Russia's war against

Ukraine since US-Israeli attacks on Iran set off the new Middle East war.

Since the US under President Donald Trump scaled back most of its support for Ukraine last year, Germany has become Kyiv's biggest backer and has significantly increased its military aid.

Berlin has pledged 11.5bn euros in aid for 2026, including Iris-T

air defence systems and Patriot batteries.

German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl has also stressed that the Ukraine war remains "the greatest security policy challenge for Europe" despite the developments in the Middle East.

In Kyiv, Klöckner praised Ukraine for remaining "capable of acting even under attack" and called for Russian war crimes to be documented and punished.

"We owe this to the victims. And we also owe it to the future, to a good future. Because where crimes go unpunished, the next injustice grows," she said.

"And Germany, dear Ukrainians, has stood and will continue to stand by your side."

Klöckner also praised Ukraine for the technological and military expertise it has built in the face of Russia's invasion.

"Under the conditions of this war, you have built up capabilities here in Ukraine that others do not have, that are relevant to Nato... (and) the security of Europe," she said.

Four killed as Moscow, Kyiv exchange drone strikes

Russian and Ukrainian drone strikes killed at least four people yesterday, officials said, as the war between the neighbours dragged on for more than four years with no diplomatic breakthrough in sight.

The latest attacks came with a third round of three-party talks derailed by the war in the Middle East, despite pressure from Washington on both sides to agree to an elusive peace deal.

Kyiv said Russian drone strikes had killed two people and wounded seven more in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv.

The governor of the wider region, Oleg Syneubov, said two people had been killed in the attack on the Shevchenkivsky district.

"A civilian enterprise caught fire as a result of the enemy strike," he said, adding that three women and four men had been hospitalised.

Another Russian drone wounded 20 people in the afternoon, after hitting a civilian minibus in the southeastern city of Kherson, Ukrainian prosecutors said.

In the Russian-occupied part of the southern Zaporizhzhia region, Moscow-installed authorities said two civilians had been killed in their car by a Ukrainian drone strike on the frontline town of Vasylivka.

"The danger of repeated strikes remains," Kremlin-appointed governor Yevgeny Balitsky said. (AFP)

Russia accuses Ukraine, Britain of 'terrorist attack' on border city

Russia's Foreign Ministry yesterday condemned a deadly Ukrainian strike on the western Russian city of Bryansk as a "terrorist attack" and accused Britain - whose missiles it said were used - of overstepping international legal norms. In a statement, the ministry said the strike was intended to derail efforts toward a peace process and fuel an escalation of the conflict.. (Reuters)



A view shows damaged shopping pavilions at the site of a recent Ukrainian missile strike in Bryansk yesterday. (AFP)

see this." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, speaking on the fourth anniversary of Russia's 2022 invasion this month, called for an immediate ceasefire as the

the first step towards a just peace. He lamented the "cascading consequences of this blatant violation of international law", referring to the Russian invasion.

'Ukraine's military hit key Russian missile plant'

Reuters
Kyiv

Ukrainian forces struck a key plant producing missile components on Tuesday in Russia's border region of Bryansk, President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

Ukraine's military said British Storm Shadow missiles were deployed against the Kremniy El factory and posted a video which it said showed explosions and a fire at the plant. It said the facility produced critical missile components. "Our fighters struck one of the important Russian military

factories in Bryansk," Zelensky said in his nightly video address, referring to a report from top Ukrainian commander Oleksandr Syrskyi.

"The plant produced electronics and components for Russian missiles. The very missiles that strike our cities, our villages and civilians," he said.

The governor of Bryansk region, Alexander Bogomaz, said on Telegram that six civilians were killed and 37 injured and posted a video showing him at the scene.

Bogomaz made no mention of the plant in what he described as a "terrorist missile attack". The injured were being treated in hos-

Russia says strike targeted civilians

pital. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the strike was premeditated and directed against civilians and challenged the UN to assess what had occurred.

The Ukrainian military's general staff, posting on Telegram, described the plant as "a critically important link in the chain of production of Russian high precision weapons" producing semiconductor devices and integrated micro chips. "The target was hit and significant damage to production

facilities was recorded," the General Staff said. "The extent of the damage is being clarified."

The video posted on Telegram showed aerial images of a series of explosions and large fires over a large area near woods.

Reuters was able to verify the location with buildings, road layout and roundabout that matched the file and satellite imagery of the area.

Zakharova, writing on Telegram, said: "The Kyiv regime deliberately struck at the civilian population. The UN Secretariat, which regularly comments on the situation surrounding the Ukrainian crisis, cannot fail to

PHCC continues to offer all healthcare services, including urgent care

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

The Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) has reiterated that all its health centres continue to operate normally, offering the provisions of all healthcare services, including urgent care and specialised clinics, without any interruption. PHCC said in a social media statement that all scheduled appointments and specialised clinics continue to offer services according to the approved schedule, without any changes. PHCC's specialist clinics are operating as scheduled, including cardiology, ophthalmology, ENT, dermatology, paediatrics



and other specialised services delivered within the primary care setting. PHCC provides 24-hour Urgent Care Services for registered



patients with non-life-threatening conditions such as minor burns, sprains, severe headaches or earaches, high fever, dehydration and dizziness. Patients requiring

higher-level care are stabilised and transferred via Emergency Medical Services to Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC). PHCC said that patients can

book, cancel, or reschedule their appointments by contacting the call centre on 107 during official working hours. It has also appealed to the public to verify any information and rely only on official channels for accurate information as several rumours are spread across on other sources. PHCC has assured that it provides 24/7 urgent care services for adults and children across its select health centres. It said that eight of the health centres under the corporation provide urgent care services for adults and children. It has ensured that emergency services are made available through these health centres round the clock, focusing on the needs of the community. The health centres that provide

urgent care services for both adults and children are: Al Ruwais; Al Mashaf; Al Wajbah; Umm Slal; Al Saad; Al Thumama; Muaitheer and Leabaib. In addition, there are six more health centres that provide urgent care for adults. They are: Gharrafat Al Rayyan; Al Kaaban; Al Sheehaniya; Al Karaana; Abu Baker Al Siddiqui and Rawdat Al Khail. Patients can access PHCC's Call Centre at 16000 for telephone or video consultations with physicians from 7am to 11pm, seven days a week, and with ophthalmologists on weekdays. A nurse-led telephone triage service operates from 11pm to 7am, directing patients to the most appropriate service, including PHCC's 24-hour Urgent Care Centres when needed.

'I'm proud to call Qatar my home'

Swedish expat lauds country's leadership and stability amid regional tensions

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

Amid regional tensions prompting some expatriates to reconsider their plans, Swedish community leader Ann Williams says Qatar's safety, strong leadership and community spirit have strengthened her decision to remain.

Williams, who has lived in Qatar for almost 10 years, serves as president of the Swedish Association in Qatar and founder of the Happy People Doha business group. She also hosts the Agents of Happiness radio show while working with the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy.

Reflecting on her first visit to Qatar in 2015, Williams recalled how a short stopover left a lasting impression. "The minute I came out of the airport and went to Souq Waqif, I felt like home. It was a really strange feeling because I had never been in the Middle East before."

Two years later, she relocated to Qatar after maintaining contact with someone she met during that visit, a person she later married. "From that moment when I first stepped out of the airport, I felt such a connection," she said. "Even before I lived here, I already felt like this place was home."

Williams said building friendships and community networks played a key role in strengthening that sense of belonging. "When you come here, you don't arrive with your extended family or lifelong friends. We rely on each other more, and that creates real connections. Over time, that community becomes your foundation."

Amid the current regional tensions, Williams acknowledged that some expatriates have chosen to travel temporarily or return home. But for those who have built their lives in Qatar, she said the decision to stay is rooted in trust and stability.

"This is where I live. This is where I feel safe," she said. "I have confidence that the government and the leadership of Qatar will take care of us."

Williams also expressed strong appreciation for the country's leadership, noting that residents receive clear guidance and information during uncertain periods. "We follow the authorities' recommendations and the alerts



Ann Williams

we receive," she said. "The information here comes very quickly and from reliable sources, which gives people reassurance."

She added that Qatar's leadership plays a significant role in creating a sense of security for residents. "We are very blessed here in Qatar to have this leadership. I feel a deep gratitude towards this country and towards His Highness and the whole leadership."

Williams also lauded the country's humanitarian spirit, highlighting how people are treated with care and respect regardless of nationality. As a leader within expatriate communities, Williams emphasised the importance of staying connected during uncertain times.

"Being anxious can become very isolating," she said. "My strongest recommendation is to break that isolation, call a friend, talk to someone, and stay connected with your community."

She also highlighted Qatar's multicultural society as one of the country's most unique strengths. "It's like a small planet," she said. "You meet people from all over the world and that enriches your life."

Above all, she said the country's safety and hospitality continue to stand out. "We live in one of the safest countries in the world," she said. "The Qataris are very generous and kind-hearted."

"I am proud to live here," Williams added. "And I am proud to call Qatar my home."

Ramadan reflects values of peaceful coexistence

Ramadan holds a profound place in family and community life for many Pakistanis, as it is marked by extended-family gatherings at Iftar, recitation of the Holy Qur'an at home, and the spiritually uplifting atmosphere in mosques during Taraweeh prayers, according to Pakistani ambassador Muhammad Aamer.

He noted that the call to prayer at sunset carries a special emotional significance, signalling the moment when neighbourhoods collectively prepare to break their fast.

A strong sense of social solidarity also distinguishes Ramadan in Pakistan, as households remain open to guests, food is generously shared, and charitable acts are widely practised humbly and discreetly. In these daily moments, the values of faith, compassion, and community become visible parts of everyday life.

He pointed out that such traditions often accompany Pakistanis wherever they live or work abroad.

Many continue to preserve the spiritual essence of Ramadan by maintaining regular congregational



Ambassador of Pakistan to Qatar Muhammad Aamer

prayers, dedicating time to reflection and reciting the Holy Qur'an, and participating in charitable activities.

In places such as Doha, community iftars frequently bring together members of the Pakistani community alongside friends and colleagues from different nationalities, reinforcing social ties and fostering mutual understanding. In such settings, Ramadan becomes both a spiritual anchor and a bridge that connects cultures and communities.

The ambassador stressed that Qatar's Ramadan atmosphere is widely recognised for its sense of dignity, tranquillity, and generosity. Respect for the sanctity of the holy month is clearly reflected in public life, while widespread charitable initiatives and community programs demonstrate a strong commitment to humanitarian values. He said that what makes the Ramadan experience in Qatar particularly distinctive is the country's ability to preserve authentic traditions while embracing the realities of a multicultural society.

He explained that in a nation that hosts people from many cultures and nationalities, Ramadan often becomes a powerful symbol of coexistence and shared humanity. Community iftars, charitable campaigns, and public events bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds, reflecting a broader national approach based on dialogue, respect, and peaceful coexistence.

The spirit of inclusion during the holy month demonstrates how faith and tradition can contribute to social harmony and mutual understanding.

Govt platforms provide hassle-free, secure digital transactions in Qatar

Government entities across Qatar are accelerating the expansion of digital services, enabling individuals and businesses to complete hundreds of transactions online through integrated platforms and mobile applications available around the clock. This digital transformation supports operational continuity, enhances service quality, and aligns with the country's broader development goals. The Ministry of Justice is a key contributor to this transformation, offering more than 200 electronic services. Central to these services is Sak App, the official platform for real estate registration and documentation. The application enables users to complete property-related transactions, such as issuing title deeds, mortgage registration, and mortgage release—securely and efficiently. The updated version also allows users to request replacement title deeds, obtain property ownership statements, and correct property

details, with official documents delivered through Qatar Post. Similarly, the Ministry of Municipality provides numerous digital services through its online platforms and the Oun App, covering sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and livestock. These services include permits for importing agricultural materials, licensing fishing vessels and fishermen, and veterinary certifications, allowing users to complete procedures electronically at any time. Digital services provided by the Ministry of Interior (MoI) are widely accessed through the Metrash 2, which offers more than 440 services for individuals and companies. In 2024, the application processed around 15mn transactions, including vehicle licensing, visa services, residency renewals, payment of traffic violations, and other administrative procedures. In the education sector, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) delivers a range of services

through its electronic portal and Maarif App. These include issuing and verifying academic certificates, student registration and transfers, payment of educational fees, and applications for prior approval to study abroad. The judiciary has also embraced digital transformation. The Supreme Judicial Council provides electronic court services, including remote litigation through secure video systems. Legal documents can be submitted online, and rulings are issued digitally with immediate notifications to relevant parties, reducing processing time and improving efficiency through coordination with the Public Prosecution and other government entities. Accordingly, Qatar's expanding digital infrastructure demonstrates its commitment to modernising public services, improving accessibility, and strengthening efficiency across government institutions.

Bygone era: The market caller – voice of the neighbourhoods

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

The Majlis was crowded as many young adults heard the wonders of the stories told by the Hakawati (storyteller). He sat comfortably on his mat made from palm fronds, perfumed his beard and moustaches with musk, then cleared his throat and said: "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah!"

Then said: "Once upon a time in Ramadan in the old traditional markets of Qatar, buying and selling were anything but silent and quiet, unlike the bustling activity we see today in modern shops. The market was a vibrant world of movement and sounds, and among the most prominent of these was the voice of the market caller (was called crier for he used his own voice).

The "crier" was an essential part of market life, his voice was a signal that goods had arrived or that sales had begun. He would stand in the market aisles or near



shops, calling out the names of the goods to attract buyers. People would hear his call and come to see what was for sale.

With the arrival of Ramadan, the markets would become even more crowded, and the voices of the "criers" would rise louder than at any other time. Demand would increase for many foodstuffs that people relied on to prepare Iftar and Suhoor meals. The "crier" would announce the arrival of dates of all kinds, ghee, rice, flour, as well as spices and legumes used in preparing Ram-

adan dishes. In some markets, the caller would also advertise coffee, cardamom, sugar, and tea, essential items frequently used during gatherings and visits throughout the holy Ramadan.

Calling out was a simple yet effective way to advertise goods before the advent of modern advertising. The caller would raise his voice to inform people of the new arrivals, prompting shoppers to head to the stores to purchase what they needed before breaking their fast or to stock up for the rest of the month. In some

Once upon a time in Ramadan in the old traditional markets of Qatar, buying and selling were anything but silent and quiet, unlike the bustling activity we see today in modern shops. The market was a vibrant world of movement and sounds, and among the most prominent of these was the voice of the market caller (was called crier for he used his own voice)

markets, particularly auction markets, the caller's voice was used slightly differently. There, he would gather people around a particular item and begin announcing the price, then loudly repeat the offers made by buyers until the item gets finally settled at the highest price.

With the development of modern markets and the disappearance of many of these practices, the image of the caller remains in the popular memory, a symbol of a time when the market was alive with sound and calls, before prices were reduced to silent numbers on shelves or screens.

Hosh Gallery opens submissions for summer exhibition

Hosh Gallery has announced that it is now accepting submissions from artists across various disciplines for its 'Summer Pulse 2026' exhibition. This artistic initiative aims to bring together creative energies in a single exhibition space that celebrates artistic diversity and the dialogue between humanity and nature.

The exhibition serves as an open platform for artists to present their works, reflecting authentic artistic visions. It welcomes diverse styles and techniques, including painting, photography, sculpture, handicrafts, and other forms of visual expression, giving participants the opportunity to showcase their creations to a wide audience.

The exhibition embodies the

interaction between creativity and the surrounding environment. Participating artists seek to present artworks inspired by elements of nature and humanity.

According to the organisers, the best artworks will be selected for display during the three-month exhibition, which will run from mid-June to the end of August, allowing participating works to reach a diverse audience of art enthusiasts and visitors. The exhibition will be held at the Marina Gallery in Qatar, a unique artistic space that attracts artists from diverse backgrounds and styles.

The organisers have also announced that submissions are open to all artists until May 2, allowing ample time for artists to prepare their work and apply for participation in this art event.

