



Qatar Insurance
Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

9%
QAR 9.9B

Net Profit Before the Impact of Fair Value

19%
QAR 874M

Net Profit Profit attributable to QIC shareholders

9%
QAR 791M

Earnings Per Share:

10%
QAR 0.188

qic-group.com

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Intercepted: Two ballistic, 1 cruise missiles, drones

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

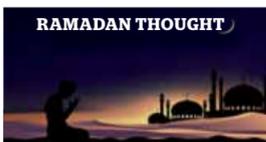
A series of special Qatar Airways flights from today

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

Qatar Airways has announced that it will operate a series of special flights in the coming days to assist passengers whose travel plans have been disrupted by the ongoing regional crisis and the temporary closure of Qatari airspace. The measure follows the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA) statement on the partial resumption of air navigation via designated emergency corridors. The airline said the flights, beginning today, March 13, will operate from Doha to key international destinations including Perth, Seoul, Dhaka, Jeddah, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Kochi, Algiers, Miami, Istanbul, Cairo, Amsterdam, London, Milan, and Paris. Additional flights will follow to Riyadh, Muscat, Shanghai, Manila, Johannesburg, Dallas, Toronto, Colombo, Islamabad, Mumbai, Rome, Madrid, and Frankfurt through March 16. Corresponding inbound flights from these cities to Doha will also operate during the same period.

Qatar air quality reaches 100%

The Ministry of Interior yesterday confirmed that environmental monitoring indicators reported that air quality in Qatar has reached 100%, noting that environmental monitoring stations across various regions of the country operate around the clock to ensure accurate and continuous monitoring to maintain a healthy and safe environment. In a post on its official account on the X platform, the ministry explained that the relevant authorities confirmed that no indicators of pollution had been recorded in the air or marine environment in Qatar, as part of the continuous monitoring of the environmental situation in the country according to previously approved plans. **(QNA)**



Whosoever disbelieves will suffer from his disbelief, and whosoever does righteous good deeds (by practising Islamic Monotheism), then such will prepare a good place (in Paradise) for themselves (and will be saved by Allah from His Torment) [Qur'an 30:44]

Prayer times
Fajr...4.29; Friday...11.03; Asr...3.08; Maghrib...5.45; Isha...7.15

Fasting times
Iftar today 5.45pm
Imsak tomorrow 4.18am

COMMUNITY
See Page 5

Qatar expands land cargo links, eases processes

Monitoring Report
Doha

Qatar has widened its overland freight links to around 75 countries through the international TIR road transport framework, while also pressing ahead with measures aimed at making customs procedures faster and more efficient for importers, suppliers and traders, according to Qatar Television.

The report said facilitating procedures for the business community remains a key focus for customs authorities, with continued efforts under way to reduce clearance times and ease administrative requirements.

The objective is to ensure the



smoother movement of goods through the country's ports and logistics gateways at a time when regional conditions are placing greater strain on transport and shipping operations.

A significant portion of cargo is currently entering Qatar overland through the Saudi border under the Transit, or TIR, system. This route has assumed

greater importance as cargo activity at Hamad International Airport remains limited, with air freight capacity largely concentrated on priority shipments such as food and medical supplies. Qatar Television said Qatar Airways Cargo is prioritising those essential consignments in co-ordination with Hassad Food Company.

To Page 3

More leaders express solidarity with Amir

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received yesterday phone calls from New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. During the calls, the leaders inquired about the situation in Qatar in light of the ongoing Iranian aggression, expressing their strong condemnation of these attacks against Qatar and other countries in the region. They affirmed their nations' solidarity with Qatar and praised the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir as well as Qatar's success in managing the crisis and safeguarding the security and safety of all residents, including their citizens. His Highness the Amir expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to them for their kind sentiments and supportive positions, and emphasised the depth of relations and the friendly ties that bind Qatar with New Zealand, Germany, and Uganda. The calls also reviewed the latest developments in the region. The leaders stressed the importance of de-escalation and an immediate cessation of hostilities, underscoring the need to give priority to dialogue and diplomatic means to resolve differences and contain the crisis. They highlighted the significance of collective international efforts to preserve the security and stability of the region and the wider world.



Qatar welcomes UNSC consensus on Iran

Qatar has welcomed the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2817, which condemns the Iranian attacks on several countries in the region and affirms respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of these states while rejecting the targeting of civilians and vital infrastructure.

In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs underlined the need for an immediate halt to Iranian attacks to spare the

region further escalation and safeguard international peace and security. It said that the adoption of the resolution reflects the broad international rejection of Iran's aggressions, which constitute violations of the sovereignty of states, the principles of international law, and the UN Charter.

The ministry renewed Qatar's call for an end to escalation and a return to the negotiating table, emphasising the importance of dialogue, wisdom, and collec-

tive diplomacy in containing the crisis, preserving regional stability, and protecting the interests of regional peoples while preventing any slide toward wider confrontation.

HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN, Sheikhha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, affirmed that the Security Council's approval of the resolution – submitted jointly by Bahrain on behalf of the GCC states and Jordan – underscores the global consensus in

rejecting the unlawful and unprovoked acts of aggression by Iran.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency, HE Sheikhha Alya said that Resolution 2817 was the outcome of intensive diplomatic efforts led by the Gulf states' missions to the UN in New York following the recent Iranian attacks. She highlighted that 13 Council members voted in favour of the resolution, with none opposing, while China and Russia abstained. **(QNA)**

MoI: Warning alert only when needed

The Ministry of Interior confirmed that warnings from the National Alert System are activated only when there is a need to take urgent additional precautionary measures to preserve public safety. In a post on its official account on the X platform, the ministry urged everyone to comply with the instructions contained therein, remain in safe areas inside buildings, stay away from windows and open spaces, and avoid going outside until a notification is issued indicating the removal of the security threat. **(QNA)**

Food for thought



Volunteers and staff prepare meals for the displaced in a school-turned-shelter in Beirut yesterday following an escalation in Israeli attacks in recent days. Qatar meanwhile announced urgent humanitarian relief for more than 40,000 displaced families across Lebanon. **(Reuters)**

Interior Minister eyes further co-operation with GCC states

HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya), Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, held a series of phone calls with Their Highnesses and Excellencies interior ministers of Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states to discuss the latest regional developments following the Iranian aggression against Qatar and other countries in the region.

The discussions focused on strengthening joint security co-ordination and unifying Gulf positions to confront any threat to the security and stability of



their member states. The ministers underscored the principle of collective Gulf security and the importance of solidarity in protecting the region and its people.

The phone calls were received from UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud al-Sabah.

HE Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani expressed his gratitude to his GCC counterparts for their solidarity and fraternal support, praising the high level of co-ordination among the region's security institutions. **(QNA)**

Home in Qatar: Residents find reassurance in leadership

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Across Qatar's multicultural communities, many residents say trust in the country's leadership, infrastructure and diplomatic approach has helped maintain stability despite regional tensions.

While the situation initially caused concern among some residents, interviews suggest that reassurance has gradually replaced anxiety as people

observe the country's response and the continuation of everyday life.

For Dr Femida Ali, founder of Aspire2Inspire, her experience living in Qatar has strengthened her confidence in the country's ability to navigate difficult times.

"I have been living in Qatar for the past four years. I moved here because my husband was working here," she said.

Dr Ali said that during her first year in the country, Qatar began to feel like home as she



Dr Femida Ali

witnessed the rapid development leading up to the FIFA World Cup.



Marivie Alabanza

"By the end of my first year, especially as the FIFA World Cup preparations and events

were unfolding, Qatar truly began to feel like home," she said.

Having previously lived in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, she said Qatar's environment eventually won her over.

"Initially, I was unsure how I would feel about Qatar, but today I wouldn't think twice, I truly love living here."

Dr Ali said past experiences, including how Qatar managed the blockade and the Covid-19 pandemic, have given her confidence in the country's leadership.

To Page 2

Canada and Spain back Qatar stance

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received phone calls yesterday from Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Anita Anand and Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Co-operation Jose Manuel Alvarez.

Discussions during the calls dealt with the developments of the military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions on regional and international security and stability, as well as ways to resolve all disputes peacefully.

HE the Prime Minister reiterated his condemnation of the Iranian attacks on Qatar's territory, stating that they are unacceptable under any pretext or justification, and noted that Qatar has always been keen to distance itself from regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue between Iran and the international community.

Both Anand and Alvarez called for de-escalation, the application of reason, and a return to negotiations and diplomatic means to avoid further chaos. - QNA



HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani

Shura Council Speaker meets UK ambassador

HE the Shura Council Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim met yesterday with the UK's ambassador to Qatar, Neerav Patel, and discussed bilateral relations and regional developments.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed relations between Qatar and the United Kingdom, particularly parliamentary co-operation and ways to strengthen and develop it.

They also discussed the latest developments in the region and the ongoing military escalation.

HE al-Ghanim reiterated the Shura Council's condemnation of Iranian attacks on Qatar and the targeting of its infrastructure.

Patel expressed his country's condemnation of the attack on Qatar's territory and affirmed Britain's full solidarity with Doha. - QNA



Qatar attends joint GCC-UK ministerial meeting

Qatar participated in the joint ministerial meeting of Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and UK foreign ministers, held yesterday via videoconferencing.

Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi. - QNA

Qatar confirms Iranian attacks are an escalation, a breach of sovereignty and territorial integrity

Qatar has reiterated that the Iranian attacks, in which long-range missiles and drones have been used, represent a dangerous escalation and an unequivocal breach of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

It further added that these attacks pose a direct threat to the region's security and stability, especially since they primarily target civilians, as well as civil and critical facilities, causing numerous gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

This was outlined in Qatar's statement delivered by the deputy permanent representative of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Juhara Abdulaziz al-Suwaidi, on Wednesday, during her participation in the general debate on Agenda Item 3, as part of the 61st Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

These unprovoked attacks, she stressed, have been relentlessly mounted on Qatar and several countries of the region for the 12th day in a row, in a flagrant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, as well as the principles of peaceful relations between states.

Al-Suwaidi said that these unlawful acts are inexplicable and are solely meant to expand the scale of war and target nations that are not parties to the armed conflict, with the intent of inflicting greater damage, as well as economic, humanitarian, and security impacts in the region.

Qatar has always been committed, she said, to being predisposed to neutrality in regional conflicts and has sought to facilitate dialogue and negotiation to resolve conflicts and disputes, including between Iran and the international community, in its belief in peaceful means as the exit ramp for addressing disputes and settling conflicts. - QNA

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Interior minister receives messages of solidarity from counterparts

HE the Minister of Interior and Commander of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani has received a number of messages from the interior ministers and senior security officials of allied and friendly countries expressing solidarity with Qatar following the Iranian attack on the country.

In the messages and cables, the officials expressed their support for Qatar and their firm rejection of actions that threaten security and regional peace.

They also stressed the importance of strengthening co-ordination between countries to address the security challenges resulting from the attack on states in the region.

The messages came from Pakistan's Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control Mohsin Raza Naqvi, France's Interior Minister Laurent Nunez, Italy's Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, Spain's Minister for Home Affairs Fernando Grande-Marlaska, the UK's Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood, Italy's Commander-General of the Carabinieri General Salvatore Luongo, and Germany's Federal Police chief Dr Dieter Romann.

HE Sheikh Khalifa expressed his appreciation for the messages and the solidarity shown, praising the security co-operation between Qatar and its international partners and their shared commitment to maintaining security and stability in the region. - QNA

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MoEHE adjusts second semester midterm exam dates

THE Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has a change in the schedule for the second semester midterm exams for the 2025-26 academic year for students from Grades 1 to 11 (daytime).

The ministry, in a statement posted on its digital platforms, said that the exams will now be held from Sunday (April 12) to Tuesday (April 21).

The decision comes in line with current developments.

Regarding distribution of subjects across days of the exams, the ministry indicated that detailed timetables for each grade will be announced later through its official channels and Qatar Education platform.

Students are urged to follow official updates to receive schedules as soon as they are released. - QNA

Qatar-Ukraine Forum shapes future of learning and innovation

By Peter Alagos
Business Editor

THE Qatar-Ukraine Business Forum (QUBF) is positioning itself as a catalyst for long-term collaboration in science, education, and innovation, with the groundwork laid in 2025 now setting the stage for new outcomes in 2026, an official has said.

The QUBF, in partnership with the Ukraine's embassy in Qatar and other reputable counterparts, continues to create meaningful connections to drive bilateral economic and knowledge-based interactions, according to QUBF co-founder and chairperson Dr Olga Revina (pictured).

In an exclusive interview with *Gulf Times*, she noted that the QUBF capped 2025 by welcoming Snoonu founder Hamad al-Hajri as a board member.

"Mr al-Hajri is a visionary entrepreneur and serial investor," Revina said. "We are optimistic about his ability to unite our efforts in knowledge transfer while contributing to the development of Qatar's tech and innovation ecosystem."

She explained that the first stage of this collaboration was marked by the visit of Ukrainian educators to Qatar, who attended the 12th edition of the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE Summit) and engaged with Qatari counterparts.

"Thanks to the support of Mr al-Hajri and the Snoonu team, the delegation explored innovative educational trends, connected with local experts, and built bridges for future co-operation," she said.

"Among the delegates were representatives of the Unesco chair in Science Education at Dragomanov Ukrainian State University, the Junior Academy of Ukraine, and SET University," Revina said.

She emphasised that the delegation's participation in the WISE Summit, themed *Human Values at the Heart of Education*, "resonated deeply with the challenges faced by Ukraine's education sector since February 2022."



Aside from the summit, Revina said the delegates held talks with Unesco representatives at the UN House, the Unesco chair at the University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST), the Qatar University Young Scientists Centre, the UDST's College of IT, and other institutions.

She noted that potential areas of co-operation include student exchanges, joint courses, and the sharing of expertise between Unesco-affiliated programmes.

Revina also said that Dragomanov University representatives introduced a portfolio of progressive short courses and training programmes for teachers, gifted children, pre-college students, and academic institutions.

One of the most distinctive proposals was the pilot school, "Teaching & Learning with Living Heritage".

Revina said that Prof Denys Svyrydenko, chairholder of the Unesco Chair on Science Education, introduced the project during the meeting.

Prof Svyrydenko told the meeting: "The project represents a distinctive and forward-looking approach to education, namely, one that moves beyond conventional classroom-based instruction toward a more engaging, experiential, and culturally embedded model of learning."

He added that the methodology integrates scientific inquiry, interdisciplinary learning, and naturally occurring patterns in the environment with cultural heritage and community knowledge.

"Equally important is the project's role in preserving and revitalising cultural heritage, perceived not as a static subject but as a living source of knowledge that informs scientific understanding, sustainability, and identity," Prof Svyrydenko said.

"Within the Unesco framework, this integration of heritage, nature, and science is internationally validated and scalable," Revina said. "A pilot project in Qatar could be designed from the outset as a model for nationwide adoption, positioning the country as a regional leader in innovative, culturally grounded, and future-oriented education."

"While these initiatives began in 2025, the conversations and partnerships are expected to mature in 2026, with both sides exploring how to translate dialogue into concrete projects," she continued. "The momentum signals that the QUBF's bridge-building role is not only about fostering connections but also about shaping the future of education and innovation in Qatar and Ukraine."

Home in Qatar: Residents find reassurance in leadership

From Page 1

"My sister lived here during the blockade, and my husband was here during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, and both witnessed how efficiently the country handled challenging times," she said.

Dr Ali added that the government's commitment to stability reassures residents. "I trust that the government will always do its best for the people living here."

Despite regional tensions, she said she hopes to continue contributing to the community.

"As long as circumstances allow and we are not asked to relocate, we would like to continue living here and contributing in our own small way to the country," Dr Ali said.

Another long-term resident, Avie Alabanza, a Filipino expatriate who has lived in Qatar for 14 years, said that her family's experience reflects the sense of security many residents feel.

"Qatar (feels) like home as my children grew up here," she said. "Seeing them feel safe and com-

fortable in their everyday lives made a big difference."

For Alabanza, trust in the country's defence systems and leadership has reinforced her confidence.

"I have strong trust in the government and in the country's defence systems to protect everyone who lives here," she said.

Alabanza added that the country's diplomatic efforts also help reassure residents.

"Qatar's efforts to promote de-escalation and peace also reassure me, as the country consistently demonstrates that it values stability and diplomacy."

Despite occasional interception sounds, she said that they represent protection rather than danger.

"At times, the sounds of interceptions may seem alarming, but to me they are the sounds of protection, signs that the systems in place are working to keep us safe," she explained.

Alabanza said her family plans to remain in Qatar for the foreseeable future.

"Both of my children are currently in university here, and they truly enjoy living in the country," she said.

Another resident who has spent more than two decades in Qatar, Laura Allaberdina from Uzbekistan, described the country as the place where she built her life.

"I have been living in Qatar for 21 years; I originally came here to work as a cabin crew member with Qatar Airways," she said.

What began as a professional opportunity eventually became something much deeper.

"What started as a professional opportunity eventually became a life journey that shaped my career, my perspective, and my future," she said.

Over time, Allaberdina said she developed a deep appreciation for the country.

"Once I made that shift in mindset, everything changed," she said. "I started to truly appreciate the country and eventually fell in love with living here."

Allaberdina said that Qatar's stability and leadership continue to inspire confidence. "I trust the Qatari government and its ability to manage situations responsibly and maintain security."

After more than two decades

in the country, she now considers Qatar her permanent home. "I plan to live here for the rest of my life. Qatar has become my true home."

Similarly, Malaysian national Anusha Kandaiah said that residents initially experienced uncertainty when the situation began.

"Initially, when this started on February 28, there was a huge sense of uncertainty, fear and worry," she said.

However, confidence grew as authorities communicated their response.

"As time passed, people began to realise that we are in the very good hands of the Qatar government and the defence ministry," Kandaiah said.

She said the country's experience in managing previous challenges strengthens her belief in its resilience.

"This is not the first time that Qatar has faced a challenge, and each time it has handled the challenges with grace, peace, patience and resilience," Kandaiah pointed out.

Having lived in the country for



Laura Allaberdina



Anusha Kandaiah

17 years, she described Qatar as her home away from home.

"It has kept me safe and protected, nurtured me, and allowed me to grow into the person I have become today," she said.

An African expatriate living in Qatar, who requested anonymity, also described a community adapting to the situation while maintaining daily life.

"In general, moods have different types of anxiety, and others are okay," she said, noting that families respond differently depending on their circumstances.

"With my communities of parents, it's a mix, some parents are more anxious while others are calmer," she said.

Despite these differences, she believes Qatar's communication and defensive systems help reassure residents.

"The government is actively communicating with its citizens through alert notifications, and Qatar has been intercepting incoming missiles," she said.

For her, the continued availability of services and supplies reflects the country's preparedness. "I feel secure that Qatar will provide the needs of each resident."

As the region navigates a complex geopolitical landscape, many residents say that their experiences in Qatar continue to highlight a sense of security, stability and belonging.

Iran wants to ensure war is not 'imposed' again: deputy foreign minister

AFP
Tehran

Iran wants to ensure that a war will not be imposed on it again in the future, Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi told AFP, as the conflict raged with the United States and Israel.

"We want to see that war is not going to be imposed again on Iran," said Takht-Ravanchi in an interview with AFP in Tehran.

"When the war started last June, after 12 days there was so called cessation of hostilities... but after eight or nine months, they regrouped and they did it again," he said, referring to the US and Israel. "We do not want to be treated like this again in the future."

On February 28, Israel and the United States launched strikes on Iran, killing its supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and triggering a war that spread across the Middle East.

Iran responded by targeting Israel and US interests across the region.

"Before the war started, on different occasions, we informed our neighbours that if America is engaged in aggression against Iran, all the US assets and all the US bases are legitimate targets for Iran," said Takht-Ravanchi. "We are acting in self defence. We continue to act in self defence as long as necessary."

The Israeli and US attacks took place two days before Washington and Tehran were scheduled to hold talks following three prior rounds of negotiations.

Omani mediators had said there was "significant progress" in the talks.

The strikes recalled the 12-day war in June, when Israel launched attacks just days before a planned sixth round of talks between Tehran and Washington.

This war has, however, created the biggest oil supply shock in history, the International Energy Agency warned, sending prices spiking above \$100 a barrel.

Shipping in and around the crucial Strait of Hormuz - through which 20% of the world's oil normally transits - has remained near a standstill in recent days following attacks on ships.

On Wednesday, US President Donald Trump said that US forces had struck 28 Iranian mine-laying vessels.

Takht-Ravanchi however denied the

claim, saying "it is not true" that Iran was laying mines in the strategic waterway.

"Within our territorial waters in the southern area near the Persian Gulf, we take precautionary measures to be prepared to protect our water and our homeland," he said, without elaborating.

Takht-Ravanchi even said that Iran has allowed ships from some countries to cross the strait.

"Some countries have already talked to us about passing the strait and we have co-operated with them," he said, without specifying which countries.

"As far as Iran is concerned we feel that those countries who have joined the aggression should not benefit from safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz," he added.

Takht-Ravanchi confirmed that Iran has been approached by some "friendly countries" to put an end to the conflict, without specifying which.

"We are telling them the same thing, that we want the ceasefire to be part of an overall formula for ending the war altogether," he added.

On whether the US and Israeli attacks threatened the survival of the Islamic republic, Takht-Ravanchi said "we have passed that stage".

"The Americans and the Israelis felt that in a matter of 24 or 48 hours, the whole system would collapse and that was not the case," he said.

"The enemy is aware that this system is strong enough to stand on its feet," Takht-Ravanchi added.

Qatar participates in GCC media stand at UN

HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani has participated in a media stand organised by the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) group at the United Nations in New York.

The media stand addressed the draft resolution submitted to the UN Security Council (UNSC) by Bahrain, on behalf of the GCC states and Jordan, which condemns Iranian attacks on the territories of GCC member states and other countries.

In a statement delivered during the media stand, HE Sheikha Alya noted that the draft resolution was submitted in response to the unjustified and illegal attacks launched by Iran against the territories of GCC member states, including Qatar.



She said that these attacks constitute a flagrant violation of national sovereignty and a direct assault on the security and territorial integrity of the GCC states, representing an unacceptable escalation that threatens the security and stability of the region.

Noting that the draft resolution is consistent with the fundamental principles of international law and the UN Charter, HE Sheikha Alya said that the large number of countries sponsoring it reflects a broad understanding of the gravity of these attacks.

She expressed Qatar's hope that the UNSC would fulfill its responsibilities and unite in support of the draft resolution, sending a clear message about the need to immediately halt these attacks.

HE Sheikha Alya affirmed that no casualties were reported, thanks to the vigilance, efficiency, and high level of readiness of the Qatar Armed Forces and their air defence systems.

She stressed that these attacks targeted the Qatar's sovereign territory, endangered the civilian population, and caused damage to

civilian infrastructure, and constitute a clear violation of international law and the UN Charter.

HE Sheikha Alya added that Qatar has been among the countries calling for dialogue with Iran, in line with its policy of prioritising the resolution of disputes and conflicts through peaceful means.

However, she stated, the continued targeting of Qatar's territory does not reflect good faith and profoundly undermines the foundations of understanding upon which bilateral relations between the two countries were based.

HE Sheikha Alya reiterated Qatar's strong condemnation of these attacks, affirming its full right to respond in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, in defence of its sovereignty and to protect its security and national interests. - QNA

Qatar joins meeting of Arab trade ministers

Qatar participated yesterday in a co-ordination meeting of Arab trade ministers, held via virtually, as part of efforts to align Arab positions ahead of the 14th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) scheduled to take place in Yaounde, Cameroon.

Qatar was represented at the meeting by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs Dr Ahmad bin Mohammed al-Sayed.

HE al-Sayed said that the meeting comes at a time of significant global economic challenges and a complex geopolitical landscape, underscoring the need to strengthen co-ordination and joint action among members of the group to defend their shared interests.

He stressed the importance of supporting a rules-based, transparent and fair multilateral trading system anchored in the WTO.

HE al-Sayed noted that Qatar's position is aligned with the draft Arab ministerial statement, affirming the country's support for WTO reform efforts and the restoration of an effective dispute settlement system, which would help enhance the stability and predictability of the global trading framework.

The minister emphasised the importance of ensuring uninterrupted access to food and agricultural inputs, avoiding unjustified export restrictions, and safeguarding the rights of developing countries and net food-importing developing countries to adopt necessary measures to ensure their food security.

HE al-Sayed welcomed the entry into force of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, expressing support for completing the second phase of negotiations related to the agreement.

He also reaffirmed Qatar's backing for extending the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions until the 15th WTO Ministerial Conference, as well as its support for integrating the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement and the E-commerce Agreement into the organisation's legal framework.

Regarding Arab priorities, HE al-Sayed reiterated Qatar's support for adopting Arabic as one of the official working languages of the WTO, facilitating the accession of Arab countries to the organisation, and granting observer status to both the League of Arab States and Palestine based on technical merit and without politicisation.

He expressed Qatar's full support for Saudi Arabia's bid to host the 15th WTO Ministerial Conference in Riyadh in 2028, voicing confidence that the event would mark an important milestone in strengthening the organisation and enhancing its role in supporting global trade. - QNA



Israel hits Beirut following threat to expand operations

AFP/Reuters
Beirut

Israel renewed its strikes on Beirut yesterday, as it threatened to expand operations and seize territory in Lebanon if Hezbollah did not stop its attacks.

The Israeli military issued a call to evacuate ahead of the Beirut attack, after having also widened its evacuation warning for residents in southern Lebanon to include areas below the Zahrani river, around 40km north of Israel.

After Hezbollah announced a new operation against Israel on Wednesday night, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the following day that he had ordered troops to "prepare for expanding" attacks in Lebanon.

"I warned the President of Lebanon that if the Lebanese government does not know how to control the territory and prevent Hezbollah from threatening northern communities and firing toward Israel - we will take the territory and do it ourselves," Katz said.

Lebanon said last year that it aims to establish a state monopoly on arms and its cabinet last week outlawed any military activities not carried out by the Lebanese state.

On Wednesday, Foreign Minister Youssef Raggi summoned the Iranian charge d'affaires over the joint attack, saying it violated last week's decree, said a source familiar with the matter.

The Israeli military later announced "a wave of strikes targeting Hezbollah terrorist infrastructure across Beirut", with AFP TV footage showing dark smoke rising into the sky above Bashoura, in the heart of the Lebanese capital.

Bashoura is generally a busy part of town, adjacent to Beirut's commercial centre, where many large companies and government institutions are based.

The strike there was the fourth in central Beirut since the beginning of the latest round of fighting on March 2.

Both Israel and Iran said Hezbollah on Wednesday launched a co-ordinated attack with the Iranian military.

Hezbollah had declared it was staging a new operation.

The Israeli military said the attack saw the Iran-backed group launch around 200 rockets and about 20 drones in its biggest barrage since the start of the war.

An Israeli strike hours later in Ramlet al-Bayda, on Beirut's seaside, killed 12 people and wounded 28, according to Lebanon's health ministry.

An AFP correspondent at the scene saw a damaged motorcycle and two damaged cars, with the area, usually bustling with crowds, now sealed off by security forces.

Blood stains were on the pavement, and



Displaced people are seen near a tent along a roadside in Beirut by the sea, following an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran. - Reuters

there was a small hole in the ground.

"We saw dead people on the ground," said Aseel Habbaj, a displaced woman who had been sheltering in a nearby tent after fleeing Israeli bombings in other areas of Lebanon.

"We were all asleep in my tent, when suddenly we heard a noise," Habbaj told AFP. "We jumped up and went to see what was happening" before a second strike wounded her husband.

Her 40-year-old neighbour Dalal al-Sayed said she had opted to pitch her tent at the seaside after fleeing attacks in southern Lebanon "because the last thing we expected was Israel to hit Beirut".

Her family could not afford to rent apartments, she said.

"We won't leave, we will stay here even if we die," she added.

"Who's in these tents? There are children, elderly people, and women in them. Israel... what justification will it create for last night's strike?" said Abu Ali, a displaced man. "My heart is dead, my heart is dead. I'm not like before, when one would be afraid only for himself."

The seaside attack was the third in the heart of the capital since the Middle East war began.

Displaced people have been sleeping rough or in tents on the streets of Beirut, including in Ramlet al-Bayda, where some shelters were hit by shrapnel from Thursday's strike, according to an AFP correspondent.

Israel has also repeatedly hit the southern suburbs of Beirut, a Hezbollah stronghold.

A strike on a nearby branch of Lebanese University branch, the country's only public institution of higher learning, killed the head of the faculty of sciences and another professor, according to Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA).

Strikes on Aramoun, a residential area south of Beirut, also killed five people and wounded a child, according to the health ministry.

The NNA reported several Israeli strikes on the south of the country, where Hezbollah has long held sway.

Hezbollah said yesterday that it targeted Israel's air defence systems near the town of Caesarea in the country's centre, home to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's private residence.

It announced earlier in separate statements that it had fired missiles at an Israeli military intelligence base in the suburbs of Tel Aviv and another base south of Haifa, among other attacks.

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

Israel, which had kept up its strikes in Lebanon even before the war despite a 2024 ceasefire, has since launched air raids and sent ground troops into border areas.

GCC chief hails UNSC resolution

Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Jassem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi has welcomed the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution condemning the Iranian military operations against the GCC states and Jordan.



He emphasised that this international condemnation, achieved through unprecedented international consensus, serves as blatant evidence of Iran's violation of international laws, norms, and UN charters by targeting civilians, civilian objects, and infrastructure across the GCC states and Jordan.

"The adoption of the resolution by 136 states demonstrates the international community's full conviction regarding the gross violation posed by Iranian aggressions against the sovereignty of the GCC member states and Jordan, affirming their legal right to respond in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which guarantees the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence in the event of aggression, to take all measures necessary to preserve sovereignty, security, and stability," Al-Budaiwi stated.

He further said that the UNSC resolution underlined its strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political independence of all GCC states and Jordan.

The resolution also highlighted the strategic importance of the Gulf region to international peace and security and its vital role in global economic stability, while reaffirming the right of navigation for vessels traveling to and from the ports and facilities of coastal states that are not parties to the hostilities. - QNA

Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Kuwait and Arab Parliament welcome UNSC resolution

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Palestine and the Arab Parliament have welcomed the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2817, which condemns the Iranian attacks targeting Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries and Jordan.

The Saudi foreign ministry, Kuwait's ministry of foreign affairs, the Palestinian Presidency, and the Arab Parliament said in statements that the provisions of the resolution were welcome, including the condemnation of the attacks on residential areas and the targeting of civilian objects, the resulting civilian casualties, and the damage to civilian buildings, and expresses its solidarity with these countries and their peoples.

The statements noted the international support that the resolution received and the international condemnations of these flagrant Iranian attacks, demanding their immediate and unconditional cessation, and an end to any provocation or threat against neighbouring states, including the use of proxies.

Arab Parliament President Mohamed al-Yammahi's statement condemned the targeting civilian facilities and residential areas, saying that such constitutes a blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter.

The statements added that the UNSC resolution recognises that the targeted states retain full rights to take measures that ensure the protection of their security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and deter aggression, as recognised by Article 51 of the UN Charter.

The statements added that the adoption of the resolution by the UNSC represents a consequential step toward enhancing stability in the region and calls for full adherence to its provisions while working to prevent further escalation, thereby contributing to consolidating regional and global peace and security. - QNA

Qatar expands land cargo links, eases processes

From Page 1

The TIR system, a global mechanism for cross-border road transport, connects Qatar to a wide logistics network spanning about 76 countries.

A major advantage of the system is that goods can move under a single customs seal, which reduces the need for repeated full inspections at every border crossing and helps accelerate the movement of trucks and commercial cargo across frontiers.

Qatar has also digitised use of the system through the AI Nadeeb platform, allowing import, export and transit transactions to be processed electronically.

According to the report, this helps lower costs, cut procedural complexity and strengthen cargo security, while improving operational efficiency across the wider transport and logistics chain.

At the same time, the Ministry of Transport, through the Logistics Support Committee, is

working with the relevant entities to address challenges faced by shipping and transport companies.

These include extending truck operating hours and easing permit procedures for drivers and vehicles. Other proposals under review include allowing GCC-registered shipments to move more freely within the region and establishing a direct hotline between ports and shipping companies to speed up co-ordination and resolve bottlenecks more effectively.

New Iranian leader promises vengeance

Reuters/AFP
Dubai/Beirut/Tehran

Iran will fight on and keep the Strait of Hormuz shut as leverage against the United States and Israel, new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said yesterday in the first comments attributed to him since he succeeded his slain father.

Khamenei did not appear in person and the remarks were read out by a state television presenter.

No images have been released of him since an Israeli strike at the start of the war. Khamenei, whose father and predecessor Ali Khamenei was killed in the first wave of US-Israeli attacks at the start of the war, called for Gulf countries to close their US military bases and vowed to avenge "the blood of our children and grandchildren".

"The lever of blocking the Strait of Hormuz must definitely be used," he said of the waterway.

"I assure everyone that we will not neglect avenging the blood of your martyrs," said the hardline cleric who is close to Iran's top military force.

"The popular demand is to continue our effective defence and make the enemy regret it," he added, referring to the shipping route through which a fifth of global oil normally passes along Iran's coast.

State television offered no explanation for why the message was read out rather than delivered in person.

Iranian officials have said Khamenei was lightly wounded in the initial February 28 airstrikes, but the extent of his injuries is unclear.

The prospect that one of the most severe disruptions ever to hit global energy supplies could drag on sent oil prices surging back above \$100 a barrel, after falling back earlier in the week on hopes of a swift end to the conflict.

Shortly after the address was read out, the Revolutionary Guards announced that

they would keep the strait shut in line with his orders.

Two tankers were ablaze in an Iraqi port yesterday after a hit by suspected Iranian explosive-laden boats, a clear sign of defiance toward US President Donald Trump, who said on Wednesday the United States had already won the war.

Images verified by Reuters as filmed from the Iraqi port of Basra showed ships engulfed in massive orange fireballs that lit up the night sky.

At least one crew member was killed. Hours earlier, three other ships were struck in the Gulf.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards claimed responsibility for at least one attack - on a Thai bulk carrier that was set ablaze - saying that it had disobeyed their orders.

Another container vessel reported being struck by an unknown projectile near the United Arab Emirates.

In another front of the unpredictable war, Israeli airstrikes hit a building in central Beirut yesterday, sending thick smoke above the Lebanese capital.

Israel also ordered residents out of another swathe of southern Lebanon, intensifying its offensive against the Iran-backed Hezbollah group after it fired its biggest volley of rockets into Israel since the start of the war.

So far the war has killed more than 2,000 people, including almost 700 in Lebanon.

Undermining US and Israeli claims to have knocked out much of Iran's stock of long-range weapons, more drones were reported yesterday flying into Kuwait, Iraq, the UAE, Bahrain and Oman.

Gulf states have borne the brunt of retaliatory attacks from Iran.

Images from Bahrain yesterday showed thick smoke rising after a strike on fuel tanks in Muharraq, with residents told to stay inside and close their windows.



A man watches a televised statement by Mojtaba Khamenei. - AFP

Drones caused damage again at Kuwait's international airport and in downtown Dubai, while Saudi Arabia said it had intercepted drones headed towards its Shaybah oil field and its embassy district.

Inside Iran, residents said security forces were increasing their presence on the streets to demonstrate continued control.

"Security forces are everywhere, more than before. People are afraid to come out, but supermarkets are open," teacher Majan, 35, said by phone from Tehran.

Three sources told Reuters that US intelligence indicated that Iran's leadership remained largely intact and not at risk of imminent collapse.

Israel and the United States have called on Iranians to rise up and topple their clerical rulers.

Many Iranians want change and some openly celebrated the elder supreme leader's death on the war's first day, after his forces had killed thousands of anti-government protesters in January.

However, there has been no sign of or-

ganised dissent while the country is under attack.

Khamenei's remarks reinforce Iran's message that its strategy now is to impose a prolonged economic shock to force Trump to back off.

A spokesperson for Iran's military command said on Wednesday that the world should prepare for oil prices of \$200 a barrel.

US Energy Secretary Chris Wright said yesterday he did not expect that to happen, but did not totally rule it out.

"I would say unlikely, but we are focused on the military operation and solving a problem," Wright told CNN.

"If the White House imagines the conflict will stop when Donald Trump decides it... they're making a mistake and ignoring the lessons of history," Pierre Razoux, director of studies at the Mediterranean Foundation for Strategic Studies, told AFP. "The Iranian regime, which no longer has anything to lose, will wage a war of attrition against the United States and Israel to punish them for their aggression."



A foreign tanker carrying Iraqi fuel oil is seen damaged after catching fire in Iraq's territorial waters, following unidentified attacks that targeted two foreign tankers, according to Iraqi port officials, near Basra, Iraq. - Reuters

US military 'not ready' to escort tankers through Hormuz Strait

Reuters/AFP
Washington

US Energy Secretary Chris Wright told CNBC yesterday that the Navy cannot escort ships through the Strait of Hormuz now but it is "quite likely" that could happen by the end of the month.

His comments came as an attack on two oil tankers off Iraq killed at least one person, and oil prices briefly soared past \$100.

Since launching the war on Iran, US President Donald Trump has sought to calm the markets by offering US Navy escorts for oil tankers and reinsurance facilities for shipping companies - but no escorts have so far taken place.

"It'll happen relatively soon, but it can't happen now. We're simply not ready," Wright said. "All of our military assets right now are focused on destroying Iran's offensive capabilities and the manufacturing industry that supplies their offensive capabilities."

On Tuesday, he sent oil prices see-sawing when he said US ships



Wright: It'll happen relatively soon, but it can't happen now. We're simply not ready.

had carried out an escort, before his social media post was swiftly deleted and the White House denied that such an operation had occurred.

As Iran launches a new wave of attacks against Gulf energy targets, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said that the war "is creating the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market".

US and Israeli strikes on Iranian

targets - including energy infrastructure - have also disrupted supplies.

The conflict has sent energy prices spiking, including in the United States, creating a political headache for Trump.

The US president sought yesterday to address the issue, saying that stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons was more important to him than gasoline prices.

"The United States is the largest

Oil Producer in the World, by far, so when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money. BUT, of far greater interest and importance to me, as President, is stopping an evil Empire, Iran, from having Nuclear Weapons, and destroying the Middle East and, indeed, the World," said Trump in a post on his Truth Social platform.

IEA member countries on Wednesday agreed to unlock 400mn barrels of oil from their reserves - their largest release ever.

The United States will be releasing 172mn barrels, Wright said, under a swap arrangement that would see 200mn barrels flow back to its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) "within a year".

The move was unable, however, to overcome fears about the choking of energy supplies, with the Strait of Hormuz - through which a fifth of global crude passes - effectively shut down.

Wright said he had meetings at the Pentagon yesterday to discuss possible US Navy escorts for tankers.

The US energy secretary told CNN yesterday that he believed

markets were "very well supplied with oil right now" and that short-term pricing was "based on psychology more than flows of oil".

The United States has also moved to ease sanctions on some Russian at-sea oil, notably allowing India a temporary waiver to buy that oil in order to address supply issues caused by the war.

Wright told CNN that waiver did not amount to "sanctions relief" for Russia, arguing the oil was already bound for China.

"Russia is not getting sanctions relief. All of that oil is in the water that's waiting in line to unload into China," he said, terming the waiver a "pragmatic solution" in the current crisis.

Wright's comment came a day after an envoy for Russian President Vladimir Putin met with US negotiators in Florida, in the first talks between Moscow and Washington since the start of the Iran war.

Kirill Dmitriev called the meeting "productive" and said Washington was "beginning to better understand" the importance of Russian oil.

Laundry fire on giant US aircraft carrier injures two: US military

Reuters/AFP
Washington

Two US sailors were injured after the USS Gerald Ford suffered a non-combat-related fire on board, the US military said yesterday.

The Ford carrier, the United States's newest aircraft carrier and the world's largest, is taking part in operations against Iran and currently located in the Red Sea.

In a statement, the military said the sailors

were receiving medical treatment for non-life-threatening injuries and were in stable condition.

The Navy said that the fire, originating "in the ship's main laundry", was "not combat-related and is contained".

"There is no damage to the ship's propulsion plant, and the aircraft carrier remains fully operational," the military said, adding that the fire.

Reuters reported on Tuesday that as many as 150 US troops have been wounded in the US-Israeli war with Iran.

The Ford, which has more than 5,000 sailors aboard, has more than 75 military aircraft, including fighter aircraft like the F-18 Super Hornet jets.

The carrier has been deployed for more than nine months, including taking part in operations in the Caribbean earlier this year.

The laundry episode was not the first mishap reported from the nuclear-powered giant.

The Ford's toilets have been plagued with malfunctions and clogging as a result of misuse by sailors, according to US media reports.

Shipping in the Gulf and along the narrow Strait of Hormuz, which carries around a fifth of the world's oil, has come to a near-standstill since the US and Israel began strikes on Iran on February 28, sending global oil prices surging to highs not seen since 2022.

US Central Command, which oversees US military operations in the Middle East, said that the United States has carried out strikes against more than 6,000 targets.

It added that more than 90 Iranian vessels had been damaged or destroyed, including more than 30 minelayers.

Kenya arrests man trying to smuggle over 2,000 live ants

A man was arrested with more than 2,200 live garden ants in his luggage at Nairobi's main airport this week amid a rise in cases of smuggling of the insects in Kenya.

Chinese national Zhang Kequn, 27, was arrested at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport on Tuesday while he was trying to leave the country, court filings seen by Reuters yesterday showed.

Immigration officials flagged a "stop order" on Zhang's passport after he evaded arrest in Kenya last year.

Ant aficionados pay large sums to maintain colonies in large transparent vessels known as formicariums, which offer a literal window into the species' complex social structures and behaviours.

Last year four men were fined \$7,700 each for trying to traffic thousands of ants valuable to Kenya's ecosystem in a case that experts said signalled

a shift in biopiracy from trophies like elephant ivory to lesser-known species.

Investigators said a search of Zhang's luggage recovered 2,238 ants, including 1,948 packed in test tubes and the rest in three rolls of "soft tissue papers".

They said that Zhang had been in Kenya for two weeks and had mentioned three accomplices who supplied him with the ants.

The Kenya Wildlife Service told the court that it needed more time to complete investigations, including examining an iPhone and a MacBook recovered from Zhang.

The wildlife service said a similar consignment of ants had been seized in Bangkok on Tuesday that originated from Kenya, indicating the existence of a widespread and organised ant-smuggling network. - Reuters

PM reshuffles Libya government in bid to improve performance

Libya's Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah has reshuffled his UN-backed government, saying yesterday that he wanted to improve its performance.

Dbeibah will remain as defence and foreign affairs minister, but he has sought to overcome regional differences with the new cabinet in which about 10 of the 27 ministers changed.

Libya has struggled to regain stability since the fall of strongman Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

The North African country has two governments, the UN-recognised administration led by Dbeibah in Tripoli and a rival government in Benghazi under Khalifa Haftar.

The prime minister's relations with key officials Mohamed el-Menfi, representative for Libya's three regions, and Mohamed Takala, head of the High State Council that acts as an upper house, had become strained because of the split of official posts between the western, southern and eastern regions.

Menfi and Takala attended the first cabinet meeting of the year following the reshuffle however.

The aim of the reshuffle was to improve "state performance", according to the Hakomitna government website.

"The goal is not change for its own sake, but to accelerate the delivery of services to citizens," Dbeibah said in a social media post.

There is only one woman in the cabinet, Randa Ghareb at the women's ministry. - AFP

Mauritanian anti-slavery stalwart Boubacar Ould Messaoud dead

Boubacar Ould Messaoud, a rights activist who fought incessantly to wipe out slavery in his native Mauritania, died yesterday in Nouakchott aged 80, a representative of his non-governmental organisation told AFP.

Born into a family of slaves, he founded SOS Esclaves in 1995 to eradicate slavery and support the reintegration of ex-slaves into society.

The organisation operated for years without

official recognition before obtaining legal status in 2005.

An architect, Messaoud was involved in several organisations, including the anti-slavery El Hor movement, which he joined in 1975.

Messaoud was awarded the Officer of the National Order of Merit medal in 2023, France's Human Rights Prize in 2010 and the Anti-Slavery International Award in 2009.

His commitment to denouncing slavery and the racist crimes of the years 1989-1992 under former Mauritanian president Maouya Ould Taya (1984-2005) sparked punitive action.

He was arrested several times during the 1980s and early 1990s.

He was also dismissed in 1991 from his position as chief of the public housing company because of his political activism. - AFP

Ghana to submit UN resolution on slavery reparations

Ghana intends to propose a United Nations resolution recognising transatlantic slavery as the "gravest crime in the history of humankind" and calling for reparations, and expects broad support despite resistance in Europe.

The West African nation, a prominent advocate of reparations on the continent, plans to table the proposal at the UN General Assembly, possibly as early as this month, its foreign ministry said in a statement to Reuters.

The plan marks a new step in Africa's efforts to seek accountability for historical injustices by former colonial powers, and the country hopes it will "enjoy the support of many member states".

"The proposed resolution seeks to recognise transatlantic slave trade as the gravest crime in the history of humankind, taking into account its scale, duration, legalisation and enduring consequences," it said.

While calls for reparations have gained momentum in recent years, there is also a growing backlash.

Several European leaders have opposed even discussing the subject, with critics arguing that today's states and institutions should not be held responsible for historical wrongs.

Asked if it expected opposition, the ministry said: "A backlash against truth is one that we hope would not occur. Ghana is not seeking to reopen old wounds but to heal those wounds with truth."

African and Caribbean nations have been seeking to establish a special UN reparations tribunal, with lawyers noting previous tribunals had been created by resolution or by the Security Council.

The African Union (AU) last year set out to create a "unified vision" among its 55 member states on what reparations may look like, from financial compensation and formal apologies to policy reforms.

AU leaders endorsed the proposed resolution at a summit last month.

Member states of the Caribbean Community, which has outlined its own reparations plan, are also expected to support it.

"We remain optimistic that others would equally be able to do so," the ministry said. - Reuters

TNG students embark on Umrah pilgrimage

In a powerful demonstration of its commitment to holistic education, a team of students and teachers from The Next Generation School (TNG), recently returned from a profound five-day educational Umrah pilgrimage to the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah.

The journey was meticulously designed as an immersive experience in practical Islamic values, transforming abstract concepts from the curriculum into spiritual and personal realities. The pilgrimage began with students performing Umrah at the Masjid al-Haram, where their focus and devotion were a testament to their character.

“Seeing our students in ihram—focused, reflective, and spiritually present—was deeply moving,” said accompanying teacher, Naeem Akbar.

This spiritual discipline continued at Masjid an-Nabawi, where the group prayed in Riyadh ul-Jannah with remarkable reverence. “They understood they were



In the Blessed House of Allah.

representing their families, their school, and their faith,” added Asim Bukhari, deputy campus head.

Beyond the sacred rituals, the journey was a profound lesson in resilience, teamwork, and personal responsibility. Students climbed the rugged path to the Cave of Hira, the historic site where the first revelation of the



Outside Masjid al-Haram, before performing Umrah.

Qur’an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The challenging climb became a metaphor for their educational journey.

“Reaching the summit together felt like a real achievement,” one student reflected. “It was about teamwork, support, and truly feeling the history of what hap-

pened here 1,450 years ago.” The educational aspect was deliberately student-led. Participants took the initiative to research historical sites, asked thoughtful questions, and shared their learning with peers, embodying independent thinking—a key objective in TNG’s mission to develop confident, inquisitive learners.

Teachers also noted the students’ remarkable independence and sincerity throughout the trip. They managed their belongings, woke for Fajr prayer without reminders, and naturally looked after younger peers, reflecting the school’s core values of Respect and Teamwork.

This experiential learning journey is a direct reflection of The Next Generation School’s Vision: to empower students to meet global challenges with an emphasis on Islamic values and practices. It brings to life the school’s mission of fostering an enabling environment that encourages active participation and independent learning. “This was experiential



Students and teachers at Hamad International Airport.

learning at its finest, where our students learned about Islamic history and they lived Islamic values. They learned responsibility and practiced it with sincerity. They embodied the ambition to push their limits and teamwork to succeed together. That’s what makes TNG’s approach to education truly distinctive,” said campus head Rusna.

This initiative aligns perfectly with TNG’s overarching goal

of providing quality education that builds confidence, encourages leadership, and inspires students to become responsible global citizens anchored by their faith. The school continues to set a benchmark in Qatar for integrating academic excellence with character development, as seen in its recent Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards, including a prestigious ‘Top in the World’ distinction in Islamiyat.

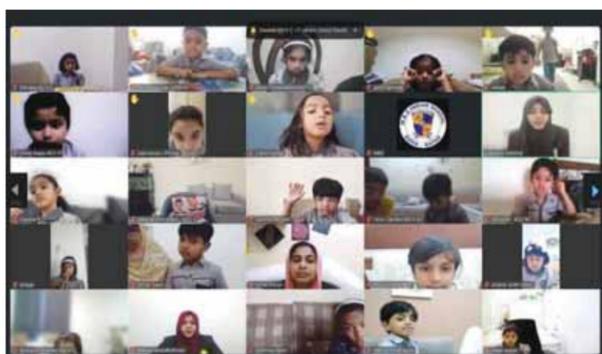
MES conducts online resilience-building session for students

MES Indian School, in collaboration with its Guidance and Counselling Department, organised a comprehensive resilience-building session titled ‘Safe Today – Strong Tomorrow’ for students of Grades KG–8.

The session was thoughtfully designed to provide emotional support, promote safety awareness, and strengthen students’ coping skills during challenging and uncertain times. Addressing the students, the school principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, expressed her sincere gratitude to the Government of Qatar for its effective measures ensuring the safety and security of all.

She also thanked the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) for its timely guidelines and regular updates, and expressed sincere appreciation to the embassy officials for their constant support during the period of prevailing uncertainty and instability.

Tulika Mukherjee, Fashna Abdul Samad, Irene Thomas and Shahana Fathima KC from the Department of Guidance and Counselling were the resource persons. With a strong focus on “Support and Coping Strategies,” the session emphasised



the importance of emotional regulation as a sign of maturity and inner strength in sensitive situations.

Students were guided on the importance of remaining calm and composed during emergencies, prioritising safety above all, and building inner resilience to foster emotional well-being. They were encouraged not to panic during unforeseen circumstances but instead to adopt practical strategies that help in managing fear and anxiety effectively.

The session emphasised sharing apprehensions with genuine caregivers and trusted individuals, such as parents, teachers, counsellors, and other responsible adults. Students were sensitised to the importance of seeking reassurance from reliable sources rather than being influenced by rumours or misinformation.

Students were advised to use social media judiciously and to refrain from trusting unverified or unconfirmed messages. They were cautioned against clicking on suspicious links from invalid sources and were reminded to rely solely on official and reliable platforms for time-to-time updates. The session also emphasised the importance of staying indoors during sensitive situations, strictly adhering to parental and school instructions, and avoiding areas near windows to minimise unnecessary risks.

To strengthen emotional well-being, practical calming techniques, such as simple

deep-breathing exercises, were demonstrated. Students were encouraged to engage in prayer and meditation to cultivate inner peace. The session also suggested engaging in constructive indoor activities such as reading storybooks, listening to music, journaling, playing mind games and board games, and practising creative writing, thereby channelising energy positively and productively. School officials, parents, and students actively participated in the online session.

Through initiatives such as ‘Safe Today – Strong Tomorrow,’ MES Indian School reiterated its unwavering commitment to nurturing not only academic excellence but also the emotional resilience and holistic well-being of its students. The school also assured students and parents that online classes have been organised to facilitate uninterrupted academic progress while placing paramount importance on safety.



MES Junior hosts Multilingual Festival with unity in diversity

The Junior Section of MES Indian School has organised Multilingual Fest 2025–26 last month, held at the Conference Hall. The event, con-

ducted under the inspiring theme ‘One World, Many Voices – Diversity is Our Greatest Strength,’ stood as a vibrant tribute to linguistic diversity and the spirit of

unity in a multicultural world. The programme commenced with students and teachers gathered to celebrate the richness of languages that shape identi-

ties and connect communities across the globe. Addressing the gathering, the school principal, Dr Hameeda Kadar, eloquently underscored the profound sig-



nificance of language in shaping human connections. She emphasised that language is not merely a medium of communication but a powerful bridge connecting cultures, communities, and hearts.

A captivating language gala presentation by the students of the Junior Section formed the highlight of the event. Through a series of vibrant performances, speeches, and cultural expressions, students showcased a variety of languages with confidence and creativity. The segment titled ‘Unity in Diversity’ further reinforced the central theme of the fest, beautifully illustrating how different languages coexist harmoniously within the

school community. Earlier in the programme, Fathima Faisal of Grade 3-E delivered a warm welcome address, setting a positive tone for the celebration. The event concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by Amrin of Grade 3-J, who expressed sincere gratitude to the school leadership, teachers, participants, and organisers for their invaluable contributions in making the fest a resounding success.

The Multilingual Fest was meticulously organised and coordinated by Umadevi, along with a dedicated team of teachers, whose collective efforts ensured the event’s flawless execution and grand success.



MES hosts sports fiesta for parents and staffers

Demonstrating its unwavering commitment to fostering community engagement and promoting a healthy sporting culture, MES Indian School organised a vibrant Parents and Staff Cricket Tournament recently. The event saw enthusiastic participation and a remarkable display of sporting spirit among parents and staff.

The tournament brought together a total of 10 teams, comprising nine parents’ teams

and one staff team, with approximately 160 parents actively participating.

The matches were meticulously planned and executed, ensuring strict adherence to the principles of fair play, discipline, and sportsmanship throughout the tournament. After a series of intensely competitive matches, the Parents’ Team “Pace Beaters” emerged as the champions, showcasing exceptional coordination, strategic acumen, and outstanding

cricketing skills. The Staff Team “MES XI” delivered a spirited performance, securing the runner-up trophy.

The event was meticulously planned and coordinated by Salim Nadaf, coordinator, Department of Physical Education, in collaboration with members of the staff. The event served as a wonderful platform to strengthen the bond between parents and the school community through teamwork, camaraderie, and friendly competition.





47,000 Americans returned from Middle East: US

AFP/Reuters
Washington

Around 47,000 Americans have returned home from the Middle East since February 28, when the US and Israel began their attacks on Iran, a State Department official told AFP yesterday.

The Trump administration has organised nearly 50 flights to return US citizens from the Middle East.

The State Department was criticised in the days after the conflict began on February 28 for its late preparations to relocate diplomats and offer assistance to US citizens as Iran's strikes led to airspace closures and flight cancellations across the region.

By the end of the day, the department will have "completed over four dozen flights," the official said on condition of anonymity.

"We have directly provided security guidance and travel assistance to about 32,000 impacted Americans," the official added. Countries worldwide have urged citizens to avoid the Middle East during the ongoing war against Iran, which has seen violence erupt across much of the region.

But closed airspace and airports meant thousands of people were struggling to find a way out, and flights have only partially resumed in recent days.

US officials in particular requested assistance have declined seats when offered, opting either to remain in (the) country or book commercial flight options which offer greater flexibility in terms of destination and luggage."

US has arranged nearly fifty charter flights from Middle East

under fire for allegedly not giving citizens sufficient warning to avoid the Middle East in the days before launching the attacks on Iran.

In recent days the government has scrambled to organise charter flights, using emergency funds so that travellers can fly without cost – an unusual perk in such circumstances.

"We have offered departure options to nearly every American in the region who has asked us for assistance," the state department official said. "Most Americans who re-

quested assistance have declined seats when offered, opting either to remain in (the) country or book commercial flight options which offer greater flexibility in terms of destination and luggage."

The Trump administration has organised nearly 50 flights to return US citizens from the Middle East since the US-Israeli war with Iran began, a State Department official said yesterday, and officials said demand for the flights has declined.

The State Department was criticised in the days after the conflict began on February 28 for its late preparations to relocate diplomats and offer assistance to US citizens as Iran's strikes led to airspace closures and flight cancellations across the region.

Assailant dead after ramming vehicle into Michigan synagogue

An unidentified assailant was dead after ramming his pickup truck yesterday into a synagogue on the outskirts of Detroit, Michigan, and causing a blaze, police said.

Security guards opened fire on the attacker at the Temple Israel synagogue in West Bloomfield, Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard told reporters.

"He breached the building, drove down the hall, and he was engaged by security," Bouchard said. "We can't say what killed him at this point, but security did engage the suspect with gunfire."

The sheriff said the assailant appeared to be alone in the vehicle and police dogs were checking the car for explosives. "It's been complicated because there's some fire," he said. "We're through an abundance of caution, clearing the vehicle for

IEDs or any explosives."

The sheriff said a security member was injured by the assailant's pickup truck and was being treated in hospital.

Smoke could be seen billowing from the synagogue after the attack and fire engines were on the scene.

Law enforcement officers and emergency personnel raced to the area in large numbers soon after the incident, which comes amid heightened tensions nationwide over the US-Israeli war against Iran.

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer condemned what she called the "heartbreaking" attack. "Antisemitism and violence have no place in Michigan."

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said President Donald Trump had been briefed about the situation. (AFP)

Nasa says 'on track' for Artemis 2 launch as soon as on April 1st

Nasa said yesterday that the long-delayed launch of Artemis 2, the first crewed flyby mission to the Moon in more than 50 years, could come as soon as April 1.

"We are on track for a launch as early as April 1, and we are working toward that date," Lori Glaze, a senior Nasa official, told a press conference, after technical difficulties delayed a launch originally expected in February.

"It's a test flight, and it is not without risk, but our team and our hardware are ready," she said. "Just keep in mind we still have work to go."

The agency announced in February a sudden revamp of the Artemis program, including the addition of a test mission before an eventual lunar landing.

The first launch window would be Wednesday, April 1, at 6:24pm (2224 GMT), with several others available in the following days.

"We would anticipate on the order of about four opportunities within that six-day period," Glaze said.

The Artemis 2 mission is meant to see the first flyby of the Moon in more than half a century, to be followed by Artemis 3 with the goal of "rendezvous in low-Earth orbit" of at least one lunar lander.

Brazil scraps taxes on diesel, imposes levy on oil exports

Reuters
Brasilia

Brazil's government scrapped taxes on diesel while imposing a levy on oil exports in a move yesterday that could affect state-run oil firm Petrobras, as the country seeks to soften the blow of the recent spike in global oil prices. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's administration said the temporary measures would reduce the impact of price swings related to the US-Israeli war with Iran on local fuel prices, particularly diesel.

The South American country cut the PIS and Cofins federal taxes levied on diesel to zero and imposed a 12% tax on crude oil exports, as well as a 50% levy on diesel shipments.

"Oil prices are getting out of control," Lula told a press conference announcing the measures in Brasilia.

The spike in diesel prices has emerged as a threat to Brazil's powerful farm sector, raising costs for producers who are harvesting a record soybean crop and planting corn they cannot afford to delay. While Petrobras has not raised local fuel prices, Brazil is still partly reliant on imported diesel, and distribu-

tors have been reluctant to sell it at Petrobras' prices, concerned about a possible price hike in the near future.

The government expects diesel prices at the pump to fall by 0.64 reais (\$0.1227) per litre due to the tax cut and a direct subsidy program that will provide payments to diesel producers and importers.

The export tax is aimed at increasing domestic refining and securing internal supply, the government said in a statement, though it remains unclear how much refining capacity Brazil has available to boost local diesel output.

Petrobras was operating its refineries at around 91% of capacity last year and aimed to increase it to 95% in the first quarter. The company's near \$3bn net profit in the fourth quarter was due in part to record exports during the period. Sales to international markets grew 41.7% year-on-year to 42bn reais, while domestic sales dropped 6.8% to 85.4bn reais.

Finance Minister Fernando Haddad said the measures would not affect Petrobras's own fuel-pricing policy. Haddad added they are set to run until the end of the year, but that the government hopes for a short-term solution to the Middle East conflict.

US, allies clash with Russia, China over Iran nuclear programme

By David Brunstrom
Reuters

The US and Western allies clashed with Russia and China yesterday over Iran's nuclear intentions, as Washington sought at the United Nations to further justify the war it launched on Iran two weeks ago.

At a meeting of the 15-member UN Security Council, which is chaired this month by the US, Russia and China moved unsuccessfully to block a discussion about a committee established to oversee and enforce UN sanctions on Iran. They were overruled 11-2 with two abstentions.

Addressing the council, US envoy to the UN Mike Waltz accused Moscow and Beijing of seeking to protect Tehran by blocking the work of the so-called 1737 Committee.

US says Russia and China blocking sanctions committee work to protect Iran; Trump has used nuclear issue to justify attack on Iran

"All member states of the UN should be implementing an arms embargo against Iran, banning the transfer and trade of missile technology, and freezing relevant financial assets," Waltz said.

"The UN provisions to be re-imposed are not arbitrary, but instead, narrowly scoped to address the threat posed by Iran's nuclear, missile and conventional arms programs and Iran's ongoing support for terrorism," he said.

Waltz charged that both China and Russia did not want a functional sanctions committee "because they want to protect their partner, Iran, and continue to maintain defence co-operation that is now once again prohibited."

Waltz noted that last week the

UN's International Atomic Energy Agency had reiterated that Iran was the only state in the world without nuclear weapons to have produced and accumulated uranium enriched up to 60%, and had refused to provide the IAEA access to this stockpile.

Russia's UN ambassador Vasily Nebenzya charged that the US and its allies had "whipped up hysteria surrounding supposed plans Iran had to get a nuclear weapon" that were never corroborated by IAEA reports.

"This was done in order to undertake yet another military venture against Tehran and to ensure great escalation of the situation in the Middle East and beyond," he said.

China's representative, Fu Cong, called Washington the "instigator" of the Iranian nuclear crisis and said it had "resorted to blatant use of force against Iran during the negotiation process, which rendered the diplomatic efforts futile."

US President Donald Trump has used Iran's nuclear program to justify his war on Iran. He said this month that Iran would have had a nuclear weapon within two weeks had the US not struck three key nuclear sites in June, a claim sources have said was not supported by US intelligence assessments.

Britain and France told the Security Council that re-imposing sanctions on Iran was justified by Tehran's failure to address concerns about its nuclear program. France said the IAEA was no longer able to guarantee the peaceful nature of the program and Tehran's nuclear stockpile was sufficient for 10 nuclear devices.

Top US, China economy officials to meet for talks in Paris

Treasury secretary to meet Chinese vice-premier ahead of Trump-Xi summit

AFP
Washington

Top economic officials from the US and China are set to convene in Paris, the Treasury Department said yesterday, ahead of President Donald Trump's planned meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in April.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent will meet Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng in France between March 15 and 16, the department said.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer is also expected to attend the talks, his office confirmed to AFP.

"Thanks to the bonds of mutual respect between President Trump and President Xi, the trade and

economic dialogue between the US and China is moving forward," Bessent said in a statement.

The gathering of Bessent, Greer and He is widely expected to set the stage for Trump's visit to Beijing, where he is due to meet Xi.

The talks are likely meant to hammer out trade and economic achievements to be announced at the leaders' summit, Fudan University professor Wu Xinbo told AFP.

But they come after a turbulent year in US-China economic ties since Trump returned to the presidency.

Washington and Beijing engaged in an escalating tariffs war in April last year as China pushed back against Trump's sweeping duties against trading partners.

This brought their tariffs on each other's exports to triple-digit levels, forcing trade to a halt before both sides eventually eased tensions.

Washington has announced that Trump will visit China from

March 31 to April 2, although Beijing has yet to confirm those dates – in line with its usual practice.

Trump and Xi last met in October in South Korea where they agreed on a year-long trade truce.

Preparations for the upcoming Paris meeting are underway, and industry leaders are hoping for positive outcomes.

"Thanks to the bonds of mutual respect between President Trump and President Xi, the trade and economic dialogue between the US and China is moving forward"

US-China Business Council president Sean Stein believes Trump's visit to China is a "time for ambition" when it comes to addressing "longstanding issues with the business climate in China."

Chile's Smiljan Radic Clarke wins Pritzker architecture prize

AFP
New York

Chile's Smiljan Radic Clarke, whose modern buildings can sometimes appear "deliberately unfinished," is the recipient of this year's Pritzker Prize, considered the Nobel of architecture, organisers announced yesterday.

The 60-year-old Radic, a native of Santiago, creates "optimistic and quietly joyful" structures, the jury said in its citation.

Radic is best known for his Serpentine Gallery Pavilion in London – a translucent donut-shaped fibreglass shell resting on locally sourced rocks – and the Vik Millahue Winery in his home country, set among the Andes mountains and the vineyards.

The Teatro Regional del Biobio in Concepcion, Chile resembles a paper lantern.

"If architecture gives shape to the ways in which people live, Radic's work produces spatial experiences that feel at once surprising and entirely natural," the Pritzker jury said.

"His buildings may appear



Chilean Architect Smiljan Radic (centre) gives a press conference from inside the 2014 Serpentine Pavillion at the Serpentine Gallery in Hyde Park, central London. (AFP/File photo)

temporary, unstable, or deliberately unfinished – almost on the point of disappearance – yet they provide a structured, optimistic and quietly joyful shelter, embracing vulnerability as an intrinsic condition of lived experience."

The panel hailed Radic – who has created buildings and installations across Europe and at home in Chile – for "reminding us that architecture is an art."

First awarded in 1979 to modernist Philip Johnson, the Pritz-

ker Prize has honoured many of the profession's most influential figures including IM Pei, Oscar Niemeyer, Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas and Zaha Hadid.

It honours a living architect for "significant achievement" in the field.

Last year's award went to China's Liu Jiajun, who lives and works in his birth city of Chengdu. His projects – known for their minimalism and use of designs that fit local context – include the Museum of Clocks in that city.

Mexico considering social media restriction for minors: minister

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.

Any ban needed to come "from the experiences of parents, different communities, and teachers"

"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.

TikTok, in a statement to AFP, said it has made efforts to prevent children from using its platform and that children under 13 should not be on social media.

TikTok and Meta, parent company of Facebook and Instagram, require users to be at least 13 years old, and have automatic safety and privacy settings for teenagers between 13 and 17 years old.

That hasn't stemmed criticism

over implementation of these controls.

Delgado insists 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.

He added that, for now, Latin America's second-most populous country after Brazil was not considering banning mobile devices in public schools.

Brazil and Chile last year joined a growing number of nations that have banned non-emergency smartphone use by children in schools.

Indonesia, Australia plan to expand security co-operation

Reuters
Jakarta

Indonesia and Australia are planning to expand their security co-operation to include Japan and Papua New Guinea, Jakarta's Defence Minister said yesterday after a meeting with his Australian counterpart.

Trilateral security arrangements would be developed with Indonesia, Australia and Japan, and between Indonesia, Australia and Papua New Guinea, Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin told reporters after talks with Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles.

The leaders of Indonesia and Australia signed a security treaty last month that commits them to consult each other if either country is threatened.

Indonesia and Australia will work together on intelligence sharing, Sjafrie said, without providing details.



Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles interacts with Indonesia's Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin upon their meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia, yesterday. (Reuters)

The two ministers discussed the possibility of developing a defence training facility on the island of Morotai on North Maluku, with a proposal to upgrade its existing defence infrastructure, he said, adding: "We will work together to improve and utilise it."

Marles told reporters that the Morotai facility will belong to Indonesia "but there would be opportunities we see for Australia to engage in training there," adding that it is up to Indonesia to determine how it will be used. Sjafrie also said military per-

sonnel from countries such as the Philippines, Australia and Singapore would have access to the facility, as well as another in North Kalimantan being developed with Singapore.

Indonesia was ready to deploy troops for the international security force in Gaza, but that was dependent on the current dynamic with US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace and the conflict in the Middle East, Sjafrie also said.

Indonesia had been prepared to send 20,000 troops but was now ready to deploy 8,000, in phases, he said, with the move to scale back coming in response to pledges by other countries involved in the initiative to send numbers in the hundreds.

"The president has instructed us to prepare our troops, and we are ready to act, but we are awaiting developments from the BOP. I cannot confirm anything yet because the situation is very dynamic," he added.

Asean ministers to hold meetings to address Middle East crisis

Reuters
Manila

The widening conflict in the Middle East is expected to dominate discussions at tomorrow's Asean economic ministers' retreat, with foreign ministers also holding a virtual meeting on the same day to tackle a deepening crisis that has upended global markets. The Philippines, this year's Asean chair, is hosting the meetings as officials weigh impacts and responses to surging oil prices as well as disruptions to shipping, logistics, and trade flows across the region's export-reliant economies.

"The concern is a given," Philippine trade undersecretary Allan Gepty told reporters, saying the region could not ignore the effects of the crisis on inflation and jobs. Joint US and Israeli strikes on Iran launched almost two weeks ago have thrown global energy markets and transport into chaos. The conflict has effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz, the chokepoint that funnels about a fifth of the world's oil and LNG to Asia, sending crude surging to above \$100 a barrel.

The crisis has forced Asean foreign ministers to call a special vir-

tual meeting to assess the implications for Southeast Asia, where several economies rely heavily on crude and LNG shipments from the Gulf. The Philippines sources much of its oil needs from the Middle East and Qatar's LNG halt has also tightened supplies.

Several Asean countries have already taken concrete steps to cope with the impact of the Middle East crisis. The Philippines has shortened the government work week to conserve fuel, and its president has asked Congress for authority to suspend excise taxes on fuel to help stabilise costs. Vietnam yesterday cut its retail fuel prices overnight following the easing in global crude oil prices from earlier highs, but the government warned prices will remain volatile, with more supply disruptions anticipated.

"It is important that our actions and responses to the ongoing conflicts must be synchronised," Gepty said. Asean foreign ministers have said that the escalation in conflict was "particularly regrettable," and urged an immediate cessation of hostilities, calling on all sides to exercise maximum restraint, protect civilians, and resolve differences through dialogue in line with international law.

N Korea leader, daughter visit munitions factory

Reuters
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visited a munitions factory on Wednesday, state media KCNA reported, releasing photographs that showed him touring the facility with his teenage daughter and the pair test-firing handguns.

During the visit, Kim oversaw firearms production and called for modernisation of the process, KCNA said.

The factory is "playing a very important role in increasing the combat efficiency of the army," Kim was quoted as saying.

He emphasised a need to expand the production capacity of the factory "in a far-sighted way," according to KCNA.

Kim was recently shown overseeing the test-firing of a strategic cruise missile on a newly launched destroyer, according to KCNA.

Kim's daughter, known as Ju-ae, accompanied her father during the visit to the munitions factory, state media photographs showed. They were both clad in black leather jackets, with Ju-ae shown participating in a shooting drill alongside military officials.

There has been speculation that Ju-ae is being groomed as a potential leadership successor.

South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) last month told lawmakers there were signs that Kim's daughter was providing input on policy matters, reflecting that she "was in the stage of being internally appointed successor."



Kim Jong-un and his daughter Kim Ju-ae inspecting the production of a new type of handgun at a munitions factory at an undisclosed location in North Korea, on Wednesday. (AFP)

Foreign investors threaten legal action against Vietnam over renewables, document says

Foreign investors may take legal action if Vietnam does not fully pay electricity tariffs agreed with multiple wind and solar projects, according to a document signed by five chambers of commerce seen by Reuters.

The dispute began last year when Vietnam cut previously agreed subsidised prices for electricity from some solar and wind farms, citing irregularities. The move comes as Vietnam's energy sector struggles with higher prices and risks of shortages linked to the conflict in Iran.

Lengthy negotiations with affected investors, who run projects with a combined capacity of 12GW, failed to produce a compromise, prompting the chambers of commerce in Vietnam from the European Union, Britain, Japan, South Korea and Thailand to send a joint letter to the government yesterday.

If payment obligations are not met, electricity producers "may seek to enforce remedies, including pursuing dispute resolution in Vietnam or other jurisdictions," said the document, dated March 12.

The letter urges authorities to find an amicable solution to a dispute that the chambers said could lead to defaults and significant losses on multibillion-

dollar investments in Vietnam's renewable energy sector.

Vietnam's industry ministry, which received the letter, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In recent years, the southeast Asian country saw a boom in renewable energy investments driven by generous subsidised, or feed-in, tariffs under which the state committed to buying electricity for 20 years at above-market prices.

However, the high tariffs increased losses for state-owned power utility EVN, the sole buyer of the generated electricity, and pushed up power prices for households and factories.

The retroactive change to tariffs, which took effect in January 2025, followed investigations into alleged abuses in accessing the preferential rates.

EVN had no immediate comment.

The letter follows several coordinated actions aimed at persuading Vietnam to change course. These included a document in May signed by 16 affected firms, among them private equity fund Dragon Capital, the Vietnamese subsidiary of Philippines' ACEN energy group, and investors from Thailand, Portugal, the Netherlands, South Korea, Singapore and China. (Reuters)

China approves 'ethnic unity' law condemned by rights groups

AFP
Beijing

China approved what it called an "ethnic unity" law yesterday, which rights advocates warn could further marginalise minority groups such as the Uyghurs.

The law, passed by the National People's Congress, formalises policies to promote Mandarin as the "national common language" in education, official business and public places.

Social cohesion is a key focus of the new "ethnic unity" law, which criminalises engaging in "violent terrorist activities, ethnic separatist activities, or religious extremist activities".

The law aims to "strengthen cohesion" within China, which the legislation argues is undergoing unprecedented social change.

China officially recognises 55 official ethnic minorities within its borders that speak hundreds of languages and dialects.

Government policies have already directed that Mandarin Chinese be used as the language of instruction in some areas with large minority populations, such as Tibet and Inner Mongolia.

Yalkun Uluyol, a China researcher at Human Rights Watch, described the new legislation as a "significant departure" from a Deng Xiaoping-era policy that

guaranteed the right of minorities to use their own languages.

Educational institutions will now need to use Mandarin as the principal teaching language. Teenagers will now be required to have "a basic grasp" of Mandarin upon completing compulsory education.

No minority languages are specifically cited in the new law, although it will likely affect Uyghur, Mongolian and Tibetan speakers.

"It is no coincidence that the law targets spaces where children are most likely to encounter their mother tongue," Erika Nguyen from PEN America told AFP.

"The intent being to sever children's ties with their identity, history, and culture."

A recent report by PEN and the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SM-HRIC) said that more than 80 percent of Mongolian language websites in China have been "censored or banned".

Requiring fluency in Mandarin in public life could also inhibit the chances of Mongolian-speakers advancing professionally, SM-HRIC director Enghebatu Togochog said in a statement.

"Economically, it marginalises Mongolians, as Chinese fluency becomes a gatekeeper for jobs and advancement," Togochog said.

The law also states that its provisions can also be applied outside China's borders.

S Korea parliament approves \$350bn US investment bill

AFP
Seoul

South Korea's parliament passed a bill yesterday that paves the way for \$350bn in US investments under a deal struck with Washington last year to avoid the worst of President Donald Trump's tariffs.

The countries finalised an agreement in November under which Seoul pledged a huge investment package, including \$150bn for shipbuilding cooperation and the remainder for strategic sectors such as semiconductors.

The bill's passing comes after Washington launched new probes Wednesday into alleged unfair trade practices by countries including South Korea, potentially opening the door to additional tariffs.

The deal struck last year was

agreed in exchange for a reduction of tariffs on South Korean exports from 25% to 15% under Trump's widespread levies.

But Trump wrote on social media in January that he would raise the rate back to 25 percent, saying the South Korean parliament was "not living up to its Deal with the United States" in failing to pass the investment bill.

Trump's warning expedited the bill being put to a vote by lawmakers in parliament. The bill easily passed in a vote supported by the ruling Democratic Party and main opposition People Power Party, by 226 votes to eight.

President Lee Jae Myung thanked MPs for passing the bill "for the sake of our economy and national security".

"With the passage of the special bill, the institutional and legal foundation has now been estab-

lished to implement the South Korea-US tariff agreement," he added.

Earlier Thursday, Lee's office said Seoul will make efforts to ensure South Korea is "not placed at a disadvantage compared with other major countries" after Washington announced the trade practice probe.

The move came after the US Supreme Court struck down Trump's global tariffs, saying he had exceeded his authority in invoking emergency economic powers to impose them on virtually all countries.

The US leader has since tapped a different law to impose a new 10-percent duty, and vowed to raise this level to 15 percent.

Trump's sector-specific tariffs on goods like steel, aluminium and autos, however, remain unaffected by the Supreme Court's ruling.

South Korea imposes fuel price cap

AFP
Seoul

South Korea said yesterday a fuel price cap would take effect from midnight to mitigate pressure on the country's energy supply during the Iran war.

The country is heavily reliant on energy imports, including shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, and has said it will try to find alternatives to secure supplies.

It marks the first such measure introduced in Asia's fourth-largest economy since 1997.

"The government has decided to introduce institutional measures aimed at curbing the recent surge in domestic oil prices triggered by the situation in the Middle East," the energy ministry said in a statement.

The price ceiling applies to supply prices charged by refiners to distributors and gas stations, not retail prices charged to customers at gas stations, the ministry said.

"The initial maximum prices... have been set at 1,724 won (US\$1.70) per litre for regular gasoline, 1,713 won per litre for automotive diesel," it said.

The capped prices are below the average fuel prices submitted by refiners on Wednesday, the ministry added.

The set maximum prices will remain in place for two weeks, after which they will be reset after "taking into account internal and external situations regarding oil prices", officials said.

Seoul said last week it had struck a deal to ship around four million barrels of crude from the United Arab Emirates to bolster supplies.

The country has said it has oil reserves equivalent to about seven months of consumption.

China-N Korea train arrives in Pyongyang after 6-year halt

AFP
Beijing

A passenger train from China arrived in the North Korean capital yesterday, state media said, after a six-year hiatus since the service was suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic.

China is North Korea's largest trading partner and a vital source of diplomatic, economic and political support for the isolated nuclear state.

Train journeys between the East Asian neighbours were halted in 2020 under strict border closures to prevent the coronavirus from spreading.

China's state news agency Xinhua said a train that departed from Dandong, a city in the northeast bordering North Korea, arrived in Pyongyang on Thursday evening.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported earlier that a train had been seen crossing the Sino-Korean Friendship Bridge over the Yalu River.

China Railways said in a separate statement that regular train services would also resume between Beijing and Pyongyang on Thursday evening.

AFP journalists aboard the K27 train departing from Beijing and bound for Pyongyang yesterday saw carriages reserved only for passengers travelling to North Korea.

Several people at the station gathered around the departures board to take photos of the "Beijing to Pyongyang" listing.

The overnight train is set to make a few stops, including at the



People board the K27 train bound for Pyongyang at Beijing Railway Station in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)

port city of Tianjin, and then head northeast to Dandong on the border.

A railway enthusiast at the station told AFP he was taking the train only one stop and would disembark at Tianjin.

"It's great that this line is reopening, because there are very few international rail connections in China," he said, before being subjected to an ID check by plainclothes police officers.

Wagons from Beijing holding Pyongyang-bound passengers are then attached to another train in Dandong, taking them across the border to the nearby North Korean city of Sinuiju, said Rowan Beard from Young Pioneer Tours, a company specialising in North Korea travel.

Those wagons, as well as North Korean domestic carriages, will then be attached to a new train heading to Pyongyang, he added.

Trains will run in both directions between Beijing and Pyongyang every Monday,

Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, China Railway said.

The Dandong-Pyongyang service would operate daily, it said.

Travel agents for an official ticketing booth in Beijing told AFP on Tuesday that anyone with a valid visa can now buy train tickets to the North.

That includes Chinese people working and studying in North Korea, as well as North Koreans working, studying and visiting family abroad.

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

Tickets are currently available for offline purchase in several Chinese cities, it added.

A spokesman for China's foreign ministry said yesterday that "maintaining regular passenger train services is of great significance for facilitating personnel exchanges" between the two countries.



India boosts LPG imports from US, Norway as Gulf supplies tighten

Reuters
New Delhi

India is securing more liquefied petroleum gas cargoes from new sources such as the US, Norway, Canada and Russia, besides sources in the Gulf region that remain available, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said yesterday, as the world's second-largest importer grapples with tight supplies.

The federal environment ministry has advised state pollution control boards to permit the use of biomass, kerosene and coal as alternate fuels for the hospitality and restaurant segment for one month to free up LPG usage, Puri said.

India previously imported about 60% of its LPG requirements from Gulf countries, Puri told parliament, adding that purchases had now been diversified. 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 estimated 333mn homes with LPG connections.

Domestic LPG supply is fully protected and the delivery cycle is unchanged, Puri said.

The panic about cooking gas supplies was triggered by con-

sumer anxiety rather than a supply shortage, he added.

India's crude oil, LPG, and liquefied natural gas 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. Despite the government steps, restaurants, hotels, and industries across sectors are beginning to feel the strain from the tighter supplies of LPG, mainly used as cooking fuel.

Puri said that 20% of the average monthly commercial LPG requirement will be allocated from yesterday by oil marketing companies, in co-ordination with state governments to avoid hoarding or black marketing.

India consumed 33.15mn metric tonnes of cooking gas last year, with imports accounting for about 60% of demand.

Puri said that the South Asian nation's current crude supply position is also secure as sourcing of non-Hormuz crude has increased to 70% of its total imports.

India's petrol and diesel availability is also fully secure and LNG cargoes are arriving almost daily from alternative routes, he said.

"India has sufficient gas production and (LNG) supply arrangements to sustain this position even in the event of a prolonged conflict," Puri said.

India says Hormuz deal for its tankers; Tehran denies reports

Reuters
New Delhi

Iran will allow Indian-flagged tankers to transit the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for 40% of the South Asian nation's crude imports, an Indian government source said yesterday, but an Iranian source outside the country denied any such deal was reached.

India, the world's No. 3 oil consumer, said yesterday the foreign ministers of the two countries have had three conversations in recent days and the latest one this week focused on "issues pertaining to the safety of shipping and India's energy security".

"Beyond that, it would be premature for me to say anything," foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told a weekly media briefing.

The Indian source, who was briefed on the matter, declined to be identified, citing a lack of authorisation to speak to media, while the Iranian source said the matter was a sensitive one.

Yesterday, the Suezmax tanker Shenlong, carrying Saudi crude, arrived at a port in Mumbai after transiting the strait. The Liberia-flagged vessel was the first crude carrier to reach India from the Middle East since the war between Iran and the US and Israel broke out in late February, according to LSEG data. The customer is state-run Bharat Petroleum Corp, said a source with direct knowledge of the matter.

The company did not immediately respond to a request seeking comment.

The Indian source said two other foreign-flagged tankers believed to be bound for India had recently transited the Strait, and that Iran had given assurances of safe passage for Indian-flagged vessels after the foreign ministers of both countries spoke by telephone late on Tuesday.

The source said the situation remained



The Liberia-flagged tanker Shenlong Suezmax, loaded with Saudi Arabian crude, arrives at a port after transiting the Strait of Hormuz, in Mumbai, yesterday. (Reuters)

fluid, with limited clarity on how instructions were being relayed across different layers of Iran's administration.

In a statement after the talks between India's S Jaishankar and his counterpart, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign ministry said the US should be held accountable for the "insecure situation and problems arising from shipping in the Persian Gulf".

Neither side mentioned any agreement on allowing safe passage for Indian vessels.

On Wednesday, India said 28 Indian-flagged vessels were operating west and east of the Strait with 778 Indian sailors aboard.

"Authorities, ship managers and recruitment agencies are co-ordinating closely with Indian embassies and local authorities to ensure safety and provide assistance to Indian seafarers," the Indian petroleum ministry said in a statement.

India has given safe harbour to 183 Iranian sailors from a vessel that docked after the war

broke out between Iran and the US and Israel.

New Delhi had allowed three Iranian ships that departed following a naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal to dock, but one was later sunk by a US submarine in international waters, and another sought assistance from Sri Lanka.

Iran has attacked at least 16 ships in the Strait since the war began in late February. Tehran has warned that oil prices could nearly double to \$200 a barrel as it retaliates.

A Thai vessel bound for India's western port of Kandla was attacked in the Strait on Wednesday, prompting criticism from New Delhi.

"India deplores the fact that commercial shipping is being made a target of military attacks in the ongoing conflict," the foreign ministry said on Wednesday, adding that its citizens had also died.

The near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz has compelled India to scramble for alternatives, such as buying more from Russia.

Balendra's RSP wins majority: Nepal election commission

AFP
Kathmandu

Nepal's centrist RSP party of rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah won a majority in parliament with 182 seats, Election Commission results showed yesterday.

The March 5 vote elected a new 275-member House of Representatives, the lower house of parliament, with 165 seats chosen directly and 110 through a proportional representation vote.

"The counting of votes for the election of members of the House of Representatives... has been completed," Election Commission spokesman Narayan Prasad Bhattarai said in a statement.

In direct elections, RSP won 125 of the 165, and secured another 57

in PR votes, leaving them only two seats short of securing a powerful two-thirds majority.

The Nepali Congress, which was the biggest party in the last parliament, secured 38 seats and the Marxists of now-defeated KP Sharma Oli trailing with 25 seats. The Maoists have seven seats.

"A letter has been sent to the concerned political parties today to select the names of the candidates, and submit them to the Commission within three days," Bhattarai said.

The vote was the first since deadly September 2025 youth anti-corruption protests toppled the government. The demonstrations, under a loose Gen Z banner, began over a brief social media ban but quickly tapped into broader grievances over corruption and a struggling economy.

UK watchdogs press social media to block children

Reuters
London

Britain's media and privacy regulators yesterday demanded that major social media platforms do more to keep children off their services, warning that companies were failing to enforce their own minimum age rules.

Britain has been weighing tougher curbs on children's access to social media, with the government considering barring under 16s from such platforms — mirroring a move by Australia.

Ofcom and the Information Commissioner's Office said they had grown increasingly concerned about algorithmic feeds that expose children to harmful or addictive content.

"These online services are household names, but they're failing to put children's safety at the

heart of their products," Melanie Dawes, Ofcom's chief executive, said.

"That must now change quickly, or Ofcom will act."

In the latest implementation phase of Britain's Online Safety Act, Ofcom told Facebook and Instagram — both owned by Meta — as well as Roblox, Snapchat, ByteDance's TikTok and Alphabet's YouTube to show by April 30 how they would tighten age checks, restrict strangers from contacting children, make feeds safer and stop testing new products on minors.

The ICO separately issued an open letter to the same platforms, calling on them to adopt "modern, viable" age-assurance tools to stop those under 13 accessing services not designed for them.

"There's now modern technology at your fingertips, so there is no excuse," Paul Arnold,

ICO's chief executive, said.

A Meta spokesperson said the company already uses AI-based age detection and age-estimation tools and places teens in accounts with built-in protections. The spokesperson added that age should be verified "centrally at the app store level" so families do not have to provide personal information multiple times.

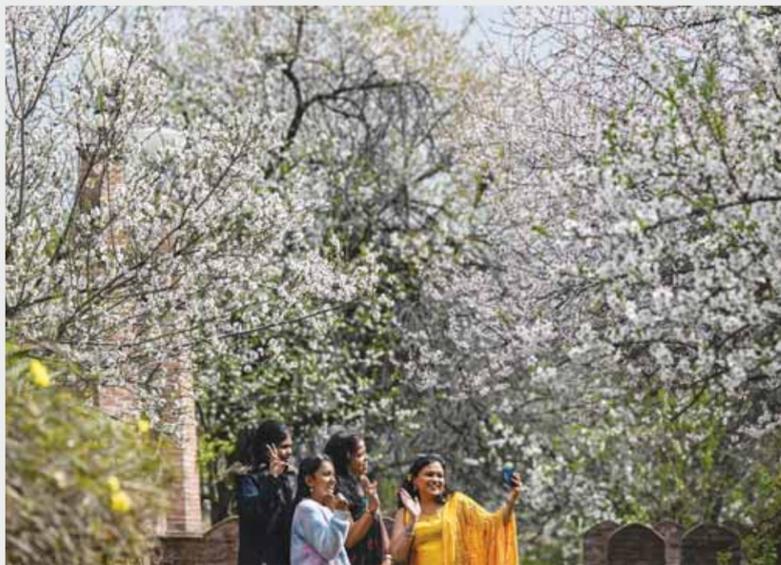
A YouTube spokesperson said the platform also offered age-appropriate experiences and was "surprised to see Ofcom move away from a risk-based approach," urging the regulator to focus on "high-risk services" that were failing to comply with the law.

A Roblox spokesperson said the company had launched more than 140 new safety features in the past year, including mandatory age checks for chat, designed to prevent adults from communicating with children.

Musk's Tesla set to supply UK with electricity

A subsidiary of Tesla, Elon Musk's electric vehicle maker, has won approval to supply UK households and businesses with electricity, Britain's energy regulator said yesterday. The company applied to become an electricity supplier in Britain in July, a first such move outside the US by the operation run by tech billionaire Musk. Tesla Energy Ventures obtained a licence to produce electricity in the UK in 2020, notably using solar panels, without selling it directly to consumers. It currently provides power across Texas. The regulator Ofgem said Tesla Energy Ventures "has been granted a licence authorising it to supply electricity to domestic and non-domestic consumers in Great Britain". A spokesperson added that "protecting consumers and maintaining a secure, fair energy market underpins every licensing decision we make". The announcement comes as Tesla suffers a global decline in sales of its cars. (AFP)

Almond blossoms in Srinagar



Tourists take a selfie with almond blossoms in an orchard at the Badamwari Garden in old downtown Srinagar yesterday. (AFP)

Britain eyes new Gulf deployments following minehunter exit

Reuters
London

Britain is exploring additional options for deployments to the Gulf after Iran stepped up attacks on vessels, defence minister John Healey said yesterday, adding that the UK already has autonomous mine hunting systems in the region.

The Royal Navy (RN) said last week its last minehunter HMS Middleton, which was based in Bahrain, had arrived back in Britain on March 1. The vessel, which was more than 40 years old, was no longer certified to sail, it said.

"We do have some autonomous mine hunting systems already in the region," Healey said. "There are additional options we're starting to consider that we could deploy alongside allies."

Iran has deployed about a dozen mines in the Strait of Hormuz, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters on Wednesday, in a move likely to complicate any reopening of the narrow waterway, an important route for shipping oil and LNG.

The US military says it has targeted Iranian mine-laying vessels, eliminating 16 of them on Tuesday.

Two tankers were ablaze in an Iraqi port yesterday after a hit by suspected Iranian explosive-laden boats. Hours earlier, three other ships had been struck in the Gulf. Healey described the situation as a "major escalation from Iran".

"It is a breach of international law," Healey said. "It's a very serious situation that is having an impact on oil prices and the cost of living for everyone."

Bangladesh parliament reconvenes after Gen-Z protests and election

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh's parliament convened yesterday for the first time since a deadly 2024 uprising plunged the country into political turmoil and following elections last month.

The government of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), took over after February 12 elections from the interim administration that had led the country of 170mn people since August 2024.

"After more than a decade and a half of fascist and subservient rule, the activities of parliament are beginning today with representatives elected by the people," Rahman told parliament.

"The BNP wants to build a prosperous, safe and democratic country," he added, calling on all lawmakers, whatever their political opinions, to work together.

Rahman blamed the toppled government of Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League party for undermining the previous parliament. Hasina, 78, who has been sentenced in absentia to death for crimes against humanity, is in self-imposed exile in India.

"The fallen dictatorship made parliament dysfunctional, instead of making it the centre of all national activities," Rahman said, promising it would change under his watch. "We will make parliament the centre of all debates and arguments aimed at resolving the country's problems."

They include tackling a sluggish economy, restoring stability and reviving growth after months of turmoil that rattled investor

confidence and strained state finances.

The world's second largest garment exporter, heavily dependent on fossil fuel imports, has also been hit hard by an oil price spike caused by the war in the Middle East.

Rahman's appeal for unity is a bid to heal rifts in a country polarised by years of bitter rivalry.

A new speaker, Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, and his deputy, Kayser Kamal, were elected to office. Both are members of the BNP.

The parliament building was looted during the August 2024 uprising against Hasina, but has since been repaired.

The BNP-led alliance secured 212 seats, while the BNP alone won 209 seats.

The leader of the opposition is Shafiqur Rahman, who heads the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance with 76 seats, with Jamaat alone holding 68.



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman speaking during a parliamentary session in Dhaka yesterday. (AFP)

Anchors of relief: Three phrases

Enveloped in triple darkness -- the darkness within the belly of a massive sea creature, the darkness of the turbulent ocean depths, and the darkness of a storm-choked sky -- buffeted by fierce winds that whipped the waves into towering mountains and tossed ships precariously, a pure and sincere plea pierced these layers of darkness and ascended swiftly to the heavens. The gates of heaven opened to receive it, and in response came swift divine rescue, delivering the supplicant from these perils and bringing relief.

La ilaha illa Anta Subhanaka Inni kuntu mina Az-zalimeen ("There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.") [Qur'an 21:87] These three phrases encapsulated and alleviated much of the suffering of a Prophet of Allah. Allah had decreed that his trial would take place within a prison, but what a prison it was! This was no ordinary confinement with doors to be locked or unlocked, nor guards to be commanded to release the captive. Instead, the prison and the jailer were one -- a sea creature incapable of understanding human speech. It was the whale that swallowed Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him), also known by his epithet "Dhu-n-Nun," derived from this very encounter.

The story is well-known, so the purpose here is not to retell it or delve into its details. Rather, the focus is on the prophetic supplication that this noble prophet continuously repeated within the whale's belly. This supplication raises several questions: What is the meaning of this plea? Why was it so effective in relieving distress? What is the significance of admitting wrongdoing and acknowledging sin in this context? Most importantly, how can this prophetic supplication be understood theologically, revealing its greatness, significance, and connection to a broader doctrinal framework?

To answer these questions, we begin by analysing these words with Allah's guidance:

The First Phrase: La ilaha illa Anta (There is no deity except You)

The phrase of Tawheed (monotheism) encompasses both negation and affirmation. It is similar to Allah's statement: "It is You we worship and You we ask for help." [Qur'an 1:5], meaning: we worship none but You, and we seek help from none but You. Similarly, Allah, the Almighty, says: "And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth..." [Qur'an 98:5] And He says: "That is because Allah is the Truth, and that that they call upon other than Him is falsehood..." [Qur'an 22:62] Therefore, every deity worshipped besides Allah is false, regardless of the virtue, status, or rank attributed to that being -- whether prophets, righteous people, angels, or others. Every object of worship besides Allah is false, its worship is invalid, and its worshiper is misguided. Scholars explain that the term "falsehood" here refers to the fact that the worship neither benefits the worshiper nor the object being worshipped. For this reason, the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, praised the words of the poet Labid, considering them the truest words he ever spoke:

"Indeed, everything except Allah is false."



It is noteworthy that many prophetic supplications and adhkar (remembrances) begin with the declaration of Tawheed. One example is the supplication known as the Master of Istighfar (Sayyid Al-Istighfar), as narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari, "The master of Istighfar (seeking forgiveness) is for the servant to say, 'O Allah, You are my Lord; there is no deity except You. You created me, and I am Your servant, and I am fulfilling my covenant and promise to You as much as I am able. I seek refuge in You from the evil of what I have done. I acknowledge Your favour upon me, and I confess my sin, so forgive me, for none forgives sins except You.'"

In the supplication "La ilaha illa Anta (There is no deity except You)," there is a profound meaning that few fully grasp. Beginning this supplication with the testimony of Tawheed serves to affirm and pledge steadfastness in servitude to Allah, regardless of the severity of trials and tribulations. Allah, the Almighty, says: "And of the people is he who worships Allah on an edge. If he is touched by good, he is reassured by it; but if he is struck by trial, he turns on his face [to disbelief]. He has lost [this] world and the Hereafter. That is what is the manifest loss." [Qur'an 22:11] This steadfastness in Tawheed is built upon a foundation of piety and seeking Allah's pleasure, which is the source of a believer's resilience during trials: "So is one who laid his foundation upon fear of Allah and [seeking] His approval better or one who laid his foundation on the edge of a bank about to collapse, so it collapsed with him into the fire of Hell?" [Qur'an 9:109] This illustrates the wisdom of beginning the supplication with these words, as they inherently encompass seeking Allah's favour through righteous deeds -- the greatest of which is Tawheed.

It is as if the afflicted person is saying, "My Lord, whatever You decree and whatever trial You send my way, I will worship none but You."

The Second Phrase: Subhanaka (Exalted are You)

In Arabic, tasbeeh means glorification, and saying Subhan Allah signifies declaring Allah free of any deficiencies or imperfections. It is an acknowledgment of Allah's absolute perfection and majesty.

This negation of imperfection is not merely a denial of flaws, as scholars of Islamic creed explain. It is not a simple negation but one that affirms Allah's praiseworthy attributes and absolute perfection. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah remarked, "Negation is not a form of praise unless it implies affirmation; otherwise, pure negation contains no praise. Denying flaws and imperfections concerning Allah necessitates affirming His praiseworthy attributes and perfection."

While this phrase generally negates all deficiencies, its most significant implication in this context is the negation of injustice from Allah. This trial and affliction were not decreed unjustly or as punishment without cause. Injustice is among the most despicable traits, and Allah is far removed from it due to His perfect justice and benevolence: "Indeed, Allah does not do injustice, [even] as much as an atom's weight; while if there is a good deed, He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward." [Qur'an 4:40] "And Allah does not intend injustice to the worlds." [Qur'an 3:108]

"And Allah does not intend injustice to [His] servants." [Qur'an 40:31] "And whoever does righteous deeds while he is a believer -- he will neither fear injustice

nor deprivation." [Qur'an 20:112] This is further confirmed by what is mentioned in the Sunnah (prophetic traditions), such as Allah's words in the Hadith Qudsi (sacred hadith), "O My servants, I have forbidden injustice for Myself and made it forbidden among you, so do not wrong one another ... O My servants, it is but your deeds that I enumerate for you, then I will recompense you for them. So whoever finds good, let him praise Allah, and whoever finds otherwise, let him blame no one but himself." [Muslim]

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah remarked, "In his saying: 'subhanaka' (Exalted are You), there is an affirmation of Allah's innocence from any injustice and an affirmation of His greatness, which necessitates His being free from injustice. For the unjust individual commits injustice either due to need or ignorance, but Allah is free from any need and is All-Knowing of everything. He is self-sufficient, and all that exists apart from Him is dependent on Him. This is the perfection of greatness."

Regarding the benefit and outcome of this glorification (tasbeeh), it is mentioned in Allah's statement: "And had he not been of those who exalt Allah, He would have remained inside its belly until the Day they are resurrected." [Qur'an 37:143-144]

This consistent glorification of Allah, declaring Him free from all deficiencies and faults, was the reason for the swift arrival of relief and the end of the trial.

The Third Phrase: Inni kuntu mina Az-zalimeen (Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers)

After Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him) denied any injustice on Allah's part, he followed this by confessing his own sin

and shortcoming, which was undoubtedly the true cause of his trial. Many verses affirm that people's wrongdoing is the cause of their suffering. Among them are: "And We did not wrong them, but they were [the ones] who wronged themselves." [Qur'an 16:118] "And We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves." [Qur'an 11:101] "And We did not wrong them, but it was they who were the wrongdoers." [Qur'an 43:76] Similarly, Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) said: "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves..." [Qur'an 7:23]

This represents a profound dual approach stemming from prophetic guidance: The servant combines two crucial aspects of seeking Allah's favour -- seeking through righteous deeds and seeking through acknowledging one's weakness. This makes the supplication worthy of being answered. For this reason, the Prophet, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, taught his Companions to say in every prayer, during the opening supplication, "O Allah, You are the King; there is no deity except You. You are my Lord, and I am Your servant. I have wronged myself and admitted my sin, so forgive all my sins, for no one forgives sins except You." [Muslim]

This acknowledgment, confession, and describing oneself as among the wrongdoers -- since wrongdoing is an inherent aspect of humanity, whether directed at oneself or others -- was a means of salvation. Al-Hasan al-Basri said, "He was not saved except by confessing his wrongdoing." Moreover, this confession included a request for forgiveness from Allah, which became a reason for his deliverance.

Allah Will Surely Respond

When these words encompassed the acknowledgment of Tawheed (the oneness of Allah), seeking Allah's favour through righteous deeds, glorifying Allah and declaring Him free from any injustice, and admitting one's own sin, they collectively represented the perfect expression of helplessness, humility, and submission before the Lord of all creation. Allah, the Exalted, is characterised by modesty and generosity, as mentioned in the authentic hadith, "Indeed, your Lord is modest and generous; He is shy to turn away empty the hands of His servant when he raises them to Him." [Narrated by the compilers of the Sunan Books except An-Nasa'i] How much more so, then, for the one who perfects their supplication and humbly implores Allah? For this reason, Allah's response is a guaranteed promise. Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, said: "The supplication of Dhu-n-Nun (Prophet Yunus), when he supplicated to Allah while in the belly of the whale, 'There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers; no Muslim ever supplicates with these words for anything but that Allah responds to him.' [At-Tirmidhi]

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



Etiquette and behaviour towards Allah

A Muslim thinks about the countless blessings that Allah has bestowed upon him. He considers the numerous bounties that Allah has given him -- from the time that he was a "drop of fluid" in his mother's womb. These bounties continue until he meets His Lord. Therefore, a Muslim must thank Allah for these bounties with his tongue, by praising Him in a proper manner. He must also thank Him with his limbs by using them in obedience to Him. This is how he should behave towards Allah. Obviously, it is never considered proper etiquette to be ungrateful for the bounties one has received, or to reject the bounties of the One Who gives them. One also should never deny the goodness and bounties he has received. Allah Says in the Qur'an (what means): "And whatever of blessings or good things you have, it is from Allah." [Qur'an 16:53]

Allah also Says (what means): "And He gave you of all that you asked for, and if you count the Blessings of Allah, never will you be able to count them." [Qur'an 14:34]

Another verse states (what means): "Therefore remember Me (by praying and glorifying), I will remember you. Be grateful to Me and never be ungrateful to Me" [Qur'an 2:152]

A Muslim thinks about Allah's Knowledge and the fact that He is watching everything, under every circumstance. The Muslim's heart then becomes filled with awe, respect and love for Allah. He becomes shy and embarrassed to disobey Him. This is how he should behave towards Allah. Obviously, it is not proper for a slave to go against his Master by disobeying him or by treating him with disrespect, while his Master is witnessing and watching him.

A Muslim also ponders over Allah's Power and Control over him, and submits to this control. He knows that there is no escape or fleeing from Him. Allah is the only source of refuge and shelter. Therefore, the Muslim flees to Allah and throws himself before Him. He leaves his affairs



with Allah and puts his trust in Him. This is how he should behave with respect to his Lord and Creator.

Allah Says (what means): "There is not a moving (living) creature but He has grasp of its forelock." [Qur'an 11:56]

Allah also Says (what means): "So flee to Allah (from His Torment to His Mercy -- Islamic Monotheism). Verily, I (Muham-

mad) am a plain warner to you from Him." [Qur'an 51:50]

Allah Says (what means): "Put your trust in Allah if you are believers indeed." [Qur'an 5:23]

A Muslim also considers how Generous and Compassionate Allah has been to him in all of his affairs. He considers Allah's Mercy upon him and upon

all of His creation. He desires to have more of that mercy. He then humbles himself to Allah with sincere humility and supplications. He seeks a means of approach to Allah with the best of speech and good deeds. This is how he should behave towards his Lord, Allah. It is not proper to lose hope of receiving more of His Mercy, which encompasses everything, nor should one be pessimistic about receiving more of Allah's Generosity. Certainly, Allah has Stated (what means): "My Mercy embraces all things." [Qur'an 7:156]

Allah also Says (what means): "Allah is very Gracious and Kind to His slaves." [Qur'an 42:19]

Allah also Says (what means): "Certainly, no one despairs of Allah's Mercy, except the people who disbelieve." [Qur'an 12:87]

Another verse states (what means): "Despair not of the mercy of Allah." [Qur'an 39:53]

A Muslim always considers Allah's power to punish severely and His swift reckoning. He does his best to obey Allah and tries to live without disobeying Him. This is all part of proper behaviour towards Allah. People of intelligence know that it is not proper for a weak and incapable slave to commit acts of disobedience towards the Lord Who is the Powerful, the All-Capable, the Strong, the Dominant. He Says (what means): "But when Allah wills a people's punishment, there can be no turning back of it; and they will find besides Him no protector." [Qur'an 13:11]

Allah also Says (what means): "Verily, (O Muhammad) the seizure (punishment) of your Lord is severe and painful." [Qur'an 85:12]

Allah also Says (what means): "Allah is All-Mighty, All-Able of Retribution." [Qur'an 3:4]

A Muslim should also think about Allah while he is disobeying Him, as if Allah's threat is already being applied to him, that His punishment has come upon him due to his action. He should also think about Allah while obeying Him and following His Laws, as if His Promise has already

come true for him, that Allah's Pleasure is being bestowed upon him. Having good expectations or thoughts about Allah is part of the etiquette due to Allah. It is not correct for a person to have bad thoughts about Allah and disobey Him, and think that Allah is not watching what he is doing or will not call him to account. Allah Says (what means): "But you thought that Allah knew not much of what you were doing. And that thought of yours which you thought about your Lord, has brought you to destruction; and you have become (this Day) of those utterly lost!..." [Qur'an 41:22-23]

Allah also Says (what means): "And whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, fears Allah, and keeps his duty (to Him), such are the successful." [Qur'an 24:52]

In conclusion, a Muslim must be thankful to his Lord for the bounties He has given him; he must be shy towards his Lord whenever he is inclined towards committing a sin; he must sincerely turn to his Lord, put his trust in Him, hope for His Mercy and fear His punishment. He must have good expectations concerning Allah fulfilling His Promises and carrying out His threat to any of His slaves if He wills. This is how he should behave towards Allah. The more that he sticks to these matters and guards them, the greater his position will be and the higher his rank will be with his Lord. He shall be greatly blessed by Allah; he shall become one of the devoted slaves of Allah, and of those people whom Allah protects. He shall be enveloped by Allah's Mercy and shall have Allah's Blessings bestowed upon him.

This is the utmost that any Muslim could hope to achieve and what he should strive for throughout his life.

O Allah, make us Your devoted slaves. O Allah, make us among those whom You protect. O Allah, make us among those who are close to You, O Allah, Lord of the worlds.

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GULF TIMES

China pins hopes on society-wide AI push to add jobs

China's scramble to adopt artificial intelligence will spawn new jobs and propel the world's second-largest economy, say policymakers and company executives, as they downplay growing global fears that the technology could stunt employment.

Plans unveiled at the opening of parliament's annual session last week go all-in on AI, outlining ambitions to offset an ageing workforce and long-term economic slowdown through the technology's "job-creation" effect over the next five years.

"For now, advancing AI adoption and capability appears to be a higher policy priority than pre-emptively addressing potential job displacement," said Shujing He, senior analyst at consultancy Plenum. She added the government's focus on AI's positive effects leaves room to respond later to any disruptive labour market impact.

Human Resources Minister Wang Xiaoping said China was working to "actively leverage" AI to create jobs and expand opportunities for 12.7mn university graduates this year. The International Monetary Fund predicts AI will affect nearly 40% of global jobs, rising to 60% in advanced economies, while Stanford University researchers have found the technology is already having a "significant and disproportionate" impact on new US workers.

Some analysts remain sceptical of Beijing's optimism. "Automation has two major impacts: wages are being pushed down, and youth unemployment will continue to go up," said Alicia Garcia-Herrero, chief Asia-Pacific economist at Natixis. "If China does not introduce any kind of universal basic income, there is no way the population can cope with this shock."

Govt hopes AI deployment will boost economic productivity

In a state-run CCTV broadcast during the parliament sessions, executives from Chinese state-owned enterprises — traditionally offering "iron rice bowl" job security — said AI would spark major restructuring within their organisations.

Yet Changan Automobile chairman Zhu Huarong said he was optimistic that China's AI drive would transform the automobile industry into a "sunrise industry" from a fading one. Chinese universities are already adapting. ShanghaiTech University has introduced AI "micro-majors" to teach skills machines cannot easily replace, such as critical thinking and creativity, said provost Yin Jie. "We must train them to ask questions," he added. "If your thinking isn't sharp, you won't beat the robots."

China's emphasis on reskilling and talent development reflects its strategy to align with shifting industry dynamics, said Wei Sun, principal AI analyst at Counterpoint Research, noting that policymakers view AI and labour not as a "zero-sum" rivalry but as mutually reinforcing.

The push is also tied to demographic pressures: about 300mn people are set to retire in the next decade, threatening pension budgets. Last week, China set its lowest GDP growth target since the 1990s, at 4.5% to 5%, while youth unemployment remains high.

Under its new five-year plan, Beijing aims to extend AI use beyond manufacturing into services, developing industry-specific models and rollout strategies. Still, concerns linger.

"Job destruction often precedes and outweighs job creation," wrote labour economist Cai Fang in a recent book. "Although technological progress will ultimately create new jobs, the high automation of AI may lead to long-term employment shocks." He urged more investment in human capital and social welfare protections.

In a landmark labour ruling last year, a Beijing court said dismissing employees solely to replace them with AI was illegal. Yet robotaxis and autonomous delivery vehicles are already reducing traditional job demand, even on a small scale.

State media have hailed Bytedance's new video-generation model, Seedance 2.0, as a "singularity moment" for AI in film and television. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs are using AI agent OpenClaw to automate e-commerce shopfronts, forming so-called "one-person companies." Local governments are now building industries around such tools.

"From DeepSeek in 2025 to OpenClaw now, Chinese media have been hammering one narrative non-stop: learn this AI tool, get a high-paying job," wrote technology analyst Poe Zhao. The viral craze highlights both excitement and unease about the future of work, added the founder of the Hello China Tech newsletter. — Reuters

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RUNNING OUT...



China rebuilding grip on N Korea. Is Kim Jong-un ready to oblige?

By Mei Mei Chu, Ju-min Park and Claire Fu
Reuters

When Kim Jong-un arrived by armoured train in Beijing for a military parade in September, the pageantry signaled a thaw in one of the world's most important relationships after several years of frosty ties.

Behind the spectacle of tanks and fighter jets, North Korea's leader brought a senior economic team to talk trade and investment. Five weeks later, Chinese Premier Li Qiang reciprocated in Pyongyang, and China's ambassador declared both countries were "writing a new chapter."

For China, the mission is clear: reassert its traditional influence over a neighbour that has drawn closer to Russia since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. North Korea has supplied troops and weapons to Moscow in exchange for fuel and food to shore up an economy hobbled by UN sanctions over its nuclear-weapons program. A Reuters examination reveals how Beijing is deepening engagement with North Korea as US President Donald Trump prepares to visit China and expresses interest in reviving talks with Kim for the first time since 2019.

Satellite imagery shows China and North Korea are installing new infrastructure along the border — including roadworks and port facilities, some not previously reported — and forging closer economic links that boost Beijing's sway over any US overtures to Pyongyang. To document the shift, Reuters reviewed trade data, traveled along parts of the 1,350-km border and interviewed some three dozen people, including North Korean waitresses, Chinese business owners with factories in North Korea, Western tour operators, and a Chinese government official.

Most spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the topic. The rapprochement is cautious: North Korea shut its borders in 2020 in response to Covid-19 and remains largely closed to tourism, even as passenger-train services to the country from China resume this week. And Kim's pivot to Moscow in recent years has diversified his political and economic partners amid continued sanctions pressure. Still, his intensifying co-operation with China positions North Korea for a wider reopening that some analysts said would enable Beijing to reinforce its smaller neighbour's economic dependence and signal to Trump that his top strategic rival holds the key to shaping Kim's actions.

China's exports to North Korea reached a six-year high of \$2.3bn last year, a 25% annual increase. In November, China dropped its longstanding call for North Korea's denuclearization from an official arms-control white paper. In a message to Chinese President Xi Jinping on March 9, Kim said co-operation between the two countries "will become even closer in the future as we advance the common cause of socialism," North Korean state media reported.

"Discussions across all areas — politics, economy, security, and military — have kicked off, laying ground for relations to take a leap," said Lim Eul-chul, a professor who studies North Korea at South Korea's Kyungnam University. Asked about China's courting of North Korea, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Reuters that Russia welcomes greater co-operation in the region, which contributes to stability and security.

Beijing's foreign ministry told Reuters that China and North Korea have been "actively advancing border co-operation" to foster exchanges, without addressing Pyongyang's ties with Moscow. North Korea's mission to the U.N. and its embassy in Beijing didn't respond to questions.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

In the frontier city of Dandong, China has shown its readiness for a surge in cross-border traffic. In May, road markings reading "Truck Entry Lane" and "Passenger Vehicle Entry Lane" were painted onto the Chinese side of the unopened New Yalu River Bridge, which spans

- China installs new border infrastructure, boosts economic ties with N Korea
- Renewed engagement follows Kim's pivot to Russia in recent years
- China imports growing volumes of hair products, strategic metals from N Korea
- Strengthened ties with Pyongyang make China key to any fresh US-North Korea diplomacy



A passenger train with cross-border service to North Korea's Pyongyang leaves Beijing Railway Station in Beijing, China. (Reuters)

the border with North Korea, satellite images show. A new sports court has been installed at Dandong New Zone's dormant customs facility.

Recent construction is evident at other Chinese border stations, including roadworks and new facilities at the northernmost Quanhe port; and new pavement and buildings at Nanping and Sanhe, which Reuters is reporting for the first time. Reuters' analysis of satellite imagery provided by Planet Labs was corroborated by Center for Strategic and International Studies analysts Joseph Bermudez Jr. and Jennifer Jun.

North Korea has also been building what CSIS experts say is a customs and immigration facility, as well as warehouse and cargo-transfer buildings, on its side of the unopened bridge. After a 15-year delay, North Korea spent most of last year working on the project before construction stalled in November. Reuters couldn't determine why the work was paused.

The infrastructure work is now being matched by operational steps. China announced this week that passenger-train services between Beijing, Dandong and Pyongyang would resume for the first time in six years. Tickets are limited to travelers with a North Korean business visa, a sales-office representative in Beijing told Reuters. While tourism to North Korea hasn't officially resumed — Pyongyang canceled an international marathon scheduled for April — the revival of the rail connection is a positive sign for the eventual return of tourists, said Rowan Beard, co-founder of travel operator Young Pioneer Tours. Chinese travelers accounted for the bulk of tourists to North Korea before the border closure.

When Reuters traveled to Dandong in January, peddlers on the riverfront promenade were selling lapel pins emblazoned with Kim's portrait, while touts offered boat trips to visitors. A steady stream of Chinese trucks carried goods such as cloth, soybean oil, tires, and frozen duck meat across the old Sino-Korean Friendship Bridge toward North Korean guards.

At the Songtaoyuan restaurant on a freezing evening, five North Korean waitresses moved between tables, serving cold noodles. One told Reuters she was among a group of more than 10 workers who arrived from North Korea in December. China's foreign and commerce ministries didn't address questions about the North Korean workers and Beijing's enforcement of UN sanctions, which prohibit member states from issuing new work permits to North Koreans. Songtaoyuan didn't respond to a request for comment.

WIGS, FAKE BEARDS — AND TUNGSTEN

The pickup in activity shows China is preparing to expand trade, said Bermudez. "North Korea has a lot of raw material and also lots of people who could be put to work at a very, very low wage rate," he said. While UN sanctions restrict traditional North Korean exports like coal, Beijing has pivoted to importing labour-intensive materials that help prop up the Kim dynasty. Hair products — wigs, eyelashes, and false beards — now account for nearly half of China's imports from North Korea, rising 327-

fold over the last decade.

China is also the main buyer of strategic metals from North Korea. Shipments of molybdenum ores and tungsten ores — essential for rockets and missile components — reached records of \$17.2mn and \$31.5mn, respectively, in 2025, customs data show. These official imports allow China to bolster its stockpile at low prices while ensuring North Korean minerals don't reach the global market to undermine Chinese export controls, said Cory Combs, a critical-minerals analyst at Trivium China.

Political momentum is gaining, too. North Korea in October explicitly endorsed Beijing's position on Taiwan, shortly before China's arms white paper dropped calls for "denuclearization" of the Korean Peninsula. At a party congress in February, Kim vowed to expand his nuclear arsenal and said prospects for better relations with the United States rested entirely on Washington's attitude. Trump, who plans to visit China in late March and early April, has said he would love to meet the North Korean leader again. Kim has said the US must first drop its demands for Pyongyang to relinquish its nuclear weapons. A State Department spokesperson said the US remains committed to the complete denuclearization of North Korea.

'THE SECOND SHANGHAI'

Despite increased engagement between Beijing and Pyongyang, a transformation remains elusive in Dandong, where hopes of renewed trade with North Korea have fueled boom-and-bust cycles for years.

No traffic crosses the New Yalu River Bridge, completed by China in 2014. On the Chinese side, residents curious about any signs of progress use binoculars to peer over the crossing, which ends abruptly in a field. North Korea's new entry port, conceived in 2010, sits abandoned, with no workers in sight.

"We once joked that Dandong New Zone would be the second Shanghai," said Fu, a waiter at a cafe by the unused bridge. "If the other side really opened up, it would be."

Instead, empty storefronts line the streets. Property prices have slumped to around 3,000 yuan (about \$435) per square meter, down from 10,000 yuan during Trump's first term, according to residents and a Reuters review of property records and local media reports.

Four traders in China said logistics with North Korea remain restrictive. "Before the pandemic, our trucks could freely enter North Korea's interior to deliver or pick up goods," said an owner of an eyelash manufacturer with a factory in North Korea. "Now, they can only receive and drop off goods at the North Korean customs."

North Korea's caution about reopening stems partly from frustration that China hasn't done more to relax compliance with UN sanctions, said Lim, of Kyungnam University. Some Dandong residents said North Korea's port-of-entry needs to be completed for the promised "new chapter" to materialize. Qi, a Chinese government official who monitors border trade, told Reuters any improvement will be gradual, but he remains hopeful. "The worst time has passed," said Qi. "It can only get better and better."

China's mediation eases fighting between Pakistan, Afghanistan, sources say

Reuters
Islamabad/Beijing

Chinese mediation efforts, including a message from President Xi Jinping, have helped ease the worst fighting between Pakistan and Afghanistan since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, three Pakistani government officials said.

The officials said a meeting between the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, Jiang Zaidong, and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif late last month included a message from Xi to cease hostilities.

Neither side has reported any Pakistani air strikes on Afghanistan in recent days and ground fighting along the 2,600km border has tapered off, although daily clashes continue to be reported.

China has said it is in contact with both countries about ending hostilities but Mosharraf Zaidi, a spokesman for Sharif who has previously said there would not be any talks with the Taliban, did not respond to questions about Beijing's efforts. Pakistani security officials have said the military campaign will continue until desired goals were achieved, which was to prevent militant attacks in Pakistan launched from Afghan soil.

Pakistan's foreign ministry and military did not respond to Reuters requests for comment.

Islamabad launched air strikes on Afghanistan on February 26, saying the Taliban were providing a safe haven to militants carrying out attacks in Pakistan. Kabul denies the charge and says militancy in Pakistan is an internal problem.

The Chinese efforts came as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye, who hosted talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan during previous clashes in October, have been embroiled in the war in the Middle East following the US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

"China's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Affairs is currently shuttling between the two countries to mediate, while Chinese embassies in both nations maintain close communication with the respective parties," the Chinese foreign ministry told Reuters in an e-mail. "The most urgent task is to prevent the fighting from expanding and for the two countries to return to the negotiating table as soon as possible."

The foreign ministry added that Foreign Minister Wang Yi held telephone talks with Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Tuesday to discuss the conflict.

China's ambassador to Kabul, Zhao Xing, and the special envoy Yue Xiaoyong met Afghanistan's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi this week, the Afghan foreign ministry said in a statement.

Massive protest against Belgian austerity reforms

AFF
Brussels

Tens of thousands of people thronged the streets of Brussels yesterday in the latest mass protest against austerity reforms brought in by Prime Minister Bart De Wever's conservative government.

Police said the march drew 80,000 people — matching the turnout at the last such demonstration in October — while unions put the figure at more than 100,000.

Public transport and government services were also widely disrupted by strike action, with Belgium's two main airports cancelling all scheduled departures due to a shortage of security staff and baggage handlers.

Belgian unions have been mobilised since De Wever took office early last year against government reforms to the pension and unemployment systems.

"This shows people are strongly determined, but also that they are anxious about the geopolitical situation," Marie-Helene Ska, secretary-general of the Christian CSC, one of three unions that called the day of action, told AFP.

"It shows that making ends meet is going to become really difficult with prices going up for basic goods like petrol, diesel, heating products," she said.

Many banners at the march displayed a crossed-out number 67 — the age at which both public and private sector employees will be able to draw a full pension by 2030, as early retirement options are phased out.

The reform is accompanied by a new system



Protesters hold signs as they take part in a demonstration during a national day of action against the austerity plan of the federal government, in Brussels yesterday. (AFP)

of penalties and bonuses that unions say is highly unfavourable to people with stop-start careers, particularly women.

"At 25, I want to plan my life — not just how to survive," read a placard held aloft by a young woman demonstrator.

Belgium's parliament last year also approved a flagship reform limiting unemployment benefits in most cases to two years — after which recipients are switched onto much lower social security payments.

Unions warn it will push thousands of Belgians into poverty, especially in the French-speaking south where the jobless rate is twice as high as in the Dutch-speaking north.

Addressing parliament yesterday, De Wever vowed the government would not back down. "It's our duty to stay the course," he said.

"Failure to do so would be an act of selfishness towards our children and our grandchildren," he told lawmakers.

Dozens of associations joined the march, including the Belgian branch of anti-poverty group ATD Quart Monde — which voiced alarm about the impact of reforming unemployment benefits.

"We fear a huge increase in poverty rather than a return to work," volunteer Baptiste Boulbes told AFP, who said the training offered to get people back into employment was "often extremely limited".

Police said the demonstration passed off peacefully for the most part, although 50 people were briefly detained after "troublemakers" vandalised a bank branch in the city centre.

Hungary returns seized Ukrainian bank vehicles

Reuters
Budapest

Hungary returned two seized armoured bank vehicles to Ukraine yesterday but withheld cash and gold worth approximately \$82 million, citing an investigation into alleged money laundering, a move that Kyiv has denounced as theft. Relations between Hungary and Ukraine, already strained by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's close ties to Russia, reached a new low last week when Hungary detained seven Ukrainians transporting cash and gold.

Kyiv accused Budapest of taking the bank employees, engaged in a legitimate transfer, hostage in order to pressure Ukraine into restarting suspended oil shipments.

Those detained were expelled by Hungary and crossed into Ukraine last Friday.

Ukraine has demanded the return of the seized assets, with Foreign Minister Andrii Sybha on Sunday describing Hungary's actions as an "unprecedented act of state banditism and racketeering".

The detainees' lawyer, Loran Horvath, told reporters yesterday that the Ukrainian bank



Two Ukrainian armoured cash transport vehicles are seen as the Hungary's National Tax and Customs Administration (NAV) returns these vehicles to the State Savings Bank of Ukraine, in Budapest yesterday. (AFP)

believed the money transport was "entirely lawful".

"Oschadbank will use all legal means at its disposal to recover its assets," he said. Hungary's parliament passed a law proposed by Orban's Fidesz party on Tuesday, allowing the tax authority to retain the cash and gold for 60 days while it investigates the origin and destination of the assets and evaluates any implications for Hungary's national security.

The tensions come as Orban faces a serious electoral challenge to his 16-year rule on April 12. He has made the war in Ukraine a central plank of his campaign, saying the centre-right opposition would drag Hungary into the conflict, which the opposition has repeatedly denied.

Orban has also vetoed new EU sanctions on Moscow as well as a huge loan for Ukraine over the oil dispute.

Poland links cyberattack on nuclear centre to Iran

AFF
Warsaw

Poland's National Centre for Nuclear Research has been hit by a cyberattack, likely from Iran, Minister of Digital Affairs Krzysztof Gawkowski said yesterday.

"The attack did not succeed on the scale that had been planned," he said, adding that "a lot indicates that (it) took place from the territory of Iran".

"There was an attempt to breach security, which was stopped," Gawkowski told a podcast for rolling news channel TVN24+. While Gawkowski said that he could not reveal when exactly the attack took place, he said it had been within "the last few days".

He said security services in the

Nato member had been on high alert since the war in the Middle East broke out.

"Incidents have emerged that may be connected to adversaries from that part of the world," he said. The minister said "the places from which" the nuclear centre near the central city of Otwock "was attacked are linked to Iran".

But Gawkowski warned that "this may be a kind of camouflage" and that further investigation was going on. "When there is final information and the (security) services have checked everything, we will verify it," he said.

The debate over nuclear weapons has heightened in Poland, an EU member that borders Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, since the beginning of the Iran conflict and amid the ongoing war in neighbouring Ukraine.

Swiss teen charged with planning 'terrorist attack'

AFF
Geneva

Swiss prosecutors said yesterday they had charged an 18-year-old man suspected of planning a knife attack in the name of the Islamic State group.

The Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland (OAG) said it had charged a Swiss national with "planning a terrorist attack using a knife".

The teenage resident of the northern Swiss canton of Aargau faces charges of "supporting a terrorist organisation, preparing for murder and producing, storing and possessing depictions of violence", the OAG said in a statement.

The man, who was not identified, is suspected of planning "to commit a knife attack in the name of the Islamic State terrorist organisation", it said, adding that "he is said to have

taken the necessary steps to do so".

He was immediately arrested after Swiss federal police informed the attorney general's office last June that it had evidence suggesting he might be planning a terror attack, the OAG said. But he was released from pre-trial detention last December since "the grounds for his detention were no longer met", it said.

The OAG said its investigation had determined the defendant had from around the start of 2025 planned to carry out a "terrorist attack in the name of IS". The scheme had allegedly later evolved into a concrete plan to "carry out a knife attack against randomly-selected victims", it added.

According to the charges brought, the defendant took steps to carry out his plan, including ordering a knife online, and allegedly obtaining relevant instructions.

Attacked Russian gas tanker drifting near Lampedusa

AFF
Rome

The wreck of a Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) carrier attacked off Libya is drifting between Malta and the Italian island of Lampedusa, Malta's port authority said yesterday.

Russian President Vladimir Putin last week accused Kyiv of having carried out a "terrorist attack" on the Arctic Metagaz.

The Libyan port authority said at the time the vessel was hit by "sudden explosions followed by a massive fire, which ultimately led to its complete sinking" north of the port of Sirte.

But official Malta notices to mariners published on Wednesday and yesterday suggest it did not sink entirely.

"The Ports and Yachting Direc-

torate, Transport Malta, notifies all ships that LNG tanker M.T Arctic Metagaz... is not under command and is drifting," it said in yesterday's notice.

It gave co-ordinates putting the ship between Malta and Lampedusa. The day before it had been slightly closer to Malta.

Kyiv did not comment on the attack, which would have been a rare successful hit on a Russian vessel hundreds of miles from Ukraine.

All 30 crew members were rescued, Moscow said.

The ship was sanctioned by the US and the European Union for being one of Russia's so-called "shadow fleet" of ageing tankers that carry its oil and gas around the world, skirting Western restrictions.

The Maltese authorities said mariners should keep five nautical miles away from the wrecked vessel at all times.

Italy says 'temporarily' withdrawing from Iraqi base

AFF
Rome

Italy is temporarily withdrawing all personnel from a military base in Iraqi Kurdistan which came under a drone attack, completing a retreat that was already underway, ministers said yesterday.

"A retreat was already planned" before Wednesday's attack, which caused no injuries, Defence Minister Guido Crosetto told Italian news programme TGI. He stressed it was "only a temporary retreat".

The withdrawal was confirmed by Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani in parliament, after he earlier expressed on X the "strongest condemnation of the drone attack on the Italian base in Erbil".

Italy has soldiers in Erbil training Kurdistan security forces as part of an international force.

Crosetto said 102 personnel had recently returned to Italy from the base, while 141 were present on the base at the time of the drone attack.

Tajani said he had spoken to Kurdistan's regional president

Nechirvan Barzani and stressed it was "essential to exercise prudence and restraint to avoid further escalation".

Stefano Pizzotti, commander at Camp Singara, said the attack happened just after midnight local time — late evening in Rome.

He denied earlier reports that it had been a missile strike. All personnel were already in bunkers following the activation of an air threat alarm, he said in a video statement released by the defence ministry.

Tajani told the Realpolitik television programme late Wednesday that the Italian base was "within a compound which includes other bases from other countries, above all Americans".

"We don't know if (the attack) was aimed at the Italians or at the compound in general," he added.

Drones were shot down on Wednesday over Erbil by the US-led international forces, which are based at Erbil airport, a Kurdish security source said.

AFP journalists reported hearing loud bangs near Erbil airport from air defences engaging drones.

Ukraine, Romania beef up defence ties on Zelensky visit

AFF
Bucharest

Ukraine and Romania yesterday signed a statement of intent to produce drones together in Romania during a visit to Bucharest by President Volodymyr Zelensky aimed at deepening defence co-operation.

Zelensky also offered to develop anti-drone defence systems with Kyiv's European allies.

The visit — followed by a trip to Paris today — comes at a time of

uncertainty over planned peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow that have been spearheaded by the United States and derailed by the US-Israeli war with Iran.

Zelensky and Romanian President Nicusor Dan signed an agreement on the joint production of defence products in Romania, and another on energy co-operation, the two sides said. "We discussed our military co-operation, and one of the documents signed refers to the joint production of drones in Romania," Dan said during a joint press conference.

Both countries will consider drone production in Romania in the "shortest possible time," according to the statement of intent.

The project would be partially funded through the EU's SAFE Initiative with up to 200 million euros (\$230 million), it added.

Nato-member Romania — an important ally of Kyiv's — has seen repeated violations of its airspace, including drone fragments falling onto its soil, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Zelensky, who has dispatched teams to the Gulf to help allies fend

off Iranian drones, offered yesterday to work with European allies to develop their defensive systems. "I think it would be quite good to develop all of this together with European countries, our neighbours, our friends," Zelensky said.

The Ukrainian leader also said the two Black Sea countries were deepening energy ties, noting the construction of two new electricity supply lines. Ukraine has become increasingly dependent on electricity imports from its European neighbours since the start of Russian attacks on its power grid.



Romanian President Nicusor Dan and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hold signed documents about joint drone production, in Bucharest, yesterday. (Reuters)



'We stand with our host'

By Amjad Vanimal
Staff Reporter

Despite the heightened tensions and conflict unfolding across the wider Middle East, daily life in Gulf countries continues largely uninterrupted. 'Gulf Times' spoke with residents across the GCC, many of whom described their host countries as safe, stable environments where communities continue their daily routines with calm and confidence.

Bosco Nicholas Menezes, who has lived in Qatar for more than 45 years, said that while the current developments are unprecedented, the country remains one of the safest places to live.

"As a long-term resident of Qatar, and having witnessed even the Gulf War in the 1990s, these times are indeed unprecedented," Menezes said. "But this country has been my home for most of my life. During unsettling times, we must look out for each other and remain positive."

Menezes also lauded frontline workers and government services for continuing their duties. "My kudos to the security guards, delivery workers, health personnel, the armed forces, and government staff. Special thanks to the municipal workers who continue to keep our streets clean every day," he said.

"Seeing bustling markets and families preparing for Iftar shows the incredible resilience of Kuwait. I feel protected by the proactive measures and advanced defence systems securing our skies"

Karyll Ann Calsado said strong institutions and clear communication from authorities provide reassurance to residents. "As long-term residents, we feel incredibly secure here in Doha despite the regional headlines," she said. "Working within critical sectors, we see firsthand how institutions man-

GCC residents voice confidence in safety amid regional tensions



Moli Divakaran



Rahul Das

"As a long-term resident of Qatar, and having witnessed even the Gulf War in the 1990s, these times are indeed unprecedented. But this country has been my home for most of my life. During unsettling times, we must look out for each other and remain positive"

age contingency protocols, which gives us immense confidence in the country's stability and leadership."

Mega Cervantes echoed similar sentiments, highlighting the role of leadership and communication in maintaining public confidence. "Living here makes me feel safe and reassured every day," he said. "Government alerts and updates keep us informed and prepared, not anxious. I am proud to call this country my home."

Another resident, Sana Nazakat, said living in Qatar has consistently provided a strong sense of security and peace. "We rarely feel unstable or fearful of any threat. The current regional situation has certainly been difficult and has naturally brought moments of anxiety and uncertainty," she said. "However, the resilience shown and the protection and reassurance provided to residents have been remarkable."

The government's consistent communication and reliable updates help people stay informed and calm."

She added that trust in the leadership continues to give residents confidence. "It is natural for people to feel worried at times, but the trust we have in the leadership makes us feel safe and stable. If I had to choose a place to live even

during difficult or war times, I would choose here again."

Residents in other GCC countries also shared similar sentiments, noting that daily life continues calmly despite heightened regional attention.

Ruchika Dubey, a career counsellor and content writer based in Kuwait, said the normal pace of life reflects the country's resilience. "Seeing bustling markets and families preparing for Iftar shows the incredible resilience of Kuwait," she said. "I feel protected by the proactive measures and advanced defence systems securing our skies."

She also expressed gratitude to the security forces working tirelessly and hoped for peace across the region. Moli Divakaran noted that both nationals and expatriates have shown unity in the face of recent tensions.

"The mood is cautious but not panicked," she said. "Daily life continues with calm and determination. People trust the capabilities of the military and security forces to safeguard the country."

In Oman, residents say the country continues to maintain its longstanding reputation for stability and neutrality. Rahul Das, managing editor at *Times of Oman*, said that despite concerns expressed



Bosco Nicholas Menezes



Sana Nazakat



Mega Cervantes



Ruchika Dubey

"Oman has long positioned itself as a nation of peace, following a path of neutrality and dialogue. For those of us who live here, Muscat is not just a place on the map – it is home"

solidarity that exists within the country.

Ahmed Iqbal noted that for many expatriates, the UAE represents far more than just a workplace. "For millions of us, the UAE has become a place where we were able to start fresh, pursue our ambitions, and build a future for our families," he said. "The opportunities and sense of belonging we experience here are truly remarkable."

Another resident, Abdul Karim, said the prevailing atmosphere remains calm and reassuring. "Even during uncertain times, people here remain composed and hopeful," he said. "There is a shared spirit of unity and gratitude that helps everyone move forward with confidence."

Residents in Saudi Arabia also expressed strong confidence in the Kingdom's preparedness and its

ability to maintain stability. Mohammed Ismail said the country's emphasis on planning and security continues to reassure residents. "The Kingdom has always prioritised preparedness and strategic planning," he said. "Because of that, people feel assured that the situation is being managed responsibly and effectively."

He also encouraged the public to rely on verified information rather than speculation. "In times like these, it is important to stay calm and rely on credible sources rather than rumours," he said.

Meanwhile, residents in Bahrain said the situation remains stable, with precautionary measures taken purely as a safety step. Santosh Kumar said daily routines across the country continue without major disruption. "People are going about their usual activities, meeting friends and spending time with family," he said. "The advisories issued by authorities are simply precautionary and meant to ensure everyone's safety."

At the same time, he reflected on the wider human cost of conflicts. "No matter where it happens, conflict always reminds us of the value of peace," Kumar said.

For millions of expatriates who have built their lives in the Gulf, the message is clear: despite regional tensions, the countries they live in remain places of stability, opportunity, and home.

Tale from a bygone era: traditional Ramadan dishes

By Tawfik Lamari
Staff Reporter

In old Qatar, traditional Ramadan utensils reflected people's daily lives and their understanding of simplicity, practicality, and beauty. Every home had a collection of different utensils; each designed for a specific purpose and telling a story about life at that time.

Copper pots were used for cooking, often decorated with simple engravings that added a touch of beauty despite the motifs' simplicity. They could withstand the heat of the fire for extended periods, making them ideal for preparing traditional Ramadan dishes such as Harees or Luqaimat.

Wooden pots, on the other hand, were used to store dates, legumes, or spices. Their warm colours evoked a sense of nostalgia each time they were opened to serve food to the family. Even plates and cups had their own charac-



ter: small earthenware plates for serving food, and wooden or metal cups and spoons for tea or milk.

Each piece was designed to be practical and withstand the intensive daily use during the month of fasting. Each design reflected people's understanding of the ma-

terials available to them and how to utilise them in the best possible ecological way.

Earthenware jars, locally known as "hibb," were the most important containers for those fasting, as they naturally kept water cool. Their cylindrical or oval shape and

porous surface allowed some water to evaporate, forming a steamy layer on the outside of the jar and slightly lowering its temperature.

With the introduction of plastic, steel, and iron in the mid-20th century, container shapes changed, and traditional designs gradually disappeared, much to the regret of older generations.

However, popular memory did not forget them, and some homes still keep earthenware jars or copper pots as mementoes of a simpler and happier time.

Even today, some people prefer to use old containers to serve water or dates.

This story is about small details: the shape of the containers, how they were used, and how the simplicity of the past held practical wisdom and beauty.

It's about Ramadan, which permeates every corner of the home, from the smallest cup of water to the largest cooking pot. Everything tells the story of people's lives and their simple days.

QNL: The library from home – Read for your well-being

Qatar National Library (QNL) has made available a selection of e-books and audiobooks on mental health topics on its digital platform for members, as part of its commitment to raising awareness about mental health, as announced on its X page.

QNL, which also urges community members to adopt more balanced lifestyles, highlighted the importance of taking time to care for one's mental well-being from home.

It encouraged readers to explore a selection of recommended titles that offer perspectives on mindfulness and emotional balance.

These books are available as e-books and audiobooks through the QNL mobile app and website. The library also invited the public to register for free membership, which provides access to its extensive digital collections, including ebooks, audiobooks, and spe-

cialised databases, anytime and anywhere. QNL noted that it also aims to help readers dedicate time to their mental well-being from the comfort of their homes, through informative content that offers practical information and advice to promote mental clarity and maintain psychological balance amidst the pressures of daily life.

The collection includes a variety of books on topics such as stress management, improving quality of life, and fostering positive thinking, in addition to audiobooks that can be easily listened to at any time, providing users with a flexible reading experience that suits their different lifestyles.

The library explained that these materials are available for reading or listening via the QNL app and website, enabling members to access rich content that supports their mental and intellectual well-being wherever they are.

Luma AI CEO warns of 'digital erasure' of cultures

By Shaima Sherif
Staff Reporter

Artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to generate most online content in the near future, and without deliberate efforts to incorporate Middle Eastern cultures into AI models, those cultures risk fading from the digital landscape, an industry expert has warned.

In an interview with *Gulf Times*, Amit Jain, co-founder and CEO of Luma AI, said cultures that are not represented in AI systems today may be erased from tomorrow's digital record. "If we combine three things, our identity living online, AI generating most of that content, and models trained only on existing internet data, then cultures that

are underrepresented risk vanishing," Jain said. "The alternative is that it simply disappears from the internet."

Luma AI, a Palo Alto-based foundation lab, recently raised \$1bn in Series C funding led by HUMAIN and announced plans to build a 2-gigawatt AI super-cluster, Project Halo, to train next-generation "world models". These multimodal systems are designed to understand video, audio and language simultaneously, not just text.

"Text is humanity's interpretation of the universe. Video and audio are records of the physical world. When you combine them, you start building intelligence that understands how the universe functions – and how humans interact with it," Jain explained.

Unlike companies focused solely on text or image models, Luma is building systems capable of reasoning across formats. "We don't train image models or video models," he said. "We train models that are intelligent."

The implications stretch far beyond advertising and entertainment, although Luma's technology has already been used to produce Saudi Arabia's National Day broadcast film with a team of just three people.

"It would have taken six to eight months and up to a million dollars. Three people did it in about a month. It aired on national television," Jain said.

Yet for Jain, the bigger issue is representation: "Right now, our models know the US very well. They know China very well. They know India very well. But

the Arabic world is just coming online. Our models don't fully understand how you look, your customs, your mannerisms."

To address this, Luma is partnering with regional institutions to gather and annotate culturally aligned data, employing local experts to ensure accuracy. "It's really important that AI models understand local customs and cultures. Otherwise, all the content generated will be oblivious to Arabic culture," he stressed.

Jain sees the Mena region and Qatar in particular as critical to AI's global development. "This region is showing leadership. There is hunger, energy and forward thinking. Nations will look very different because of AI," he said.

Beyond media production, Luma's roadmap includes smart



Amit Jain

cities, infrastructure monitoring and robotics. Its world-un-

derstanding models could detect pipeline corrosion, monitor industrial facilities or power intelligent urban systems. "You don't programme them with code. You tell them what to watch for corrosion, anomalies, and they alert you," Jain said.

Jain's advice for startups in the region: "Building AI products is very different from building software; you need to be deeply technical. It's not sufficient to buy an AI domain and say you're an AI company. You need to know your space."

As generative systems accelerate, Jain believes the stakes are civilisational, saying: "In 500 years, people won't know we existed from archaeology. They'll know from the internet. And most of that internet will be generated by AI."