



Qatar Insurance
Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

9% ▲
QAR 9.9B

Net Profit Before the Impact of Piller Two Taxes

19% ▲
QAR 874M

Net Profit Profit attributable to QIC shareholders

9% ▲
QAR 791M

Earnings Per Share:

10% ▲
QAR 0.188

qic-group.com

GULF TIMES



0 688039 136499

SUNDAY Vol. XXXXVI No. 13680

March 15, 2026
Ramadan 26, 1447 AH

www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

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Drones, 4 ballistic missiles neutralised

The Ministry of Defence yesterday announced that Qatar was subjected to an attack involving four ballistic missiles and several drones launched from Iran. In a statement, the ministry said that the Qatar Armed Forces successfully intercepted all the drones and the four ballistic missiles. **(QNA)**

MoI: Evacuation is precautionary

The Ministry of Interior announced that the relevant authorities are evacuating a number of specified areas as a temporary precautionary measure, in the interest of public safety, until the threat has subsided. In a post on the X platform, the ministry urged everyone to rely on official sources for information and to adhere to the issued instructions. **(QNA)**

147 horses flown to Europe

The organising committee of the Doha Equestrian Tours announced yesterday that it had successfully operated two emergency flights from Doha to Europe to safely transport 147 horses participating in the championship, amid the exceptional circumstances currently affecting the region. In a statement, the committee confirmed that the operation was carried out in co-operation with the relevant authorities and partners, in accordance with the highest standards of safety and care, ensuring the well-being of the horses and the participating teams.

Business as usual at Souq Waqif



People stroll, dine and gather at Souq Waqif in Doha as Ramadan winds down, with the familiar evening rhythm of the capital firmly intact despite regional tensions. The bustling scene reflects a sense of normality and public composure as residents and visitors alike go about their business as usual under the warm lights of one of Qatar's most cherished landmarks. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen

MoPH support for ASD kids

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has released a comprehensive safety guide aimed at helping families of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) prepare for and respond to emergency situations. The publication details preventive measures, response protocols, and post-incident support steps designed to ensure the safety and well-being of children with autism. The ministry urged families

to develop a personalised emergency response plan that includes essential medications, a list of the child's specific needs, and a designated family meeting point. It also recommended that children carry an identification card or bracelet displaying their name, contact information, and an indication of their condition. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to prepare an emergency kit containing noise-cancelling headphones, comfort items, and required medications, along with a file of key medical and personal details to facilitate

communication with first responders when needed. According to the MoPH guide, children should be calmly and gradually trained on the agreed plan using visual aids such as cards, symbols, or pictures. Caregivers are advised to teach children simple, practical phrases like "I need help" to make communication easier during stressful situations. During emergencies, the ministry emphasised the importance of maintaining calm, noting that a caregiver's composure directly affects the child's sense of security.

Qatar ensures uninterrupted access to medicines

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring uninterrupted access to medicines for patients across Qatar, backed by a sustainable strategic stockpile aimed at meeting healthcare needs at all times.

Executive Director of Pharmacy at HMC Dr Ameena Jesaimani said the corporation remains keen to guarantee that all patients in the country can obtain their medicines in a secure, smooth and efficient manner. She stressed that HMC pharmacies continue to operate with a strong strategic reserve in place to ensure patient requirements are consistently met.

Dr Jesaimani said patient convenience remains a central part of HMC's approach, noting that medicines continue to be delivered to homes through a service run in co-operation with Qatar Post. Patients can access the service through the Lbaih mobile application or by calling the National Healthcare Helpline 16000,

selecting pharmaceutical services, where a professional team prepares prescriptions and ensures their safe delivery to homes.

The reassurance comes as Qatar's healthcare sector continues to strengthen service continuity and patient support through a broad range of measures introduced in recent weeks. Health authorities have maintained normal operations across facilities while also expanding remote access to care, helping patients receive medical guidance, consultations and follow-up services without unnecessary travel.

Urgent care services have remained available around the clock at a number of health centres for patients with non-life-threatening conditions, while telephone and video consultations have continued to offer added convenience, particularly for families, the elderly and those managing chronic illnesses.

Nurse-led support services have also helped direct patients to the most appropriate level of care, ensuring timely medical attention and easing pressure on emergency departments. **To Page 2**

Portrait of a united nation

By Kamran Rehmat
Doha

When Iranian missiles began striking Qatar in the early hours of March 1, the country faced one of the most profound tests in its modern history. The irony was bitter: Qatar had spent years building diplomatic bridges between Tehran and the West, only to find itself targeted within an hour of the war's outbreak. Yet rather than be consumed by anger, Doha made a deliberate and consistent choice — to keep talking, keep the shelves stocked, and keep its people calm.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani did not mince words in an interview with Sky News. "It is a big sense of betrayal," he said. "Just an hour after the start of the war, Qatar and other Gulf countries were attacked — we made clear that we were not going to take part in any wars against our neighbours."

And yet, in the same breath, he made clear that betrayal would not alter Qatar's

fundamental posture. The crisis could not be resolved through further military escalation, he stressed: "We continue to seek de-escalation. They are our neighbours — it's our destiny."

That posture has been consistent throughout. Qatar had played a leading role in the negotiations and joined GCC nations in pushing hard for a diplomatic solution before the war began. When those efforts failed, its diplomatic machinery shifted into higher gear rather than standing down. The prime minister chaired the Qatari delegation at a joint GCC-European Union video summit to discuss pathways back to dialogue, while Qatar received dozens of calls from world leaders expressing solidarity.

HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al-Khulaifi, speaking to Al Jazeera, urged both Iran and the United States to return to the negotiating table, pointing out that Iran's attacks on its neighbours brought "benefit for no-one." His most pointed observation: Iran had struck the very countries — Qatar and Oman — that had served as its bridges to the West. "We will not be able to fulfil that role under attack, and that's some-

QATAR UNBROKEN: RESILIENCE AND RESOLVE IN THE FACE OF CRISIS

A unified, calm, and strategic response to external aggression across diplomatic, military, and economic spheres.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP & NATIONAL DEFENCE

- Committed to Diplomatic De-escalation**
HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani continues to prioritise dialogue.
- Defensive Readiness of the Qatar Amiri Air Force**
The Air Force successfully intercepted multiple threats, including Su-24 bombers and drone strikes.
- Precision Public Warning Systems**
The National Warning System is used selectively to provide precise guidance and prevent alert fatigue.

ECONOMIC STABILITY & SOCIAL COHESION

- 200+ Tons of Essential Imports Daily**
Qatar Airways repurposed its freighter fleet to maintain a constant flow of vital supplies.
- 24-Hour Retail Branches: 33 Locations**
- Market Stability & Price Protections**
The Ministry of Commerce extended 24-hour operations to 33 branches to ensure supply availability.
- Initial Emergency Supplies: 300 Tons**

In response to unexpected regional strikes, Qatar has maintained a stance of diplomatic de-escalation while activating robust defence and supply-chain protocols. The nation's response is defined by a unified front between the government and its people, ensuring stability and safety.

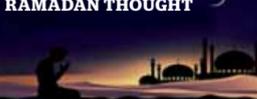
A Portrait of Social Cohesion
Citizens and residents have unified to amplify verified information and reject misinformation.

thing the Iranians need to understand." HE the Adviser to the Prime Minister and Spokesperson of the Ministry of For-

eign Affairs Dr Majed al-Ansari reinforced the message, recalling that Doha had warned for years that uncontrolled esca-

lation would end disastrously, and that it was still not too late for dialogue to contain the damage. **To Page 11**

RAMADAN THOUGHT



Had We sent down this Qur'an on a mountain, you would surely have seen it humbling itself and rent asunder by the fear of Allah. Such are the parables which We put forward to mankind that they may reflect. **(Qur'an 59: 21)**

Prayer times

Fajr...4:26; Zuhr...1:43; Asr...3:08; Maghrib...5:46; Isha...7:16

Fasting times

Iftar today5:46pm
Imsak tomorrow.....4:15am

Expert on how to spot disinformation in a crisis

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

When a crisis erupts — a war, a pandemic, a disaster — the truth is often the first casualty. Before facts can be verified, social media floods with unverified claims, staged footage, and deliberately engineered falsehoods designed not to inform, but to provoke. And the faster you feel compelled to share something, the more likely you are being manipulated. False information spreads very

aggressively during an urgent and emotionally charged situation such as a conflict, pandemic or a war, an internationally acclaimed Qatar Foundation (QF) expert in media analytics has noted. "In crises, we crave for more information to make sense of what's going on but we are also inundated with information and it becomes hard to process," Dr Marc Owen Jones, associate professor at Northwestern University in Qatar, part of QF, told *Gulf Times* in an exclusive interview. "When a crisis hits, information floods in faster than anyone can



Dr Marc Owen Jones

process it. Social media is filled with images, claims, and stories, many of them unverified, some of them deliberately false, or propaganda. "News alerts compete with viral posts, eyewitness videos with staged footage, and by the time a correction is issued, the original false claim has already reached millions," Dr Jones said. He noted that the term "fake news" is too blunt a term for what happens: "There are meaningful differences between types of false content and recognising them helps you respond appropriately." The professor underlined that

while misinformation is false content shared without the intent to deceive or cause harm, disinformation is deliberately constructed and strategically deployed. "Organised groups, sometimes state-backed, sometimes politically motivated, create false narratives, manufacture fake accounts, and flood platforms with content designed to shift opinion, manufacture outrage, or simply make the truth harder to find. In wartime, this is especially true. Disinformation can be designed to create panic, chaos and fear," he explained. **To Page 11**

From Page 1

Qatar ensures uninterrupted access to medicines

Prescription access has been further supported through digital channels, making it easier for patients to request refills, manage appointments and obtain key health services remotely. These steps reflect a wider emphasis on

combining direct care with technology-driven solutions to improve access, efficiency and patient comfort. At the same time, Qatar has continued to reinforce the resilience of its wider healthcare supply system.

Efforts to protect the steady flow of medicines and medical supplies have been supported by strong logistics planning, co-ordination across institutions and the availability of alternative transport arrangements when needed.

This has helped ensure that essential healthcare goods continue to reach hospitals, clinics and patients without disruption. The country has also pressed ahead with longer-term health priorities, in-

cluding preventative care, regulatory improvements and community health initiatives. Public institutions and partner entities have continued to invest in programmes that support quality treatment, early intervention and safer, more accessible services for the population.

SJC confirms continuity of judicial work

The Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) has affirmed that judicial work will continue efficiently amid the current conditions through the constant convening of all judicial hearings at courts virtually.

It said operating the remote litigation system ensures the continuous adjudication of cases and electronic issuance of rulings based on the highest standards of organisation and efficiency in judicial procedures.

The SJC highlighted in a statement yesterday that it continues to enforce the mechanism for sharing video hearing links via text messages as part of the service of process, enabling litigants and parties to appear at remote hearings at their scheduled times.

This is alongside maintaining the orderly conduct of proceedings in accordance with applicable court rules.

It also continues the electronic entry of judgments through the court's portal, receiving various applications and requests, and enabling users to submit filings and access judicial services through the courts' electronic filing systems, the statement read.

These systems, the SJC said, include the electronic portal, smartphone court application, as well as the "Taqadi" Platform and virtual employee service via WhatsApp.

The Council further noted that this fully flexible transition to remote litigation and electronic rulings demonstrates the effectiveness of the litigation system, which had been upgraded throughout the first phase of the National Initiative for the Development of Justice Systems, as part of the digital transformation path and modernisation of judiciary services.

Streamlined litigation procedures, the SJC added, accelerate transaction completion and enable litigants to follow up on their requests with flexibility and efficiency, ultimately fostering the quality of services and ensuring the sustainability of judicial performance under a variety of circumstances.

As such, Court of Appeal president Judge Sultan al-Dosari said, judicial hearings at the court have continued throughout the current situation, convening remotely while taking into account the circumstances facing parties in various criminal, labour, civil, and

family judicial divisions. He said that since March 1, 2026, the court has scrutinised over 409 lawsuits.

Investment and Trade Court president Judge Khalid bin Ali al-Obaidly said that the court has expanded the remote communication system during the current period to encompass all appeals chambers as well as trial chambers.

The Court continued to carry out its functions at full capacity, ensuring the continued conduct of hearings, exchange of written submissions, and issuance of rulings electronically, al-Obaidly added, noting that since March 1, the Court has considered more than 1,600 cases.

Court of First Instance president Judge Ghanem al-Humaidi said that the court has transitioned all its hearings to remote litigation, adding that since March 1, the court held over 149 hearings and scrutinised over 2,524 lawsuits remotely, in addition to receiving requests and services via the SJC's portal and official channels, whose total electronic submissions reached over 8,596 requests and services.



The Court of Execution stated that it continues to provide in-person services to the public, in addition to offering a full range of electronic court services.

Court of Execution president Dr Ibrahim al-Mohannadi emphasised the Court's commitment to conducting family case enforcement proceedings through the relevant judicial divisions and the Child Custody Office remotely, ensuring that proceedings are carried out without prejudice to the parties.

He noted that the Court has heard more than 85 cases remotely.

Furthermore, judicial sales continued, alongside the execution of court registry orders, including the collection and disbursement of funds, without prejudice to the rights of the litigants.

The total proceeds from judicial sales amounted to QR9,820,100 in favour of 1,841 cases.

The SJC indicated that during the first week of March, the number of deposits into the court registry reached 693 totaling QR54,918,602, while the total receipts of funds amounted to 1,863 receipts valued at QR27,889,801, and the number of disbursement vouchers was 1,036, totaling QR15,918,399.

The chief judge of the Electronic Justice Team, Khalid al-Mansouri, underlined that digital transformation in litigation procedures, alongside the full SJC infrastructure preparation, has helped ensure remote functioning

SJC takes part in New York session on women's representation

The Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) has participated in an international session held in New York City via videoconference, organised by the International Association of Women Judges in co-operation with the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women, to discuss ways to enhance women's representation in the judiciary.

In remarks during the session, Judge Dr Hessa al-Sulaiti, senior judge of the Court of Appeals and chair of the working group on enhancing women's representation in the judiciary in Qatar, reviewed Qatar's experience and the efforts undertaken to support women's participation in judicial work and strengthen their presence in the judicial corps. - QNA

Qatar strongly condemns second attack on UAE consulate in Iraq's Kurdistan region

Qatar expressed its condemnation and denunciation in the strongest possible terms of the attack that targeted, for the second time, the consulate general of the United Arab Emirates in Iraq's Kurdistan region, describing it as a rejected act and a flagrant violation of international norms and conventions that guarantee the protection of diplomatic missions and their premises.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that targeting diplomatic missions and headquarters amounts to a clear violation of

the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, as well as a perilous escalation that threatens the security and safety of those operating in the diplomatic corps and undermines the internationally recognised rules of diplomatic action.

The ministry reaffirmed Qatar's firm position rejecting all acts of violence and terrorism targeting diplomatic missions or undermining security and stability, stressing its solidarity with the UAE and its support for all efforts aimed at enhancing security and stability in Iraq and the region. - QNA

of hearings without prejudice to the parties.

He noted that the courts have undergone a complete transition to remote operations, while continuing to receive filings through electronic court services.

In addition, al-Mansouri said, the commercial dispute resolution committees continue to operate via the court system, with the Court of Cassation holding virtual hearings, while decisions and judgments are issued on schedule.

In terms of family documentation services, the head of the Family Documentation Department at the Family Court, Judge Dr Khalid al-Roumi, said that all family services are ongoing through electronic systems, in addition to holding remote probate hearings via video link technology, under the SJC's court continuity plan.

He pointed out that statistics

show that more than 708 applications and services were submitted and processed through the family documentation system, alongside the hearing of more than 138 cases remotely.

Dr al-Roumi stressed that all courts are committed to executing the guidance manual for remote court proceedings, which establishes the procedures and standards for the use of video conferencing technology.

This, he said, includes the organisation of proceedings before and during hearings, the provision of technical requirements, and the ensuring of recording, information security, and data protection, thereby safeguarding the integrity of judicial procedures and ensuring the continuity of court operations in accordance with the highest standards of efficiency and quality. - QNA

We extend our heartfelt greetings to

His Highness
Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani
Amir of the State of Qatar

His Highness
Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani
Father Amir

His Highness
Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Thani
Deputy Amir

and to all the honorable people of Qatar
on the occasion of

EID AL FITR

We hope for more returns of this memorable occasion and wish that Qatar always enjoys security, welfare and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness The Amir

Security is a great blessing

The greatest favour of Allah upon people after Eemaan is well-being and safety. Safety is the opposite of fear and is a source of peace and tranquillity for the heart.

With safety and security, Man has no fear over his religion, life, honour, wealth and rights. Safety is one of the fundamentals of human life. There will not be any prosperity or progress without it.

What is the value of money with no safety? What is the essence of good life in the absence of peace? How can life be activated without it?

It is under the atmosphere of safety that one has aspirations and peace of mind on the fruits of one's labour.

It is under the shade of security that different useful human activities abound, interests and benefits are exchanged, different activities that men need proliferate, good things freely flow and roads become safe.

It is safety that makes the economy of a society boom, increases it in crops and livestock, protects its lives, properties and rights, facilitates means of sustenance, increases its infrastructure and makes it prosper in all aspects of its life.

Allah the Almighty has graciously bestowed mankind with the blessing of safety and reminds them of it that they may thank Him for it and worship Him under it.

He says: "Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary, to which are brought fruits of all kinds, provisions from Ourselves, but most of them know not." (Al-Qasas: 57)

The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam, also made mention of the importance of security when he said: "Whoever wakes up in the morning feeling secure in his house, sound in his body and possesses his daily bread is like one who has the whole world at his disposal." (At-Tirmithi)

Islam takes great care of security in any of its societies by making ordainments, prohibiting mischief and evil acts and prescribing deterring punishments.

Allah says: "Help you one another in virtue, righteousness and piety; but do not help one another in sin and transgression." (Al-Maa'idah: 2)

Allah also informs us that safety belongs to those who do good deeds, are upright in guidance of Islam and keep away from mischief and evil deeds when He says: "It is those who believe and confuse not their belief with wrong (by worshipping others besides Allah). For them (only) there is security and they are the guided." (Al-An'aam: 82)

Whenever he saw the new moon, the Prophet used to say: "O Allah, let this crescent loom above us in safety, faith, peace and Islam. Make it a crescent of good and guidance. My Lord and your Lord is Allah."

Therefore safety is a great blessing.

Where there is no safety life becomes corrupt and people live miserable lives. Their condition worsens and all things turn upside-down for them; fear then replaces security; hunger replaces good living, anarchy replaces unity; injustice and aggression replace justice and mercy.

May Allah give us well-being by His grace and favour!

You should thank Allah and praise Him for this favour of safety and His other apparent and hidden favours by always obeying Him and abstaining from all prohibited things.

Fear Allah, for fear of Allah is the best provision and the source of your victory in this world and the next.

Allah's favours on you are many and great and there are those who are jealous of Allah's favours on you.

He commands you to be grateful to Him and promises increase in favour.

He says: "And remember when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you give thanks, I will give you more (of my blessings), but if you are thankless, verily, My punishment is indeed severe.'" (Ibraahim: 7)

Ibn Abbaas narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: "Observe the rights of Allah upon you, Allah will protect you; observe the rights of Allah, you will find Him in front of you (i.e. He will guide you). When you ask, ask of Allah, and when you seek for assistance, seek it from Allah. When the whole of mankind agree to benefit you with something, they cannot benefit you except with something that Allah has decreed for you, and know that when they agree to harm you, they cannot do you any harm except that which Allah has decreed upon you. The pens have been raised and the pages have dried." (At-Tirmithi)

Man observes the rights of Allah by observing His obligations and commandments and abstaining from all that He forbids.

When Man observes all this, Allah will protect him, graciously bestow His favour upon him and drive away calamities from him.

Therefore, fulfil your obligation to your Lord, He will also fulfil His promise.

[Excerpts from Khutbah]

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Iran vows to retaliate against region for US Kharg Island attack

Reuters
Dubai/Jerusalem

Iran threatened yesterday to escalate the war raging in the Middle East by targeting any facility in the region with US ties, after Washington bombed its main energy hub and US President Donald Trump predicted "many countries" would send warships.

As the conflict entered its third week, Iran projected defiance after US forces hit military sites at Kharg Island, which handles 90% of Iranian oil exports. A drone attack had already disrupted a United Arab Emirates energy hub and the US embassy in Baghdad warned US citizens to leave Iraq.

Since Israel and the US began attacking Iran on February 28, the war has killed more than 2,000 people, mostly in Iran, and created the biggest-ever oil supply disruption, pushing up global prices.

At least 15 people were killed when an airstrike hit a refrigerator and heater factory in the central Iranian city of Isfahan, the semi-official Fars news agency said yesterday.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment. Some oil-loading operations have been suspended in the UAE's Fujairah emirate, a global ship-refuelling hub, industry and trade sources said yesterday, with TV footage showing plumes of dark smoke rising into the air.

An Iranian military spokesperson called on people in the UAE to evacuate ports, docks, and "American hideouts," saying US forces had targeted Iranian islands from those areas.

Trump said many countries would send warships to allow shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for 20% of the world's oil. He did not provide details on which would do so, but in his Truth Social post, he said he hoped China, France, Japan, South Korea, Britain and others would send vessels.



An Iranian man, Parsa, goes into his house, which was destroyed by a strike, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Tehran, yesterday. (Reuters)



Family members and relatives of Ali Shamkhani, Iran's slain influential security adviser, gather during his funeral at the Imamzadeh Saleh shrine in Tajrish square in northern Tehran, yesterday. (AFP)

"Many countries, especially those who are affected by Iran's attempted closure of the Hormuz Strait, will be sending warships, in conjunction with the US of America, to keep the Strait open and safe," Trump wrote.

"In the meantime, the US will be bombing the hell out of the shoreline, and continually shooting Iranian boats and ships out of the water," he wrote.

Asked for comment on Trump's post, a British Ministry of Defence spokesperson said: "As we've said previously, we are currently discussing with our allies and partners a range of options to ensure the security of

shipping in the region."

Trump has threatened to strike the oil infrastructure of Kharg Island unless Tehran stops attacking vessels in the Strait of Hormuz.

He said on Friday the US had "totally obliterated" military targets there. US Central Command later said it hit more than 90 sites on Kharg, including naval mine storage facilities, missile storage bunkers and other military targets.

Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, who replaced his slain father, has said the Strait of Hormuz should remain closed. Separately, Iranian Foreign

Minister Abbas Araqchi dismissed speculation from US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth that Khamenei was wounded and likely disfigured. "There is no problem with the new supreme leader. He sent his message yesterday, and he will perform his duties," Araqchi told MS Now.

Khamenei has not appeared in public, instead issuing a statement on Thursday read by a television presenter.

Iran played down the extent of the damage on Kharg Island while threatening to step up its use of more powerful weapons and warning that parts of the UAE were legitimate targets.

"We declare to the leaders of the UAE that Iran considers it a legitimate right to defend its national sovereignty and territory by targeting the origin of American enemy missile launches in the shipping ports, docks, and military shelters of the US hidden in some cities of the UAE," a spokesperson for Iran's Revolutionary Guards said.

Araqchi said Iran would respond to any attack on its energy facilities and warned it would target US companies in the region or companies in which the US had shares.

Some oil loading operations 'suspended after fire in Fujairah'

Reuters
Dubai

Some oil-loading operations have been suspended in the United Arab Emirates' Fujairah emirate, a major bunkering hub and crude export terminal, after a drone attack and fire yesterday, industry and trade sources said.

The suspension comes hours after the US attacked military targets on Iran's Kharg Island oil export terminal and Iran's Revolutionary Guards responded by saying that US interests in the UAE - including ports, docks and military locations - were legitimate targets.

Fujairah, outside the Strait of Hormuz, is the outlet for about 1mn barrels per day of the UAE's Murban crude oil - a volume equal to about 1% of world demand. A witness in Fujairah saw two separate columns of smoke rising from the terminal. Reuters could not immediately establish the impact on loadings.

"The IRGC is sending a message that there is no safe harbour in this rapidly expanding conflict," said Helima Croft, analyst at RBC Capital. "The fact this comes

hours after the US strike on Kharg Island also signals that Tehran will not let Washington control the terms of escalation and impose dominance."

Earlier this week, the International Energy Agency said the world is facing its biggest ever oil supply crisis due to the effective closing of the Strait of Hormuz, a channel along the Iranian coast, since the US and Israel began airstrikes on Iran on February 28, with the UAE among producers forced to cut oil output.

The fire in Fujairah occurred after debris fell during the interception of a drone, but no injuries were reported, the emirate's media office said. Civil defence forces are handling the incident to contain the fire, it added. Authorities did not provide any information about the suspension of operations.

Abu Dhabi state oil giant Adnoc, which operates in the emirate, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

On Tuesday, Adnoc shut its Ruwais refinery in response to a fire at a facility within the complex following a drone strike, a source with knowledge of the situation said, in further disruption of energy infrastructure due to the US-Israeli war on Iran.



Smoke rises from the direction of an energy installation in the Gulf emirate of Fujairah, UAE, yesterday. (AFP)

Kuwait condemns attack on UAE consulate

Kuwait strongly condemned and denounced the recent attack on the United Arab Emirates consulate in Iraqi Kurdistan, marking the second such incident in a week, which resulted in injuries to several security personnel and damage to the building, QNA reported from Kuwait City.

In a statement yesterday, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that targeting diplomatic missions and compounds constitutes a reprehensible breach of international law and diplomatic norms, particularly the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963). The ministry reiterated Kuwait's rejection of these ongoing assaults, emphasising that it stands in full solidarity with the United Arab Emirates and supports all measures that strengthen the protection of its diplomatic missions and ensure the safety of those operating within them. Earlier, the UAE slammed the targeting of its consulate in Iraqi Kurdistan, AFP reported. "The United Arab Emirates

expressed its strong condemnation and denunciation of the treacherous terrorist attack by a drone, which targeted the UAE Consulate General in Iraqi Kurdistan, for the second time in a week, and resulted in the injury of two security personnel and caused damage to the consulate building," the foreign ministry statement said. Iraq's Kurdistan regional government later denounced the attack, labelling it "a terrorist act that threatens the sovereignty of Kurdish and Iraqi territory". It urged Baghdad to fulfil its responsibility and put an end to the activities of "armed groups and militias targeting residents" in the Kurdistan region and across Iraq. Iraq had said it did not want to be dragged into the war, which began on February 28 when Israel and the US launched strikes against Iran, but it has not been spared. It was drawn into the conflict from the outset, with strikes blamed on the US and Israel targeting foreign-backed groups, which have since claimed attacks on US bases in Iraq, including Kurdistan, and the wider region.

UN chief says 'diplomatic avenues' available to stop war in Lebanon

AFP
Beirut

UN chief Antonio Guterres said yesterday on a visit to Beirut that diplomatic channels remained open to end the war between Israel and Hezbollah and urged the international community to support Lebanon.

Lebanon was dragged into the Middle East war last week when Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli strikes, and the Tehran-backed group's leader has said the fighters were ready for a long confrontation with Israel.

Yesterday, Israel kept up strikes on Lebanon as Hezbollah claimed attacks against northern Israel and Beirut said the death toll in the country since March 2 had climbed to 826, including 106 children.

US news site Axios reported yesterday that Israel was planning a major ground invasion of Lebanon "aiming to seize the entire area south of the Litani River", citing US and Israeli officials.

The area, covering hundreds of square miles, is already subject to Israeli evacuation warnings.

Guterres, however, insisted "there is no military solution, only diplomacy" and dialogue.

The UN chief arrived in Beirut on Friday for what he called



A photograph shows a destroyed healthcare centre building in the aftermath of an Israeli strike in the southern Lebanese town of Burj Qalawiya, yesterday. (AFP)

a solidarity visit, and launched a \$325mn humanitarian appeal to support Lebanon as it responds to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people amid sweeping Israeli army evacuation orders.

Guterres urged the international community to "step up your engagement, empower the Lebanese state" and support the army, which has committed to disarming Hezbollah.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said that Ankara feared Israel could commit "genocide" in Lebanon and called for the international community to intervene. Turkiye has been fiercely critical of Israel since the start of the Gaza war.

The health ministry said 31 paramedics had been killed this

month, after the bodies of additional health workers were found following an overnight strike that authorities said hit a healthcare centre in Burj Qalawiya in the country's south, killing doctors, paramedics and nurses.

The Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Health Committee said the centre was one of its facilities, pledging such attacks would not deter it from "performing our humanitarian duty".

The Israeli military accused Hezbollah of using ambulances militarily, and its spokesman Avichay Adraee warned that Israel would act "in accordance with international law against any military activity" by any Hezbollah use of medical facilities or ambulances.

**GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS
NATIONAL HIGHWAY AUTHORITY
(PROCUREMENT & CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION SECTION)**

TENDER NO. 6(676)

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

1. National Highway Authority (NHA) of Pakistan is currently executing 71x Highways/Motorways Development Projects amounting to the tune of PKR 3.4 Trillion (Approx. 12 Billion USD). In order to establish a Pool/Roster of Consultants, NHA intends to shortlist competent and qualified individual consultants and Firms/Companies for the following services:

S#.	AREA OF EXPERTISE
1.	Traffic Engineering & Modelling
2.	Planning and Design of Urban Roads/viaducts in Mega Cities
3.	Tunnel Engineering
4.	Slope Stability in Mountainous Regions
5.	Landscaping/Horticulture
6.	Architecture (with Expertise in Façade Design, Toll Plazas, Service Areas)
7.	Transaction Advisory Services for PPP projects (Financial Consulting Firms having expertise in preparing/review of Technical & Commercial Feasibilities, evaluating Technical and Financial Bids, Concession Agreements and Financial Close Activities. Financial Consultants can Associate/make JVs with Technical/Legal Firms for Technical/Legal Input)
8.	Business Development (To Develop Commercial use of ROW/Road Amenities)
9.	Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS)
2. NHA invites interested Individual Consultants and Consultants Firms, including joint ventures, to submit Expressions of Interest (EOI) in accordance with the EOI Document available on the NHA website. At this stage, International Consultants and Firms may submit EOIs independently, without forming a joint venture with local Pakistani Firms.

**PREREQUISITES FOR SHORTLISTING
INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANTS**

- Bachelor's Degree or higher in a relevant field (Master's/PHD Preferred).
- Valid Professional registration in home country (local registration, if required, prior to contract award).
- National Tax Registration Number with Active Taxpayer Status. Tax registration to be completed in Pakistan, if required, prior to contract award.
- Minimum 10 years of Relevant Experience.
- Undertaking by the Individual Consultant on a Legal Paper/Stamp Paper that he/she is not blacklisted by any Government Entity, State-Owned Organization or Multilateral/International Financial Institution.

FIRMS/COMPANIES

- Registration with the relevant professional body international firms must be duly registered in their home country and obtain local registration, if required, prior to contract award.
- Legal incorporation/registration of the firm, with equivalent documentation for International Firms and compliance with Local requirements, where applicable.
- National Tax Registration Number with active taxpayer status; International Firms shall obtain registration with Pakistan's Tax Authorities prior to contract award, if required.
- Undertaking by the Firm/Company on a Legal Paper/Stamp Paper/Letter Head that it is not blacklisted by any Government Entity, State-Owned Organization or Multilateral/International Financial Institution.

3. Shortlisting of Individual Consultants and Firms/Companies will be done in accordance with the criteria defined in EOI Document. List of individual consultants and Firms/Companies will be valid for calendar year 2026. Shortlisting of any individual consultant and Firm/Company does not guarantee award of work and it depends upon availability of assignment and evaluation of proposal(s) submitted by consultant(s) for a specific work at a later stage.
4. Expressions of Interest must be submitted by **23 April, 2026 at 1100 Hours (PST)** either in hard copy or electronically. EOIs will be opened on the same day at **1130 Hours (PST)**.
5. Any clarification may be sought from the office of the General Manager (P&CA) NHA, at least Fifteen (15) Days prior to the EOI Submission Deadline.

GENERAL MANAGER (P&CA)
National Highway Authority
PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION SECTION
Address: 2nd Floor, NHA-HQ, 28-Mauve Area, Sector G-9/1, Islamabad, Pakistan
Tel: +92-51-9032727 | Email: gmpca@nha.gov.pk | Website: www.nha.gov.pk

Palestinian actor says he can't attend Oscars because of US travel ban

Reuters
Washington

Palestinian actor Motaz Malhees said a travel ban imposed by the Trump administration is preventing him from attending this weekend's Academy Awards, whose nominees include a movie in which he has a starring role.

The Voice of Hind Rajab, a film about a five-year-old Palestinian girl killed by Israeli forces in Gaza in 2024, has been Oscar-nominated for best international feature film.

Malhees, who plays the role of a call centre operator attempting to help her, said he cannot attend the Academy Awards show, known as the Oscars, because he has been barred from entering the US.

"I am not allowed to enter the United States because of my Palestinian citizenship," Malhees said on Instagram, adding "it hurts" he would not attend the Oscars.

In a December proclamation restricting entry of foreign nationals, President Don-

ald Trump said he had "determined to fully restrict and limit the entry of individuals using travel documents issued or endorsed by the Palestinian Authority."

The proclamation restricting entry of people from some countries cited security reasons and went into effect on January 1, according to the State Department's website.

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

The movie was spurred by an incident in which five of Rajab's family members and two ambulance workers who went to save her were also killed by Israeli fire. Israel says the incident is under review.

Malhees says the film's other Palestinian cast members have citizenship that allows US travel but he only holds a Palestinian passport.

Trump has also attempted to deport foreign pro-Palestinian voices from the United States. On Friday, an immigration judge ordered the release of Leqaa Kordia, who lost over 170 family members in Gaza and has been detained for a year.

Gaza civil defence says Israeli strikes kill six

AFP
Gaza City

Gaza's civil defence agency said yesterday that Israeli strikes had killed six people over the past 24 hours, the latest bout of violence in the territory against the backdrop of the US-Israeli war with Iran.

In a pre-dawn strike yesterday, two policemen and a civilian were killed in the southern city of Khan Yunis, the agency reported.

A strike on a group of civilians on Friday evening in eastern Gaza City killed three people, whose bodies were taken to the territory's main Al-Shifa hospital, the agency said.

When contacted by AFP, the Israeli military did not offer an immediate response.

Violence has continued in the Palestinian territory despite a ceasefire since October 10, and even as Israel continues its air campaign against Iran since February 28.

FIVE INJURED IN WEST BANK ATTACK

Israeli settlers injured five Palestinians, including two with gunshot wounds, in a fresh attack against a village in the occupied West Bank, a Palestinian official said yesterday, while the military reported a 'violent confrontation' in the area, AFP reported from Ramallah.

Palestinian news agency Wafa said a group of settlers attacked in the area of Rashayda, near the village of Kisan, "fir-



Mourners attend the funeral of Palestinians killed in an overnight Israeli strike, according to medics, at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. (Reuters)

ing live ammunition?" Musa Abayat, the mayor of the area east of Bethlehem, told AFP that two people were hospitalised with gunshot wounds and three others beaten with sharp objects or hit by stones.

"The settlers also stole 100 sheep," Abayat said, decrying "daily attacks" by settlers in this part of the West Bank.

The Israeli military said there was a "violent confrontation" involving Israeli civilians who fired toward Palestinians.

"As a result of the incident, an Israeli

civilian was injured and evacuated to the hospital for medical treatment," it said in a statement to AFP.

"Two additional Palestinians were evacuated by the Red Crescent for medical treatment." Israeli police had detained two Israeli civilians who fired their weapons, while three Palestinians were also apprehended, the military added. There has been a spike in deadly settler attacks in the West Bank in recent days, with at least five Palestinians killed since the start of March, according to Palestinian authorities and the UN.

Iraqis try to carry on as missiles fly

AFP
Baghdad

Hours before strikes hit Iraq's capital, crowds milled in central Baghdad to the sound of missiles but clinking coffee cups, children laughing and women filming TikToks.

While Iraqis have grown accustomed to conflict over the decades, this has not diminished their anxiety about a wider war.

"Life seems normal here, but it isn't really," said Karim al-Aqabi, 65, as he strolled with two friends down Al-Mutanabi Street, famous for its booksellers and performers.

"Instead of listening to music, we listen to the news constantly," said the father of three, gesticulating to emphasise his point, told AFP.

Shortly after the US-Israeli attack on Tehran on February 28, Iraq closed its airspace.

Within hours, warplanes and missiles arriving from every direction filled its skies, and the country became a chaotic danger zone with air strikes on Iranian-backed militias, attacks targeting US interests and Iranian strikes against exiled Kurdish opposition groups.

In Iraq, successive governments have long struggled to maintain a delicate



A shop owner packs a carpet for his customer near the Citadel of Erbil, yesterday (AFP)

balance between Tehran and Washington. Now, once again, Iraqis are watching their nation become a proxy battleground between the two rivals.

The oil-rich country has spent much of the past four decades devastated by conflict and international sanctions, including a bloody sectarian struggle that followed the US-led 2003 invasion which toppled ruler Saddam Hussein and the emergence of militants.

Aqabi lived through the eight-year Iran-Iraq war in the Eighties. "Even then, we didn't abandon our country," he said.

He said Iraqis would weather this latest conflict, too. "I will not leave my city even if we are ordered to evacuate. I will not leave even if my home remains bur-

ied under the rubble." But his sentiment isn't shared by all: Mariam Ahmed, 22, hasn't left her home without her brother since the war began.

She spoke to AFP inside a smart new shopping centre off Al-Mutanabi street, a shiny complex which has become emblematic of Baghdad's partial recovery.

"I feel extremely worried and sad about what's happening," she said, describing how she had repeatedly heard warplanes.

"We don't deserve this," she said. The strikes early yesterday, which killed three members of a militia, were the first in the heart of Baghdad since the start of the war. Shortly after, a drone hit the US embassy.

INVITATION TO TENDER

ORyx GTL Limited is pleased to announce the following tender(s):

S. No.	Tender Ref.	Tender Title	Tender Bond (QAR)	Bid Closing Date & Tender Bond Validity Period
1	TC-CN-023-25-IT	Physical Surveillance Control MOC-003126	136,200/-	08 April 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days
2	TC-CN-009-26-EN	Call-Off Contract for Engineering Consultancy and Support Services	408,000/-	29 April 2026 at 12.00 noon & 180 days

Companies wishing to register their interest and obtain Tender Document(s) for the above Tender(s) must pay a non-refundable registration fee and register with ORYX GTL as detailed below:

Tender Registration Fee	Not Applicable
Payable to	ORYX GTL Limited
IBAN (29 Digits)	QA23QNBAA000000000013010705001
Bank	Qatar National Bank – HQ or any branch (cash only)
Registration Dates	From 15 Mar 2026 to 26 Mar 2026
Registration Process and Requirements:	Write an e-mail to oryxgtltenders@oryxglt.qa with the following attachments: 1. Copy of Commercial Registration (CR) 2. Copy of bank deposit slip of the Tender Registration Fee. 3. Copy of ICV Certificate

COMPANIES WHO HAVE PAID THE NON-REFUNDABLE REGISTRATION FEE BUT FAILED TO FORMALLY REGISTER AT THE DATE AND TIME STATED ABOVE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED AS ACCEPTABLE TENDERER.

TENDER BOND SHALL BE ISSUED BY A BANK REGISTERED IN THE STATE OF QATAR.

Effective from 1st July 2023, bids from Local Suppliers and Contractors (companies established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) who are not in possession of an ICV score in the ICV portal by Tender Closing Date (or commercial bid submission date if separately mentioned/notified) will not be accepted. Local Company that has been established for less than 2 years are exempted from this requirement. For further details please visit ICV Digital Portal- <https://icv.qa>

For more information about ORYX GTL and its tenders, please visit our website: <https://www.oryxglt.com.qa>

QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY INVITATION TO TENDER

QAFCO ANNOUNCES THE FOLLOWING TENDER

TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER FEE RECEIPT SUBMISSION DATES	TENDER CLOSING DATE
RFQ - 6000004986	LAUNDRY SERVICES – FRAME CONTRACT FOR 5 YEARS	500/- (Non-refundable)	36,000.00 (thirty-six thousand Qatari Riyals)	15.03.2026 16.03.2026 17.03.2026 18.03.2026 19.03.2026	06.04.2026

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- During the period this tender is offered, the interested bidders shall first deposit appropriate Tender Fee amount in cash (Cheque will not be accepted) into Company's following Account at any QNB branch:
 - Account Name : QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY (QAFCO)
 - Account Number : 0013-025828-058
 - IBAN : QA51QNBAA00000000013025828058
 - Bank Name : QATAR NATIONAL BANK
- The interested Bidders shall mention their company's name and Tender Number on the payment receipt provided by the bank and submit it as Tender Fee receipt.
- Besides the Tender fee receipt (which should have the Tender Number and bidder's name clearly mentioned on it), interested bidders shall also submit a copy of the valid Commercial Registration, an authorization letter from their company with the name, telephone, fax and e-mail ID of the focal point for this tender (**Very Important**), during the submission of Tender Fee Receipt for ensuring electronic receipt of the Tender Document.
- Tender Fee Receipt along with the specified documents shall be submitted to purchase@qafco.com.qa on the dates indicated above, after payment of Tender Fee (nonrefundable).
- After submission of the above documents to the above email, Tender Document will be provided through an electronic platform separately.
- For any queries related to non-receipt of the tender documents after the submission Tender Fee receipt at the QAFCO Housing Section, you may contact at 'purchase@qafco.com.qa' or on 44227795
- Technical & Commercial details and Submission Procedures will be specified in the Tender Documents.
- The Company will not consider any offer without the enclosure of the Tender Bond.
- Bids shall be submitted at QAFCO Tender Office, between 0930 – 1100 hours during the Holy month of Ramadan and 0930 – 1130 hours and 1230 – 1400 hours, of any working day of the Company, on/before the "Tender Closing Date".

TRAGEDY

Seven health workers die on Tanzania lake

Seven health workers were killed when heavy winds capsized their boat on Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania on Friday, the president's office said, AFP reported from Dar es Salaam. The group were travelling across the lake to provide medical care in the village of Kagunga on the Tanzania-Burundi border when their boat sank, the office of President Samia Suluhu Hassan said in a statement. Fourteen others were rescued and were receiving treatment at a nearby hospital, while rescue teams were still looking for two missing people from the boat. In a separate incident, a fisherman was killed and two others injured when their canoe was struck by lightning on the same lake, the statement added. Hassan expressed her "heartfelt condolences".

DISTRESS

Death toll from Kenyan floods rises to 62: police

A total of 62 people including eight children have died since heavy rains and flooding hit Kenya's capital Nairobi and other areas late last week, police said yesterday, Reuters reported from Nairobi. The capital was the worst hit with 33 deaths, the force said in a statement on X that updated the official tally of casualties. More than 2,000 families have been displaced across Kenya and intense rain was continuing in several regions, it added. Aid workers started pulling bodies from floodwaters across Nairobi last Saturday.

QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY INVITATION TO TENDER

QAFCO ANNOUNCES THE FOLLOWING TENDER

TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER FEE RECEIPT SUBMISSION DATES	TENDER CLOSING DATE
RFQ 6000005077-	ANALYSIS OF FOOD AND WATER SAMPLING	500/- (Non-refundable)	9,000 (nine thousand Qatari Riyals)	15/3/2026 16/3/2026 17/3/2026 18/3/2026 19/3/2026 22/3/2026 23/3/2026	8/4/2026

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- During the period this tender is offered, the interested bidders shall first deposit appropriate Tender Fee amount in cash (Cheque will not be accepted) into Company's following Account at any QNB branch:
 - Account Name : QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY (QAFCO)
 - Account Number : 0013-025828-058
 - IBAN : QA51QNBAA00000000013025828058
 - Bank Name : QATAR NATIONAL BANK
- The interested Bidders shall mention their company's name and Tender Number on the payment receipt provided by the bank and submit it as Tender Fee receipt.
- Besides the Tender fee receipt (which should have the Tender Number and bidder's name clearly mentioned on it), interested bidders shall also submit a copy of the valid Commercial Registration, an authorization letter from their company with the name, telephone, fax and e-mail ID of the focal point for this tender (**Very Important**), during the submission of Tender Fee Receipt for ensuring electronic receipt of the Tender Document.
- Tender Fee Receipt along with the specified documents shall be submitted to purchase@qafco.com.qa on the dates indicated above, after payment of Tender Fee (nonrefundable) and to jsaade@qafco.com.qa.
- After submission of the above documents to the above email, Tender Document will be provided through an electronic platform separately.
- For any queries related to non-receipt of the tender documents after the submission Tender Fee receipt at the QAFCO Housing Section, you may contact at 'purchase@qafco.com.qa' or on 44227792.
- Technical & Commercial details and Submission Procedures will be specified in the Tender Documents.
- The Company will not consider any offer without the enclosure of the Tender Bond.

The Tender shall be strictly submitted using the QAFCO's Supply Chain Portal – SAP / Ariba, on or before the "Tender Closing Date". Tenderers who fail to adhere to this requirement will result in the disqualification of their Tender.

Nine convicted for involvement in attack on ICE detention centre

Reuters/AFP
Washington

A jury has convicted nine people for their involvement in a shooting at a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centre in Texas last year, the Justice Department said.

Eight of the nine defendants were found guilty of providing material support to terrorists, rioting, conspiring to use and carry explosives, and using explosives during a riot, local media reported.

The conviction followed a 12-day trial in Texas.

The defendants were charged for their roles in a non-fatal shooting of a police officer at the immigration facility on July 4 in Alvarado, Texas.

The defendants, who authorities said were dressed in black "military-style" clothing with head and face coverings when they carried out the attack on the facility, have been described by the Trump administration as members of the antifa movement, which was designated a domestic terrorist organisation by President Donald Trump last year.

Antifa, a shorthand term for "anti-fascist", is a nebulous

movement of left-wing activists that experts say is more a political ideology than an organised group.

Antifa has a track record of confronting right-wing groups and engaging in civil disobedience.

"Today's verdict on terrorism charges will not be the last as the Trump administration systematically dismantles Antifa and finally halts their violence on America's streets," US Attorney-General Pam Bondi said in a statement.

ICE Director Todd M Lyons welcomed the conviction, saying that the summer attack by the defendants was violent in nature and "an abhorrent way for antifa terrorists to 'protest'".

The defendants are Cameron Arnold, Zachary Evetts, Benjamin Song, Savanna Batten, Bradford Morris, Maricela Rueda, Elizabeth Soto, Ines Soto, and Daniel Rolando Sanchez-Estrada.

Song, who was described as the leader of a "North Texas Antifa Cell", was convicted of the additional charge of attempted murder of a police officer and could face life in prison.

Lawyers for eight of the nine defendants did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Judge blocks Trump attempt to get race data from colleges

Reuters
Boston

A federal judge has temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's administration from requiring universities to collect and turn over data by next week to prove that they are no longer considering race as an admissions factor.

US District Judge F Dennis Saylor IV in Boston issued a temporary restraining order at the request of 17 Democratic state attorneys, who sued over a newly-added component of mandatory, annual surveys administered by the US Department of Education that are used to gather information from universities.

Schools that participate in federal student financial programs were asked to provide ad-

missions-related data on the race and sex of students, which the department planned to use to track their compliance with the US Supreme Court's 2023 ruling ending affirmative action in higher education.

The judge, who was appointed by Republican president George W Bush, noted that universities and colleges nationwide faced a looming Wednesday deadline to complete the survey.

He extended that deadline through March 25 to provide time to hear the states' case and provide for an "orderly resolution of the issues".

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

The data at issue would be gathered through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System surveys, which since 1986 have been used by the Education Department's National Centre for Education Statistics to collect in-

formation from universities on matters like finances, admissions and outcomes.

The survey was altered at the direction of Trump, who in an August memorandum cited a lack of data to assess whether race remained an admissions factor after the Supreme Court's decision given the "rampant use of 'diversity statements' and other overt and hidden racial proxies".

Following the memo, Education Department Secretary Linda McMahon announced that institutions of higher education would need to report data disaggregated by race and sex relating to the undergraduate applicant pool and enrollment.

The Office of Management and Budget subsequently in December finalised the new requirements, which sought data from the 2025-26 academic year and six prior years.

Trump buying shoes for cabinet members

US President Donald Trump has confirmed that he had bought several members of his cabinet the same shoes from his favourite brand.

The unusual gifts were first reported this week in the *Wall Street Journal*, which said Trump had given out pairs of Florsheim shoes worth \$145 - at times even guessing people's shoe size in front of them.

"It's a nice shoe," Trump said in an interview with Fox Radio when asked about the story.

"What I do is, is somebody that for many many years has walked around in shoes that were not good, and would not be that comfortable," said the 79-year-old Republican.

"So I have fun with it," he said. "When they tell me

they have a problem, I say, 'Let me get you a pair of shoes: It seems to work out pretty well. Now they look all spiffy and nice. It's a gift from Donald Trump'."

Trump added that he had "never liked cabinet members walking in in sneakers".

Those wearing the shoes include Vice-President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, the *Wall Street Journal* said.

One photo showed Rubio in what appeared to be the same footwear, which looked too big on the heels.

The model on the Florsheim website that most closely resembles those in the photographs is a leather dress shoe made in China, sold for \$145 a pair. - AFP

Curfew in Ecuador's coastal provinces

Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa has decreed a nighttime curfew in four provinces of the Andean country, starting today, intended to facilitate military operations against criminal organisations with support from the United States.

The measure covers the coastal provinces of Guayas, El Oro, Santo Domingo, and Los Rios - the country's main drug trafficking routes - and will run from 11pm to 5am local time.

Joint military operations between Ecuador and the US started in early March.

A recent mission near the Colombian border resulted in the destruction of a drug trafficking camp, according to the Ecuadorian ministry of defence.

Noboa has made military repression against organised crime a cornerstone of his administration.

As part of his stance, he has criticised the government of Colombia for failing to combat drug trafficking. - Reuters

US raises flag over embassy in Venezuela after 7-year hiatus

The US flag was raised above its embassy in Venezuela yesterday for the first time in seven years, following the US capture of authoritarian leader Nicolas Maduro and the restoration of diplomatic relations.

"A new era has begun. We're staying with Venezuela," the US charge d'affaires Laura Dogu, the embassy's most senior diplomat, wrote in a post on X with a photo of the Stars and Stripes being raised outside the embassy.

Dogu wrote that she and her team raised the flag "exactly seven years after it was removed" on March 14, 2019, two months after Caracas severed ties over Washington's refusal to recognise Maduro's flawed re-election in 2018.

Earlier this month, the United States and Venezuela restored diplomatic ties amid a rapid thaw in relations since the US special forces raid in January that left around 100 people dead and saw Maduro and his wife flown to New York for trial on drug trafficking charges.

US President Donald Trump's administration says it effectively runs Venezuela and controls the country's vast natural resources after toppling Maduro.

Trump and Venezuela's interim leader Delcy Rodriguez, formerly Maduro's deputy, have signed energy and mining agreements that open the door to private investment and US access to what are the world's largest oil reserves.

On Friday, Rodriguez urged Trump to totally lift the sanctions



A woman poses atop a hill overlooking the embassy in Caracas. - AFP

imposed on her country.

Since January, the United States has eased a seven-year-old oil embargo on Venezuela and is-

sued licences allowing a handful of multinationals to operate in the country under certain conditions. - AFP

Trump replaces head of troubled Kennedy Centre

AFP/Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump has announced the replacement of the head of the Kennedy Centre, the storied Washington arts venue that he renamed after himself then closed for two years for refurbishment.

Richard Grenell, an ally and former ambassador from Trump's first term, oversaw major changes at the centre to clear out what the Republican leader called "woke" ideology.

"Ric Grenell has done an excellent job in helping to co-ordinate various elements of the Centre during the transition period, and I want to thank him for the outstanding work he has done," Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

Grenell will be replaced by Matt Floca, the current vice-president of facilities at the centre, whose official biography says he has a background in construction management and real estate.

The outgoing Grenell has also served as a special envoy for

Trump on Venezuela, where he was involved in negotiations for the release of several detained Americans.

In that role, Grenell pushed for engagement with then-president Nicolas Maduro - but lost out to hawks in the administration, and Maduro was captured by US special forces on January 3.

Trump has stamped his mark on the Kennedy Centre since the start of his second term, as part of an assault on US cultural institutions that his administration has accused of being too left-wing.

The 79-year-old installed himself as chairman of a hand-picked board to lead the centre, originally named after president John F Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1963.

Then in December the board voted to rename it the "Trump-Kennedy" centre.

Democrats, noting that the centre's name was established by Congress, have said Trump's rebranding has no force of law.

Kennedy's family denounced the renaming move as undermining the slain president's legacy.

Trump barred from ending protections for 1,100 Somalis

A federal judge has temporarily blocked US President Donald Trump's administration from ending legal protections next week that have allowed nearly 1,100 Somalis to live and work in the United States.

US District Judge Allison Burroughs in Boston issued an order postponing the March 17 effective date of the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS)'s decision to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Somali immigrants.

Burroughs cited the "weighty" consequences that would result if she did not act now to pause the end of TPS for the Somalis while their lawsuit continues.

"Plaintiffs aver that if Somalia's TPS designation is allowed to terminate, more than 1,000 people will face 'a myriad of grave risks,' including detention and deportation, physical violence if removed to Somalia, and forced separation from family members," the judge wrote.

She administratively stayed the effective date and set a schedule so she could resolve the Somalis' request for a longer-term block of the DHS's action "as quickly as possible". - Reuters

Judge revives union contract for staff at US veterans' agency

A federal judge has reinstated a union bargaining agreement covering 320,000 employees of the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that the agency had canceled to carry out an order from President Donald Trump.

The ruling by US District Judge Melissa DuBose in Providence, Rhode Island, is among the most significant so far in a series of lawsuits stemming from Trump's 2025 executive order stripping most of the federal workforce of the ability to collectively bargain.

DuBose agreed with the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents 800,000 federal workers, that the VA canceled its bargaining agreement in August as retaliation for the union's opposition to Trump administration labour policies.

In court filings, the VA claimed Trump properly exempted the agency from collective bargaining because of the role it plays in maintaining national security. - Reuters

CONDOLENCES

The Management and Staff of



extend their heartfelt condolences to the family of

Abhilash Madathiveettil
(Advertising Department)

on the sad demise of his beloved father



GOPALAKRISHNAN MADATHIVEETIL

May God rest the departed soul in peace and give fortitude to the bereaved family to bear this great loss.



Jurors mull evidence in social media addiction trial

AFP
Los Angeles

Jurors will return to court in Los Angeles tomorrow to resume deliberations in a landmark social media addiction trial accusing Meta and YouTube of trying to hook young Internet users.

The jury began privately mulling evidence after being given legal instructions on Friday morning by the judge.

The verdict could turn on the question of whether family and other real world troubles, or YouTube and Meta apps such as Instagram, were to blame for mental woes of the woman who filed the suit.

A 20-year-old California woman identified as Kaley GM testified at trial that YouTube and Instagram fueled her depression and suicidal thoughts as a child, telling jurors that she became obsessed with social media, starting with YouTube videos, at the age of six.

Under cross examination, however, Kaley also talked about feeling neglected, berated and

picked on by family members.

A jury form given to jurors asks the panel to decide whether Meta or YouTube should have known their services posed a danger to children or if they were negligent in design.

If so, jurors are to decide if Meta or YouTube were "substantial factors" in causing Kaley's woes and how much they should pay in damages.

"We trust the jury to weigh the evidence carefully and deliver a verdict that reflects the facts, the harm, and the urgent need to hold Meta and Google accountable," said Matthew Bergman, a founding attorney of Social Media Victims Law Centre representing Kaley. "Whatever the outcome, this trial has already shattered the secrecy that has shielded these companies for far too long."

Meta's chief executive Mark Zuckerberg took the stand during the trial, pushing back against accusations that his company had done too little to keep underage users off his platform and had profited from their usage.

YouTube vice-president of engineering Cristos Goodrow said while testifying that the

Google-owned company's aim was to give people value, not hook them on harmful binge-viewing, despite aggressive growth goals at the platform.

"We don't want anybody to be addicted to anything," he said.

The lawsuit is one of hundreds accusing social media firms of luring young users to become addicted to their content and suffer from depression, eating disorders, psychiatric hospitalisation and even suicide.

Internet titans have long shielded themselves with Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act, which frees them of responsibility for what social media users post.

However, this case argues that the firms are responsible for defective products with business models designed to hold people's attention and to promote content that can harm their mental health.

The outcome of the Los Angeles trial is expected to establish a precedent for resolving other lawsuits that blame social media for fueling an epidemic of mental and emotional trauma.

Brazil revokes visa of US diplomat for 'lying'

AFP
Rio de Janeiro

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has banned a US diplomat who wanted to visit the jailed former far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro amid fears of US meddling ahead of elections this year.

Bolsonaro, sentenced for plotting a coup, was hospitalised in intensive care on Friday after developing bronchopneumonia.

US President Donald Trump has called the case against his Latin American ally a "witch hunt".

Lawyers for Bolsonaro earlier this week asked the Supreme Court to allow Darren Beattie, the US State Department's new adviser on Brazil, to visit Bolsonaro in prison on March 18.

The Supreme Court initially agreed to the visit but later revoked the authorisation after the Brazilian government cautioned against the meeting.

"I banned him from coming to Brazil," Lula said at an event in Rio de Janeiro on Friday.

A Brazilian diplomatic source told AFP that Beattie's visa was revoked due to "lies about the purpose of the visit".

Lula had earlier said that the US diplomat would not be allowed into Brazil until Washington lifted a visa ban on Brazilian Health Minister Alexandre Padilha.

Padilha was sanctioned late last year over his role in a pro-

gramme to employ Cuban doctors in Brazil.

Bolsonaro, 70, is serving a 27-year sentence over his failed bid to remain in power after his defeat by Lula in 2022.

His trial last year sparked the ire of the Trump administration, which imposed high tariffs on a range of Brazilian goods as punishment.

Washington scaled back the tariffs after a meeting between Lula and Trump in October.

However, Brazil remains wary of Trump's campaign to sway events in Latin America, after his overthrow of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and attempts to influence elections from Argentina to Honduras.

Trump was embroiled in his own attempt to overturn an election when he refused to accept defeat to Joe Biden in 2020, culminating with a mob of supporters attacking the US Congress building in Washington.

Brazil's foreign ministry said Beattie's visa had been granted exclusively to allow him to attend a forum on critical minerals and to participate in meetings with Brazilian government officials.

It added that the visit of a foreign public official to a former president during an election year "could constitute undue interference" in Brazil's internal affairs, according to court documents.

Bolsonaro remains a figurehead of the Brazilian right, despite his incarceration and debilitated physical state.

US defends block on Venezuela paying for Maduro's defence

Reuters
New York

Ousted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro should not be able to use Venezuelan government funds to defend himself against US drug trafficking charges, US prosecutors said on Friday, noting that Washington has not considered him the legitimate leader of the South American country for years.

Last month, Maduro's lawyer Barry Pollack urged US District Judge Alvin Hellerstein to dismiss the indictment against Maduro because the Treasury Department had, without explanation, revoked an exemption to US financial sanctions on Venezuela that had allowed the South American country's government to fund his defence.

Pollack argued that the revocation interfered with Maduro's right to counsel under the Sixth Amendment to the US Constitution.

He said that "Venezuelan law and custom" dictate that the government pay the expenses of the president and his wife.

An official in Venezuela's attorney-general's office said in a court filing last month that the government was prepared to pay.

In urging Hellerstein not to dismiss the indictment, prosecutors with the Manhattan US Attorney's office said on Friday that the initial exemption was an "administrative error".

The prosecutors said Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, would still be allowed to use their personal funds for their defence.

Flores's lawyer, Mark Donnelly, had also asked Hellerstein to dismiss charges against her over the funding of her defence.

"While both defendants claim that they are entitled to funds under the Venezuelan constitution... both defendants also surely knew that the US government did not consider them to hold legitimate positions," prosecutors wrote, noting that one purpose of the US sanctions was to drive Maduro and Flores from power.

The Venezuelan communications ministry, which handles all press queries for the government, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Maduro and Flores were captured on January 3 in a US military raid on their Caracas home.

Both have pleaded not guilty and are jailed in Brooklyn pending trial.

Their lawyers did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Hellerstein is expected to consider the legal fees dispute during a court hearing on March 26 in Manhattan.

The US accuses Maduro, a socialist who took office in 2013, of rigging his re-election votes in 2018 and 2024, which he denies.

Maduro's former vice-president Delcy Rodriguez has been running Venezuela since his capture.

A State Department official said in a March 11 court filing in a separate case that the US recognises Rodriguez as Venezuela's sole head of state.

Protesters ransack local communist party office in Cuba

AFP/Reuters
Havana

Protesters angry over Cuba's persistent blackouts and food shortages vandalised a provincial office of the Cuban Communist Party overnight on Friday, state-run media said.

The rare outburst in the town of Moron showed the depth of people's discontent in Cuba as they endure economic hardship made worse by a US oil blockade and other pressure from President Donald Trump, who has stated openly he would like to see regime change in Havana.

The unrest was part of a new trend of protests in which people bang pots and pans at night in the street or at home to vent frustration over shortages of food, medicine and other basics and frequent rolling power blackouts that can last almost all day.

The state-run newspaper *Invador* said that five people were arrested in what it called an incident of vandalism in the town of Moron, 500km (300 miles) east of Havana.

The paper published a brief article on the unrest, in which it said people threw rocks at the local Communist Party office and ignited a fire in the street with furniture from the building.

"What began peacefully, after an exchange with the authorities in the area, degenerated into vandalism against the headquarters of municipal committee of the Communist Party," the newspaper said.

Video circulating on social media, which AFP has not been able to verify, shows a small group of protesters breaking into and ransacking the party office, removing documents, computers and furniture and burning it in the street.

Public protests, particularly violent ones, are exceedingly rare in Cuba.

Its 2019 constitution grants citizens the right to demonstrate, but a law more specifically defining that right is stalled in the legislature, leaving those who take to the street in legal limbo.

Vandals targeted several other state-run establishments in the area, including a pharmacy and a government market, the report said.

In one video on social media, a gunshot is heard, and the camera pans to a person lying on the ground.

State media outlet *Vanguardia de Cuba* dismissed online reports that the person lying on the ground had been shot by police.

"The image circulating shows the scene of the protest, but it's important for the public to know the truth: no one was injured by gunfire," *Vanguardia de Cuba* said on X. "Media manipulation seeks to sow fear and confusion among



Anti-government protesters watch as a fire burns at a Communist Party office in Moron, in this screengrab from video released yesterday and obtained from social media. - Reuters

our people. Let's not fall for provocations."

Independent media and social media posts say that Havana, which has suffered blackouts of up to 15 hours per day in recent weeks, is the epicentre of the new nightly protests although these have spread to other parts of the country, too.

On Friday Cuba's authorities began a prisoner release negotiated with the Vatican and confirmed that talks were underway with the United States but did not say what the nature of these discussions was.

Trump has said Cuba will be "next" on his agenda after the Iran war and the US overthrow of Cuba's top ally, Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, in January.

Cuba relied on Venezuela for oil and Trump, who says he effectively runs Caracas, has cut off the supply.

The oil embargo has brought Cuba's already troubled economy to the brink of collapse.

The Republican leader has placed the impoverished island under a US oil blockade, strangling its fuel supply on the basis of what he called the "extraordinary threat" posed by Cuba to the United States.

This comes on top of a six-decade-old US trade embargo.

Over the past week, several small groups of residents across Havana have banged pots in protest against extended blackouts.

Students on Monday staged a sit-in on the steps of the University of Havana after the government suspended in-person classes, blaming the US oil blockade.

Fuel shortages have vastly reduced public transportation, making it difficult, if not impossible, for teachers and students to get together for classes.

Moron was also the site of significant protests during anti-government riots on July 11, 2021, the largest since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution.

Bolsonaro is in stable condition, says hospital

Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro was in stable condition yesterday as doctors treat him for pneumonia he developed while serving a prison sentence for plotting a coup.

However, the 70-year-old, far-right leader's kidney function has worsened, the DF Star Hospital said a day after Bolsonaro was brought in with high fever, a drop in oxygen saturation, sweating and chills.

The hospital said in a statement that Bolsonaro also showed a rise in markers that detect inflammation and there are no immediate plans to release him from intensive care.

The hospital said Bolsonaro's lung infection stems from a process called bronchoaspiration, in which gastric material like food is inhaled into the respiratory tract rather than the esophagus.

It has been a frequent problem for Bolsonaro since he was stabbed in the abdomen in 2018 while campaigning to become president.

He served as president between 2019-22.

The attack has led to numerous operations and other health problems, including persistent hiccups and vomiting, which doctors said was the direct cause of his current lung infection.

Last year Bolsonaro was sentenced to 27 years in prison for his role in a botched coup attempt after his 2022 election loss to Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, the current president. - AFP

War of the Worlds 'crowned' as 2025's worst movie

War of the Worlds, the 2025 American sci-fi film inspired by HG Wells's 1898 novel, dominated the 46th annual Razzie Awards yesterday, taking home worst picture, worst screenplay, worst remake, worst actor and worst director.

The Razzies said the film "utterly destroyed HG Wells's classic novel".

"Director Rich Lee (maybe inspired by Ed Wood) chose a goofy gimmick, hack dialogue, and a particularly hilarious performance by its lead, Ice Cube, to seize 2025's biggest number of statues," the parody awards show said.

The Amazon-released movie was slammed for its awkward product placement - not least its climactic scene in which a Prime Air drone saves humanity from an alien invasion.

Despite - or perhaps because of - utterly scathing reviews, the film became an unlikely hit for Amazon, thanks to a phenomenon that critics dubbed "hate-watching" by "bored masochists".

The Razzies, Hollywood's long-running spoof of the Oscars, spotlight the most critically panned performances of each year.

This year's other major target was *Snow White*, a 2025 live-

action remake of Disney's 1937 animated classic.

"It cost a fortune and lost a fortune, perhaps cursed by Walt himself for having ignored his dying wish for it never to be remade," the Razzies quipped in their announcement.

Its star Rachel Zegler enraged Disney fans for comments denigrating the beloved 1937 original - even labeling its prince a stalker.

And the casting of a Latina actress was slammed as "woke" in some corners of social media.

However, ultimately it was the film's bizarre computer-generated dwarfs that drew the most flak, and earned the movie two Razzies.

"Described as frightening, actually terrifying and garishly fake, the winner of the Worst Supporting Actor goes to all seven artificial dwarves," Razzies organisers said yesterday.

"Artificial intelligence (AI) doesn't have to cost over \$250mn - maybe \$20.50, or a seven-day free trial period," they added, referring to the Disney's film's reportedly enormous budget.

Rebel Wilson picked up worst actress for the action comedy *Bride Hard*, and Scarlet Rose Stallone won worst supporting actress for her role in the Western action film *Gunslingers*. - Reuters/AFP

Mexico sends third major aid package to besieged Cuba

AFP
Havana

Two Mexican Navy ships loaded with 1,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid arrived on Friday in Cuba, whose economy has been hammered since becoming

the target of a US energy blockade.

US President Donald Trump has vowed to starve Cuba of oil after the US military ouster of former president Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, which had been the communist nation's main supplier.

Mexico was Cuba's other key oil supplier, and the de facto US embargo has led to

power outages that threaten to plunge the Caribbean island into complete darkness.

The Mexican foreign ministry had already dispatched two aid shipments to Cuba in February, including food donated by people during a food drive as well as personal hygiene items.

"Thank you Mexico, once again," Cuba's

Trade Minister Betsy Diaz said during a welcoming ceremony at the Havana port, in images broadcast by Cuban television.

The island of 9.6mn inhabitants, under a US trade embargo since 1962, has for years been mired in a severe economic crisis marked by extended power cuts and shortages of fuel, medicine and food.

Qatar Charity launches “27th Night Challenge” to save patients’ lives

As part of its Ramadan campaign “Good Starts With You”, Qatar Charity (QC) will launch the “27th Night Challenge”, tomorrow (Sunday) evening, under the theme “Warding off Calamity”, marking what is expected to be the largest fundraising event on YouTube dedicated to life saving medical interventions. With the support of generous donors, the initiative aims to raise QR 40 million to fund urgent humanitarian medical programs in several countries, in addition to Qatar.

Live Broadcast

The live event will air from 9:00 p.m. to midnight on the Al Ghafri YouTube channel (QQ) and Qatar Charity’s YouTube channel. Social media influencer Abdullah Al Ghafri and broadcaster Dr. Abdulrahman Al Harami will lead the broadcast, encouraging community engagement and mobilizing contributions throughout the challenge.

They will be joined by several influencers, medical professionals, supporting medical centers, and partner platforms, with Mirsal Qatar serving as the media partner to amplify the humanitarian message and help ensure that the patients’ appeal reaches the widest possible audience.

The “27th Night Challenge” is held during the last ten days of Ramadan, drawing on the special significance of the 27th night—when Muslims hope for mercy and forgiveness. Qatar Charity seeks to turn this blessed night into a humanitarian platform for meaningful giving, uniting benefactors around a life saving effort focused on helping patients, most of them children, receive urgent surgeries that cannot be delayed.

Medical Initiatives

This year, Qatar Charity is placing a special emphasis on the health sector in response to the rising number of critical cases requiring urgent treatment in countries with high need, especially in the areas of cardiac surgery and specialized treatments for children. Children are among the most vulnerable groups, and delays in treatment often lead to life threatening complications or the loss of early recovery opportunities.

The health initiatives to be supported include open-heart surgeries and the correction of congenital



heart defects in children, along with the treatment of eye diseases and surgeries that restore sight. They also cover cochlear implants for children with hearing loss, helping them hear and communicate, as well as the treatment of severe malnutrition in children. In addition, medical interventions will be carried out within Qatar to support patients with chronic illnesses and critical health conditions. Together, these efforts aim to save lives and create new stories of recovery.

Overall, the “27th Night Challenge” aims to carry out approximately 6,770 surgeries, in addition to providing malnutrition treatment and supporting cancer patients within Qatar—impacting thousands of people and their families.

The initiatives will be implemented in several countries facing major gaps in healthcare services, including Yemen, Mauritania, Djibouti, Gambia, Chad, Niger, Tanzania, Syria, Bangladesh,

Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Morocco, and Jordan, alongside humanitarian cases in Qatar.

Real-Time Surgeries

In parallel with the live broadcast of the “27th Night Challenge,” Qatar Charity will carry out humanitarian medical camps in four countries, with some surgeries streamed live to highlight transparency and show donors the real impact of their contributions.

In Yemen, the medical teams will work across two tracks: repairing congenital heart defects and performing open-heart surgeries for children. In Bangladesh, surgeons will carry out congenital heart defect repair procedures for children. Ghana will host a camp focused on eye surgeries, along with cochlear implant operations. Meanwhile, Somalia will witness a medical camp dedicated to treating eye diseases and performing eye surgeries.

Qatar Charity calls on generous individuals, institutions, and companies to seize the blessings of this night and join the “27th Night Challenge.” Their contributions, especially in these exceptional circumstances, can help ward off hardships from themselves, their families, and their communities, while saving lives, easing suffering, and giving new hope to children and families awaiting a chance to live with dignity and well-being. Qatar Charity noted that the projects supported through this initiative are eligible for Zakat. Donations can be made during the live broadcast and will continue for two days through Qatar Charity’s approved donation channels.

How to Donate

Donors can support the “27th Night Challenge” through the link <http://qch.qa/27night>, by requesting the Home Collector service, by calling 44290000, or by visiting Qatar Charity’s branches and mall-based collectors. Contributions will remain open for two days after the live broadcast.

Qatar Charity inaugurates two mosques in Chad during Ramadan



In line with the slogan of its Ramadan campaign, “Good Starts With You” and amid the spiritual atmosphere of the holy month, Qatar Charity (QC) has inaugurated two mosques in the Chadian capital, N’Djamena, and one of its surrounding areas. Implemented with the generous support of benevolent donors in Qatar—despite the current exceptional circumstances—the two mosques are expected to benefit nearly 18,000 people by providing dignified spaces for worship, as part of Qatar Charity’s ongoing humanitarian and development efforts in the Republic of Chad.

Al-Ezz Mosque

The first mosque, Al-Ezz Mosque, is located in N’Djamena, while the second mosque, Al-Noor Mosque, is situated in a village on the outskirts of the capital. Each mosque covers an area of 80 square meters and was constructed through the generous donation of a benefactor from the State of Qatar.

On this occasion, Mr. Ibrahim Mohammed Yahya, head of the mosque committee, expressed his sincere gratitude to the donor and to Qatar Charity, noting that the mosque will enable

residents to perform the five daily prayers, Friday prayers, and Eid prayers in a dignified setting. He prayed that Allah accept this charitable act as a lasting charity (sadaqah jariyah), commending Qatar Charity’s development role across various regions of Chad.

Al-Noor Mosque

Al-Noor Mosque serves approximately 8,000 residents of the village and neighboring areas. Worshippers performed the first Asr prayer immediately after its inauguration in an

atmosphere marked by gratitude and happiness.

Mr. Ali Abdul Karim Abdullah, head of the mosque committee, affirmed that the mosque will serve as a spiritual beacon and a social center for the local community, bringing residents together for prayer, remembrance, and the learning of the Holy Qur’an and Islamic values. He expressed his appreciation to Qatar Charity and the generous donor, and prayed that Allah grant the State of Qatar and its people continued security, stability, and prosperity, and protect them from all harm.





China urges Afghanistan, Pakistan to resolve tensions via talks, not force

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his Afghan counterpart Amir Khan Muttaqi in a phone call that disputes between Afghanistan and Pakistan should be resolved through dialogue and consultation, not force, the foreign ministry said in a statement published on Friday.

Wang urged both sides to remain calm and exercise restraint, hold face-to-face talks as soon as possible, seek an immediate ceasefire and address differences through dialogue, according to the statement.

The further use of force would only complicate the

situation and intensify tensions, Wang said.

The ministry's statement came after Pakistan on Friday bombed the fuel depot of private airline Kam Air near Afghanistan's Kandahar airport, stepping up the neighbours' worst conflict in years, despite China's efforts to mediate.

Wang and Muttaqi also exchanged views on the situation in Iran, the statement said. Wang told Muttaqi, according to the statement, that Beijing is willing to work with the international community, including Afghanistan, to bring peace to Iran. (Reuters)

Taiwan can afford more military spending: president

Taiwan can well afford a \$40bn special defence budget given its booming economy, President Lai Ching-te said yesterday, citing a US emphasis on collective burden-sharing.

Lai's proposed spending, which he says is needed to better face a rising threat from China, has been bogged down in parliament, where the opposition, which has a majority of seats, complains that the plans are unclear and says it cannot sign "blank cheques".

Marking the 30th anniversary of Taiwan's first direct presidential election, when China fired missiles into the waters around the island hoping to influence the result, Lai said in a speech that his government was determined to defend Taiwan and its hard-won democratic system.

"With Taiwan's economic growth, we can absolute-

ly afford it," he said of the eight-year special defence spending plan. "If we look at the United States' National Security Strategy, the US emphasises collective defence and burden-sharing."

Tech powerhouse Taiwan, the dominant producer of advanced semiconductors, has boomed thanks to demand for artificial-intelligence applications. Its economy expanded at its fastest pace in 15 years in 2025.

The Trump administration has pushed its allies to boost defence spending, something Lai has enthusiastically embraced.

Lai said Taiwan will use AI to establish a real-time defence system while promoting its defence industry. "In other words, our defence budget is not only a budget for national defence, but also a budget for economic and industrial development," he said. (Reuters)

Mass Iftar in Jakarta



Indonesians gather for Iftar, the evening meal that breaks the daily fast during the holy month of Ramadan, during a mass Iftar event hosted by the Russian Muslim Spiritual Council to strengthen ties between Russia and Indonesia at the Istiqlal Grand Mosque in Jakarta, yesterday. (AFP)

North Korea fires 10 ballistic missiles, slams peace efforts

Missiles launched during US-S Korea military drills

AFP
Seoul

North Korea fired about 10 ballistic missiles toward the sea of Japan yesterday, Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said, days after Pyongyang warned of "terrible consequences" over ongoing South Korea-US military drills.

Pyongyang recently dashed hopes of a diplomatic thaw with Seoul, Washington's security ally, describing its latest peace efforts as a "clumsy, deceptive farce".

Seoul's military detected "around ten ballistic missiles launched from the Suman area in North Korea toward the East Sea at around 1:20pm (0420 GMT)," JCS said in a statement, referring to South Korea's name for the body of water.

The missiles flew a distance of around 350km, they said adding that South Korean and US authorities are analysing their exact specifications.

The South Korean military is ready to "respond overwhelmingly to any provocation," JCS added.

Japan's defence ministry also confirmed North Korea launched multiple ballistic missiles that reached a maximum altitude of about 80km and fell outside Japan's exclusive economic zone near the Korean Peninsula's east coast.

Seoul's presidential Blue House condemned the launches as a "provocation that violates UN Security Council resolutions" and urged Pyongyang to immediately stop such acts.

It also ordered relevant agencies to maintain heightened readiness, as the launch occurred during the joint US-South Korea military drills.

The launches came hours after South Korean Prime Minister Kim Min-seok said that US President Donald Trump thinks a meeting with Pyongyang's leader Kim Jong-un would be "good".

Washington has for decades led efforts to dismantle North Korea's nuclear programme, but summits, sanctions and diplomatic



US soldiers set up a floating bridge as they participate in a combined manoeuvre training with wet gap crossing during the 2026 S Korea-US Freedom Shield military exercise in Yeoncheon yesterday. (AFP)

pressure have had little impact.

The Trump administration has pushed in recent months to revive high-level talks with Pyongyang, eyeing a possible summit with Kim Jong-un this year, potentially during Trump's visit to Beijing set for late March.

Trump said during a trip to Asia in October that he was "100 percent" open to meeting with Kim Jong-un, a remark that went unanswered by the North.

After largely ignoring those overtures for months, Kim Jong-un recently said that the two nations could "get along" if Washington accepted Pyongyang's nuclear status.

Analysts said the number of the missiles launched yesterday was unusual, and that the timing was notable.

"Global attention is currently focused on the war in the Middle East and North Korea has historically carried out military provocations when it wants to draw attention to its presence," Hong Sung-pyo, a senior researcher at the Korea Institute for Military Affairs, told AFP.

"And that motive likely underlies this launch as well," he added.

Seoul and Washington kicked off their springtime military drills "Freedom Shield" on Monday, which will involve about 18,000 Korean troops and run until March 19.

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

Earlier this week, Kim Yo-jong, a powerful confidante of her brother Kim Jong-un, said the joint drills "may cause unimaginably terrible consequences".

She went on to say the drills were taking place at "a critical time when global security structure is collapsing rapidly and wars break out in different parts of the world".

Pyongyang has condemned the US-Israeli attack on Iran as an "illegal act of aggression", claiming it shows the "rogue" nature of the US.

North Korea also recently carried out missile tests from the naval Choe Hyon destroyer, claiming the country was in the process

of "arming the Navy with nuclear weapons".

"North Korea has been devoting greater resources to its navy, with possible support from Russia. But Kim will have noticed that the US was able to sink most of the Iranian navy within a week," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

"So Pyongyang is likely to conduct tests and issue rhetoric about nuclear command, control, and delivery systems to suggest it could inflict unacceptable harm if its naval forces come under attack."

Ballistic missile fired from N Korea: Japan

North Korea fired a suspected ballistic missile yesterday, Japan's defence ministry said.

"What is possibly a ballistic missile was launched from North Korea," the ministry said on its official X account.

The projectile "is believed to have already fallen," it added in a separate post a few minutes later.

Trump thinks meeting Kim Jong-un would be 'good': S Korea PM

Kim Min-seok meets Trump in Washington

AFP
Seoul

South Korean Prime Minister Kim Min-seok said yesterday that US President Donald Trump thinks a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un would be "good".

Washington has for decades led efforts to dismantle North Korea's nuclear programme, but summits, sanctions and diplomatic pressure have had little impact.

In recent months, the Trump administration has pushed to revive high-level talks with Pyongyang, eyeing a possible summit with Kim Jong-un this year, potentially during Trump's April visit to Beijing.

Seoul's Kim, who met Trump

in Washington, said the US president told him: "Meeting (Kim Jong-un) would be good. It's really good to meet. But it could happen when we go to China this time, or it might not, or it could even be later, couldn't it?"

Kim told reporters in the United States that he and Trump agreed that if a meeting with Kim Jong-un "happens soon, or around the time of the China visit, that would in itself be meaningful."

"But even if not, what matters in essence is that dialogue or contact takes place, and (Trump) appears firm on that point," Kim added.

North Korea also recently dashed hopes of a diplomatic thaw with South Korea, describing its latest peace efforts as a "clumsy, deceptive farce".

Nuclear-armed Pyongyang, which has bolstered military ties with Russia, has condemned the US-Israeli attack on Iran as an "illegal act of aggression".

Japan asks Australia to boost LNG output

Reuters
Tokyo

Japan's industry minister Ryo-isei Akazawa yesterday asked Australia, Japan's biggest supplier of liquefied natural gas (LNG), to boost output in light of the Middle East crisis.

Japan relies on the Middle East for around 11% of its LNG imports, with 6% shipped via the Strait of Hormuz, which is effectively closed due to the US-Israeli war on Iran. Japan also depends on the region for about 95% of its crude oil supplies.

Some 20% of global LNG supply is offline as the US-Israeli war on Iran has shut QatarEnergy LNG facilities, disrupting energy supplies from the Middle East.

"For this unprecedented situation, the affordable and stable LNG supply from Australia is

the lifeline of energy security in Japan and this region," Akazawa told Australian Resources Minister Madeleine King during their bilateral meeting.

"We would like to sincerely ask for your continued contribution to stable supply, including the possibility of increasing production as much as possible," Akazawa said.

Both ministers attended the Indo-Pacific Energy Security Ministerial and Business Forum in Tokyo yesterday.

Australia supplies about 40% of Japan's LNG imports.

"Australia remains a trusted partner for Japan in supplying LNG to your community," King replied. She added that the Scarborough and Barossa fields will soon begin producing more gas, boosting output from Western Australia's gas fields, a major contribution to Australia's LNG exports.

One-fifth of Australian teens still use TikTok, Snapchat after social media ban

Platforms face fines for non-compliance with age restrictions

Reuters
Sydney

One-fifth of Australian teenagers under 16 were still using social media two months after the country banned platforms from allowing minors, industry data showed, raising questions about the effectiveness of their age-gating methods.

The number of 13- to 15-year-olds using TikTok and Snapchat, among the most popular social media apps with Australian teen-

agers, fell from before the ban took effect in December to February, but still more than 20% used the apps, according to a report by parental control software maker Qustodio provided to Reuters.

The data is among the first to show the effects on youth online behaviour since Australia rolled out the ban, which is being copied by governments around the world. The Australian government and at least two university studies are tracking the ban's impact but none has published data yet.

"Among children whose parents haven't blocked access, a meaningful number continue to use restricted platforms in the months following the ban," Qustodio said in the report, which was based

on data collected from Australian families from late 2024 to February.

Under the ban, platforms including Meta's Instagram, Facebook and Threads, Google's YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat must block people aged under 16 or face a fine of up to A\$49.5mn (\$35mn).

A spokesperson for internet regulator the eSafety Commissioner said the office was aware of reports some under-16s remained on social media and was "actively engaging with platforms and their age assurance providers ... while continuing to monitor for any systemic failures that may amount to a breach of the law".

The regulator was "actively



Social media apps are displayed on a mobile phone. (Reuters/ File photo)

drawing on a range of insights to assess compliance," the spokesperson added.

A spokesperson for communi-

cations minister Anika Wells said the government had always been clear "that increasing the minimum age to access social media is a cultural change that will take time".

A representative for Snapchat was not immediately available for comment. A TikTok spokesperson declined to comment.

The Qustodio data showed the number of Australians aged 13-15 using Snapchat tumbled 13.8 percentage points to 20.3% from November-February, while the number in that age group using TikTok fell 5.7 percentage points to 21.2%.

The number in that age group using YouTube dipped by one percentage point to 36.9%, although

the data did not specify whether the users were logged into accounts. The Australian ban allows people of all ages to use YouTube without logging in.

Australian teenage social media use typically dips in December and January due to the country's long summer school break, but the data showed a steeper decline than the previous year, suggesting the ban had an impact, Qustodio said.

But "some dips seen in December-January are slowly beginning to recover", the report added.

Fears that teenagers might migrate to unregulated platforms have not materialised, the data showed, although WhatsApp recorded a small uptick in use among 13-15-year-olds.

New Prince Harry book a 'deranged conspiracy', his spokesperson says

Reuters
London

A new biography about Prince Harry which says Queen Camilla had allegedly remarked he had been brainwashed by his wife Meghan was described by his spokesperson yesterday as a "deranged conspiracy".

Harry and Meghan have been estranged from the British royal family since stepping away from official duties in 2020 and moving to California, but continue to attract huge interest both in Britain and abroad.

In extracts from his new book published in the *Times* newspaper, author Tom Bower, who has written a number of biographies about the royals, said the couple began feuding with the other royals shortly after their glittering 2018 wedding.

The couple, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, are now barely on speaking terms with the other royals and Harry has rarely seen his father King Charles in recent years.

Bower wrote that Harry's elder brother William and his wife Kate were alarmed by Meghan's impact on him and regarded her as a threat.

"Meghan's brainwashed Harry," Camilla, the prince's stepmother, told a friend, according to the author.

According to the extracts, Harry was also shocked by the fall from grace of his uncle Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, and feared his brother would likewise effectively banish him.

In an unusually strong response, a spokesperson for Harry and Meghan said Bower's commentary had "long crossed the line from criticism into fixation."

"Those interested in facts will look elsewhere; those seeking deranged conspiracy and melodrama know exactly where to find him," the spokesperson said in a statement. Buckingham Palace declined to comment on behalf of King Charles and Queen Camilla. There was no immediate comment from representatives of the Prince William and Kate.



Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan, (Reuters/File photo)

Two India-bound tankers cross Strait of Hormuz

AFP
New Delhi

Two Indian-flagged tankers carrying liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) have safely passed through the Strait of Hormuz, India's shipping ministry said yesterday, marking a rare exception in the critical naval chokepoint disrupted by the Middle East war.

Tehran has all but halted maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas normally pass.

"They crossed the Strait of Hormuz early morning safely and are en route to India," Rajesh Kumar Sinha, India's special secretary of the ministry of ports, shipping and waterways told reporters at a news briefing in New Delhi yesterday.

The tankers "Shivalik" and "Nanda Devi", carrying around 92,700 metric tonnes of LPG, are expected to arrive in the next couple of days and are bound for the western ports of Mundra and Kandla.

India is the world's fourth largest buyer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and second-largest buyer of LPG, which is used for cooking and predominantly sourced from the Middle East.

As supplies dwindle, New Delhi ordered tighter controls Tuesday over natural and cooking gas following import disruptions.

Tehran's ambassador to India confirmed that Iran has allowed some Indian vessels to sail through the Strait of Hormuz

India's Ministry of Petroleum said the new rules would "ensure equitable distribution and continued availability for priority sectors".

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

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

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

The safe passage of the two Indian vessels follows talks between New Delhi and Tehran in recent days.

Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar made two posts to X this week confirming talks with his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi.

He said the pair had "agreed to remain in touch" after having a "detailed conversation... on the latest developments regarding the ongoing conflict" in the Middle East.

In a later post Jaishankar said the pair discussed "bilateral matters" and "Brics related issues".

Plane spotters at Fairford



Plane spotters watch as an aircraft comes in to land at RAF Fairford in southwest England yesterday. Fairford is one of two bases, along with the Diego Garcia facility in the Indian Ocean, that the UK has given the US permission to use for "specific defensive operations into Iran" to destroy Iranian missiles at source, the British defence minister said in a statement. (AFP)

'UK considering targeted support for households'

Reuters
London

The British government is looking to provide "targeted" support for poorer households to offset the impact of surging energy costs due to the conflict in the Middle East, finance minister Rachel Reeves said in an interview published yesterday.

Reeves told the *Times* newspaper the government was looking at options to help those vulnerable to sharp rises in energy prices, especially those who relied on heating oil, but ruled out universal help for all households, saying it would be unaffordable.

The Labour government, trailing in the polls to the populist Reform UK party, has come under pressure from opponents to

cap regulated household energy tariffs - due for review in late May - and to scrap a planned rise in vehicle fuel duty in September.

"I have found the money and we've worked through with MPs (lawmakers) and others a response for people who are not protected by the energy price cap. We're giving greater support to those who really need it," she said of the plan to help households who rely on heating oil.

More than a million households in Britain use oil for heating, particularly in rural areas where connection to the gas grid is not available. The highest concentration is in Northern Ireland, where almost half of households rely solely on the fuel.

Heating oil is not covered by the government's energy price caps, leaving those consumers more exposed to global swings in

oil prices. Reeves told the *Times* the Treasury was modelling different scenarios depending on how long the Iran conflict lasted, including "more targeted options" of support.

"I am concerned given how high our debt is, the debt that we inherited, and so I want to look at what the different options available would be," she said.

Britain's Competition and Markets Authority, wrote to Reeves yesterday saying it was contacting a number of firms involved in the supply of heating oil "as a matter of urgency" to assess whether their practices raised any concerns.

"The CMA is at the initial stage of its review, and while it should not be assumed that any businesses have broken consumer protection law, we will not hesitate to take enforcement action

if potential breaches are identified," the letter from the CMA's chief executive Sarah Cardell said.

The CMA said it was also monitoring vehicle fuel prices to identify if the current situation was being exploited.

The *Times* said Reeves would use a speech on Tuesday not just to address energy issues, but also to call for a closer alignment with the European Union single market to boost growth.

"Brexit has not been good for our country, for growth, for prices in the shop," she told the paper.

"It's almost 10 years since we voted Leave. That ship was sailed but there's an awful lot we can do to improve our trading relations. Where that requires alignment in our national interest, we should absolutely align."

India frees Ladakh activist after six months in jail

AFP
New Delhi

India yesterday ended the preventive detention of prominent Ladakh activist Sonam Wangchuk, freeing him six months after he was held over protests in the Himalayan region.

Wangchuk, 59, an environmental advocate who became a key figure in Ladakh's movement for greater autonomy, was held in September and later charged under India's National Security Act following protests that left four people dead and dozens wounded.

New Delhi had blamed the violence on "provocative speeches" by Wangchuk, who had been on a hunger strike demanding either full federal statehood for Ladakh or constitutional protections for its tribal communities, land and fragile environment.

Authorities in the sparsely populated, high-altitude region bordering China and Pakistan, at the time said the order, issued by the district magistrate of Leh, was needed to "maintain public order."

Under the stringent National Security Act, a suspect can be detained for up to 12 months without being formally charged.

The home ministry said in a statement yesterday it had decided to end Wangchuk's detention "with immediate effect" after "due consideration".

It is not clear if the charges against Wangchuk were dropped.

Mustafa Haji, a lawyer for the Leh Apex Body - which spear-

headed last year's protests - said Wangchuk was released from jail in the western city of Jodhpur soon after.

The home ministry said it remained "committed to fostering an environment of peace, stability, and mutual trust in" Ladakh and have "meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders".

The decision also comes as the Supreme Court continues to hear a petition filed by Wangchuk's wife Gitanjali Angmo, challenging the legality of his detention.

The fate of that case remains unclear now that Wangchuk has been released.

An engineer by training, Wangchuk is best known for pioneering water conservation projects in the Himalayas.

He received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2018 for his environmental work and contributions to reforming local schooling in Ladakh.

His life and work are said to have inspired a character played by Bollywood star Aamir Khan in the hugely popular movie "Three Idiots".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government split Ladakh off from Indian-administered Kashmir in 2019, imposing direct rule on both.

Ladakh has since called upon New Delhi to include it in the "Sixth Schedule" of India's constitution and have their own local legislature to make their laws and policies.

India's army maintains a large presence in Ladakh, which includes disputed border areas with China.

Drones, burning ships: Indian sailors stranded off Iran just want to go home

Reuters
New Delhi

Stranded for two weeks at the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas as drones and missiles set ships ablaze nearby, 26-year-old seafarer Ambuj says he has not been home for six months and cannot wait to see his family.

Ambuj, who asked Reuters not to use his second name for security reasons, is one of about 23,000 Indians working on merchant, harbour and offshore vessels across the wider Gulf region, which is bearing the brunt of the

war between Iran and the United States and Israel.

Hundreds of tankers and cargo ships have been waiting to pass through the Strait of Hormuz, where Iranian attacks have killed three Indian crew members and left another missing. The plight of Indian sailors in and around the Strait has become a major issue at home, with Delhi saying it is coordinating with multiple authorities, including in Iran, to ensure their safety.

"We know how dangerous it could be to sail without a navy escort or without permission," Ambuj said by phone from his ship, stuck with 15 other crew

Some 23,000 Indian seafarers work across the Gulf region; Plight of sailors around Strait of Hormuz big issue at home; Indian authorities say they are working on sailors' safety

members and surrounded by more than 50 other ships.

"The company I work for has released us from duty and we are now waiting for safe passage because flights from Tehran are not operating. If we get clearance to sail to the Middle East or anywhere nearby, we will dock there and take the earliest flight home," he said.

Bound for a Southeast Asian country, Ambuj said the crew

panicked early in March when the captain received a warning over wireless from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that passing through the Strait would have consequences.

The crew initially waited for clearance to sail, but it never came. They are now coming to terms with the possibility of being stranded for many more days or even weeks, Ambuj said.

India is the world's third-larg-

est supplier of seafarers, with more than 300,000 sailors working across global shipping fleets, according to government data.

M Kanta, aboard an India-bound ship, said the crew had spotted drones and fighter jets flying past and feared for their lives, especially after Iranian authorities ordered their Starlink internet disconnected in early March.

"There have been sirens. We saw fire on a ship at a distance and received warning messages on wireless," he said.

"We got permission to restart Starlink after March 6...and we have been able to communicate with our families and receive verified news.

Our hearts sink every time we see or hear drones or a fighter jet."

Kanta said his company and authorities in India and Iran have asked the crew not to share details of their ship or location for safety reasons.

Another crewman, who did not want to be named, said his ship was bound for a South Asian country carrying bitumen and crude, and was just a few nautical miles short of the strait when he saw a ship hit by a drone.

"One hobby these days is identifying planes, jets or drones we can spot from the ship. Sleeping is hard. There is a lot of anxiety," the crewman said.



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GULF TIMES

What is Basel and why has it been so contentious?

US President Donald Trump's bank regulators will unveil this month a new draft of sweeping capital rules that would overhaul how big banks gauge their risks and in turn the funds they must put aside to absorb potential losses. The "Basel Endgame" rule has been mired in controversy since it was first unveiled in 2023 under the Democratic Biden administration, sparking a massive pushback from Wall Street banks who said it would hurt lending and the economy.

Critics, meanwhile, say banks are flush with cash and that the changes will weaken critical rules introduced as a result of the 2007-09 crisis at a time when geopolitical shocks sparked by the Iran conflict and deteriorating private credit conditions are rattling markets. The new draft, combined with changes to other capital rules, will modestly reduce capital requirements for many lenders, Federal Reserve Vice Chair for Supervision Michelle Bowman said earlier this week.

The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision is a panel convened by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in Basel, Switzerland, which aims to ensure regulators globally apply similar minimum capital standards so that banks can survive loan losses during tough times.

The committee's "Basel III" standard was agreed after the 2007-09 global financial crisis. It includes numerous capital, leverage and liquidity requirements for banks. Regulators across the world have worked for years to implement many of those standards, and the so-called "endgame," agreed in 2017, is the final iteration.

The US proposal would overhaul how large banks gauge their risk, and in turn, how much capital they should set aside as a cushion against potential losses

The Fed is leading the project in the United States, along with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and Office of the Comptroller of the Currency.

The original 2023 Basel draft led by Bowman's Democratic predecessor Michael Barr proposed raising capital by 16%. Big banks said it could hike their levels by as much as 20%. That came as a shock to the industry, which had expected the rule would shift capital around but keep overall levels mostly flat.

In response, banks launched an unprecedented lobbying effort and public campaign - which included running attack adverts during football games - arguing the rules were unnecessary because banks were already well-capitalized, and that they would hurt lending, small businesses and the economy. Banks also threatened to sue. Barr pledged to rewrite the rule, but the three regulators could not agree a path forward, and the effort slipped into the Trump administration, which has generally sided with the industry.

The US proposal would overhaul how large banks gauge their risk, and in turn, how much capital they should set aside as a cushion against potential losses. The main areas of focus are credit risk, market risk and operational risk. On Thursday, Bowman said the new proposal would "right-size" requirements to better capture risks, while minimizing overlaps. The changes would also give banks relief for activities regulators see as less risky and which they want to promote, such as mortgage lending.

For smaller banks, the plan would create a new standardized measurement of risk which would "moderately reduce" their requirements and incentivize lending. Overall, Basel is still expected to raise capital slightly for the largest, riskiest banks. But when combined with changes to a surcharge levied on risky global or "GSIB" US banks, capital at the biggest Wall Street banks would shrink "a small amount," she said.

The GSIB surcharge requires eight big US banks deemed to be globally risky to hold even more capital. Those big banks have argued for years the surcharge calculation needs to be updated. Bowman said on Thursday that the Fed plans to update some calculation inputs, which were fixed in 2015, to adjust for economic growth and in turn more accurately reflect the size of the banks relative to the global economy. The Fed had previously considered that change, but the effort stalled amid the broader Basel fight.

The Fed also plans to tweak how much banks must set aside due to short-term funding risks, as Bowman argued it had become more costly over the years than originally intended. - Reuters

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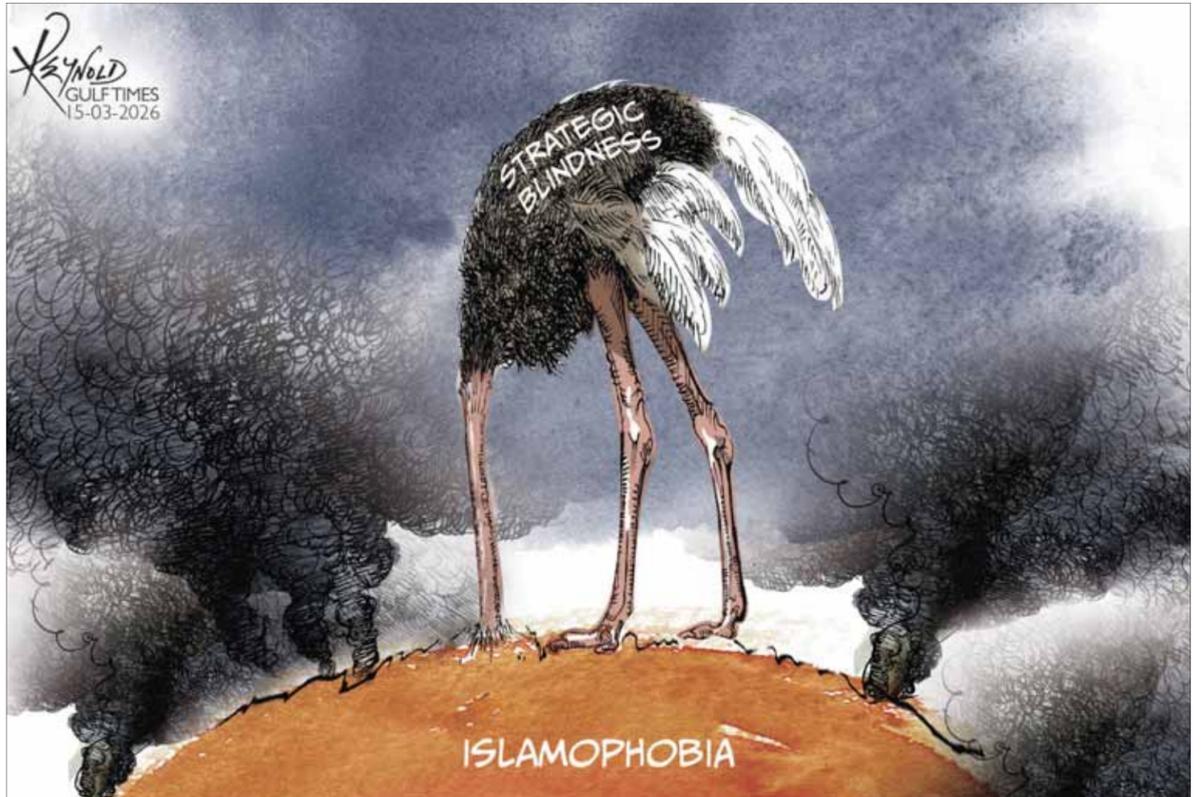
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Venezuela's students reclaim the streets after years of oppression

In mid-February, hundreds of students from Venezuela's most prestigious university did the once unthinkable: their protest left the campus of the Central University of Venezuela in Caracas and spilled out into a nearby street. Before the US military operation that captured Nicolas Maduro on January 3, student activism was a risky proposition in Venezuela.

Remaining on campus had historically offered some protection; student protesters who took to the streets risked being beaten, detained, or worse. Bodies like the United Nations have denounced torture against detainees in Venezuela, including electric shocks, asphyxiation and sleep deprivation. So when the students, marching alongside relatives of some of those imprisoned by the Maduro government left campus chanting "free them all," it was an act of defiance.

"I was born in 2003 and all I knew was fear...until today," Paola Carrillo, 22, a member of the student union told the cheering crowd. "We are fighting for the freedom we want." Venezuelan university students, waving flags or bloodied from clashes with security forces, were the key protagonists of massive anti-government protests a decade ago. Those demonstrations waned amid a crackdown by security services which included arrests of students and professors and violence by ruling-party-allied motorcycle gangs that killed hundreds. A deep economic crisis forced many out of classrooms and into the workforce. Smaller protests in 2019, 2024 and early 2025 were quickly extinguished.

But now a new generation is on the streets. Ten student activists from four universities around the country told Reuters they see real hope after the ouster of Maduro - despite the endurance of the government he headed - and feel safer speaking out now than at any point in recent history. The students, ranging in age from 22 to 27, have only ever known the socialist 'Chavismo' government, named for former President Hugo Chavez, in power since 1999. "I hadn't done anything like this before, and I think now is the moment even though it's frightening," said Carrillo, who is in her final year of a law degree and was just becoming a teenager when the last mass student protests took place. Her goal, she said, is to encourage others to join, "to let people who feel like I do know that they have a voice, that there is someone who feels the same and is still here, trying," she said.

Neither Venezuela's communications ministry, which handles all press requests for the government, nor the attorney general's office responded to questions for this story.

CONFRONTING DELCY RODRIGUEZ IN THE STREETS

The students said their agenda goes far beyond the release of prisoners: they want the repeal of laws against hate speech and terrorism which they say are tools of oppression, free and fair elections, and what they call "reinstitutionalization," repairing



Students walk in a hall of the Central University of Venezuela, in Caracas. (Reuters)

- Under Nicolas Maduro, student protesters risked detention, beatings, torture
- A new generation sees hope but remains wary of the United States
- About 1.3mn students eligible to vote, making them crucial bloc

state institutions activists say have been destroyed by the socialist party.

The students also want larger budgets for universities and salary increases for professors, who earn just \$4 a month. Miguelangel Suarez, 26, president of the student federation at the Central University of Venezuela, even confronted Interim President Delcy Rodriguez after she attended an event on campus in January, an encounter which was shared widely on Venezuelan social media.

"I told the group: 'Look, I'm going to confront Delcy Rodriguez.' About 20 others stood up and decided, 'We're going with you.' That says a lot about how the paradigm has changed since January 3," he said.

The interaction was a rare unscripted one for Rodriguez, a 56-year-old lawyer and herself a Central University of Venezuela graduate, who rarely gives interviews or takes questions. Her interactions with the public are mostly at pro-government events.

"She told us we weren't letting her speak. On the contrary, we were - and still are - willing to engage in dialogue," said Suarez, who is set to graduate in December with a degree in political and administrative studies. "As a graduate, and as someone with such important responsibilities, she should come and talk with us about the many problems facing universities." Though the students are anti-government, many are not involved directly in opposition parties and have yet to turn their attention to eventual elections promised by the US.

About 1.3mn students are eligible to vote, according to

Carlos Melendez, a sociologist and director of the non-governmental Observatory of Universities, which could make them a crucial voting bloc in the country of 28 million. "We are seeing a group of students who not only want to study, but also to engage in the country's political agenda," said Melendez, who has monitored Venezuela's higher education system since 2018. Their participation is "not due to party indoctrination, but rather a reaction to the government and its policies, as they seek to push for democratic restoration."

'NOBODY WANTS THEIR COUNTRY TO BE BOMBED'

Students across Venezuela expressed gratitude that Maduro is gone, but are wary of the United States and said they wished his ouster had been achieved through other means. Maikel Carracedo, 27, a law student at the University of Zulia in Maracaibo said he learned of the US operation to remove Maduro when he was woken by a phone call. "They're invading Caracas!" a friend said. "The first thing I did was make myself a cup of coffee. My first coffee in freedom," he said.

But for all the elation of seeing the potential end of the Chavista era and the hope for reconstruction, Carracedo, like a lot of other students, expressed dismay about how it happened. "We truly hoped that change would come in a much more democratic, peaceful way," he said. "Nobody wants their country to be bombed or attacked, but that's what happened. Most people weren't injured, it was surgical. And I'm genuinely glad because the dictator's departure was quite significant."

Carrillo, the student leader in Caracas, said that in general, young Venezuelans "would have preferred to reach this point differently." "Deep down there is frustration that it couldn't be done by us and that the situation, the circumstances, the regime, led us to this point where someone else had to do it for us," she said. "Furthermore, there is practically indirect administration by a third country over our country and especially over our resources." US President Donald Trump has repeatedly praised Rodriguez for stabilizing the country after the removal of Maduro, as well as for her efforts to open the country to oil and mining interests. Maduro always denied accusations he presided over a dictatorship and said he was fairly elected for his third term in 2024, an assertion rejected by the opposition and international observers, who say the candidate for an opposition coalition roundly won.

FROM STUDENT TO PRISONER AND BACK

For some students, prisoner releases are personal. Jose Castellanos, a 22-year-old economics student at the Lisandro Alvarado Central Western University in the western state of Lara, was detained in October 2025 and held for nearly four months on charges of terrorism, inciting hate and treason, all of which he denies. Authorities accused Castellanos of hanging a banner reading "Freedom... it's happening" on a university building. He was arrested alongside his brother, a communications student and reporter, and their mother. Both have also been released.

"Being in prison made me mature. It gave me more courage and strength to fight for the country's freedom, for democracy," Castellanos told Reuters while taking part in a march in Barquisimeto in February. "We will continue peacefully in the streets, with the truth on our side, demanding our rights as Venezuelans."

At least two Central University of Venezuela students and two professors were also released from detention in February, student leader Suarez said. They include Jesus Armas, a professor, human rights activist and opposition member who was arrested in December 2024 and accused of terrorism, which he denies.

"We are basically going through a personal transition - from uncertainty and fear of speaking out to feeling freer," said Luigi Lombardo, 26, a social sciences education student at the University of Carabobo, in the central state of the same name, adding that Maduro's capture marked "the end for us of a long and painful era."

"It's the freedom to say what you feel, to express the circumstances you're living through today or the needs facing the university, such as lack of transportation funding, increases in student grants and decent salaries for professors," Lombardo said. "Now there is space to express that discontent... to understand that the country is moving toward reconciliation." - Reuters

Eid shopping in Rawalpindi



Pakistanis shop for Eid al-Fitr celebrations during the last week of the Islamic holy fasting month of Ramadan in Rawalpindi yesterday. (AFP)

Pakistan says thwarted Afghan 'drone attacks' on civilian targets

AFP
Islamabad

President Asif Ali Zardari said yesterday the Afghan Taliban had "crossed a red line" by launching what the military called "rudimentary drones" against civilian targets in Pakistan.

Pakistan's military said they were intercepted on Friday night and did not reach their targets, including their own headquarters in Rawalpindi, near Islamabad.

The Taliban authorities lack a fully functional air force but have used locally produced drones, targeting areas primarily in border regions of Pakistan, experts say.

Pakistan's military said debris from the downed drones on Friday injured two children in Quetta, in the southwest, and a civilian

each in Kohat, south of Peshawar in the northwest, and Rawalpindi.

Security sources said airspace around the capital was temporarily closed as a precautionary measure when the drones were detected.

"Afghan Taliban launched few rudimentary drones to harass the brave people of Pakistan. The drones... did not reach their intended targets," the military said.

The incident followed attacks by Pakistan overnight Thursday-Friday that killed four civilians in the Afghan capital, Kabul, and two reported deaths in border provinces.

The Taliban authorities then vowed to strike back, including on Islamabad.

In a post on X, Zardari's office said he "strongly condemned the drone attacks on Pakistani civilian areas, saying the Afghan Taliban crossed a red line".

"Pakistan will not tolerate its civilians being targeted. Afghan soil must not be used for terrorism against neighbours. Pakistan will defend its people," he added.

Islamabad last month launched a military operation against Afghanistan, targeting what it said were Islamist extremists following attacks in Pakistan.

The Taliban government has denied any involvement or the use of Afghan territory for militancy while Pakistan insists it does not target civilians.

There have been repeated clashes at the border in recent weeks, hampering trade and forcing nearby residents to leave their homes.

The UN mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said on Friday that at least 75 civilians have been killed and 193 injured in Afghanistan as a result of the clashes since February 26.

Protesters burn photos of Trump, premier Meloni in Rome march

AFP
Rome

Protesters burned images of US President Donald Trump and Italy's premier Giorgia Meloni in Rome yesterday during a demonstration against the government's judicial reform and the Middle East war.

A few thousand people joined a march in the Italian capital, initially organised against far-right Meloni's planned reforms of the judiciary, which will be put to a referendum next weekend.

It also drew critics of the US-Israel war with Iran, with protesters decrying Meloni's closeness with US President Donald Trump, even if Rome is not directly involved in the conflict.

A small group set fire to posters showing Meloni and Trump together, an AFP photographer witnessed.

The crowd, the majority of them trade unionists, left-wing groups and students, held aloft banners declaring "No to the Meloni government", "No to war" and "No to the referen-

dum", alongside a smattering of Cuban, Iranian and Palestinian flags.

"Meloni describes herself as a patriot, but this is the most subservient government, the most sycophantic of American interests in decades," protester Alessia Lotierzo, a 45-year-old from Rome, told AFP.

The reform being put to a referendum on March 22 and 23 would separate the functions of prosecutor and judge while also changing their oversight body.

Meloni says it is crucial to ensure the impartiality of magistrates, but critics decry it as interference by a government that has repeatedly criticised the judiciary for ruling against it.

Paolo Spena, 31, from the Communist Youth Front, told AFP at the protest that the reform was the latest sign of a "trend towards authoritarianism" of a government that has also tightened laws on protests.

Italy, an EU and Nato member, has sent defensive aid to Gulf nations attacked by Iran during the war, but Meloni has repeatedly said the country is not at war and will not be.

Six killed in Russian missile, drone attacks across Ukraine

Russia targeted energy infrastructure near Kyiv: Zelensky

Reuters
Kyiv

Russia hammered Ukraine with missiles and drones yesterday, killing six people and inflicting damage across several regions of the country, Ukrainian officials said.

Five of the dead were in Kyiv region outside the capital, where President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russian forces targeted energy infrastructure, but also damaged residential buildings, schools and businesses. Fifteen people were injured.

Zelensky said the Sumy, Kharkiv, Dnipro and Mykolaiv regions were also targeted in an attack that included around 430 drones and 68 missiles, most of which were downed by air defenses.

The governor of the southeastern region of Zaporizhzhia, Ivan Fedorov, said a residential area of the city of Zaporizhzhia

had been hit by Russian-guided bombs, killing one person and injuring three. Photos posted online showed parts of buildings reduced to rubble. Yesterday's strikes come as the Iran conflict has distracted international attention from a US-backed peace push in the four-year war, which Kyiv says Moscow has no interest in ending.

"Russia will try to exploit the war in the Middle East to cause even greater destruction here in Europe, in Ukraine," Zelensky wrote on X.

He repeated his call for Kyiv's partners to boost production of air-defence weapons, stocks of which have been diminishing as the U.S. and its allies in the Gulf have fended off Iranian strikes.

Russia's winter attacks on Ukraine have left swathes of major cities without power or heating, part of a campaign to weaken resolve as Moscow's troops press a battlefield offensive and demand Kyiv cede more territory in the east.

Ukraine's forces have targeted Russian strategic infrastructure such as oil refineries, depots and terminals in long-range strikes.

Ukraine's Energy Ministry said



Firefighters work at the site of a residential area which was hit by a Russian air strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, yesterday. (Reuters)

yesterday that consumers in six regions were without electricity after the overnight strikes and Russian shelling of frontline areas.

"There's no way Russia will stop," said local resident Natalia Fetko, 57, whose building was damaged in the strike. "Nothing is enough for them."

Four people died in the Kyiv region surrounding the capital, where 15 people were wounded and damage recorded in four districts, according to regional military ad-

ministrator Mykola Kalashnyk. Yesterday's attack also prompted Nato member Poland to scramble jets to protect its airspace, but no violations were observed, Warsaw's military said.

In Moldova, on Ukraine's western border, the Foreign Ministry denounced what it said was an intrusion by a Russian drone into its airspace in a border district, saying Moscow's actions undermined regional security and posed a danger to its citizens.

Portrait of a united nation

From Page 1

Defending the skies, protecting the streets

While diplomats worked the phones, the Qatar Amiri Air Force worked the skies. The Ministry of Defence reported shooting down two Iranian Su-24 bombers on March 2 and intercepting multiple drone and missile strikes ever since. The country was under attack but not overwhelmed — a testament to years of defence investment and the readiness built through the national Watan exercise, which the interior minister credits with preparing Qatar for precisely this contingency. "Qatar is operating with a unified front," he said. "No department is working in isolation."

On the ground, the Ministry of Interior became the primary voice of reassurance — visible, consistent and precise. It confirmed that the National Warning System would only be activated when urgent action was genuinely required, a deliberate policy to prevent alert fatigue and unnecessary panic.

Environmental monitoring confirmed that air and marine pollution levels remained stable throughout. Practical public guidance was issued and regularly updated: upon hearing a national warning, residents were advised to move inside, stay away from windows and glass facades, await official instructions and report any unknown objects or remnants by calling 999. Residents evacuated from specified areas were provided safe alternative accommodation.

Crucially, citizens and residents responded. Social media feeds showed widespread sharing of official Ministry of Interior posts, with community leaders and expatriate groups actively amplifying only verified official communications — a collective act that helped contain the spread of misinformation at a moment when false information was circulating aggressively.

Keeping the country fed

Perhaps the most consequential domestic challenge was ensuring supplies. The government moved quickly and on multiple fronts.

Qatar Airways repurposed part of its Boeing 777 freighter fleet to maintain the flow of vital goods, transporting approximately 300 tons of essential supplies since the start of March — medicines, baby milk, fresh food and medi-

cal equipment — after obtaining civil aviation authority approval for limited safe air routes. The airline is now delivering more than 200 tons of imports daily from markets across Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, India and Pakistan.

On the ground, major hypermarket chains including LuLu, Al Meera, Monoprix, Safari and Carrefour continued operating at full capacity with well-stocked shelves. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry extended 24-hour operations to 33 retail branches nationwide to support market stability and deployed daily field inspection teams to prevent price manipulation.

Qatar Chamber Chairman Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim al-Thani formed a dedicated working team holding continuous meetings to address emerging supply challenges, backed by a joint government-Chamber committee to monitor prices and clamp down on any unjustified increases.

Underpinning all of this was Qatar's long-term strategic reserve of food and essential goods — a foresight investment that has proved its worth. Domestic self-sufficiency in dairy, poultry and key agricultural products further cushioned the disruption.

A nation defined by its response

What has emerged over the past two weeks is a portrait of a state under genuine threat that has refused to be defined by that threat. Qatar did not choose this war. It warned against it, lobbied against it and mediated against it.

Qatar's UN ambassador HE Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani told the Security Council that targeting uninvolved neighbours was a clear violation of international law — a position the UNSC ultimately endorsed by voting to denounce the Iranian strikes on GCC states.

The prime minister, reflecting on the weeks just passed, praised the resilience of everyone living in Qatar and spoke of the "significance of the moment our country is going through", before adding: "I cannot fail to express my pride, as a Qatari, in the cohesion of our society."

For a country that has navigated a blockade, regional rivalries and now outright missile attacks, that cohesion — between government and governed, between citizen and resident — may prove to be Qatar's most enduring strategic asset.

Expert on how to spot disinformation in a crisis

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Dr Jones said one of the clearest warning signs of coordinated disinformation is the accounts spreading it: "Automated 'bot' accounts and networks of fake profiles are routinely used to amplify false narratives. If a social media account is anonymous, and you don't know who runs it - don't share it."

He described that accounts with vague personal details and no profile photo, affiliation, and online footprint should raise suspicion. These are also accounts that post at a volume no human could sustain — dozens of times per hour, at all hours of the night. It could also be accounts that were dormant for months or years and suddenly became highly active around a specific news event.

"More recently, AI-generated images have entered the mix, with fabricated visuals presented as documentation of events that never occurred. If something looks almost too perfectly

dramatic, that's worth noting," he underlined.

According to Dr Jones, people should not share such details and if shared, do it with a message that it can't be confirmed as real and suggest practical tools such as reverse image search or a dedicated tool like TinEye to verify false content.

"The simplest and most powerful act is to slow down before posting or sharing any news. The most viral content during a crisis is almost always designed to provoke an immediate emotional reaction — outrage, fear, grief, contempt. That reaction is frequently the point. The faster you feel compelled to share something, the more important it is to stop and ask why," he emphasised.

He highlighted that emotional content travels further and faster than calm, factual reporting as false stories about atrocities or conspiracies are engineered to bypass critical thinking. Dr Jones also said social media al-

gorithms are not designed to surface accurate information but to surface engaging information. He said, "Those are very different things. Actively seeking out reporting rather than passively consuming what your feed delivers gives you meaningfully better odds of finding reliable content."

He affirmed that no single source is sufficient during a fast-moving crisis and people should compare what is seen across multiple outlets, international wire services, established broadcasters, and relevant human rights organisations. He stressed: "If you are living in Qatar, follow relevant government accounts that may provide up-to-date verified information about what's going on."

"In an era when disinformation is often professionally produced and strategically deployed, a little healthy scepticism isn't cynicism. Slow down, read around, and beware of your own biases. It's an important part of citizenship," concluded Dr Jones.

German philosopher Jurgen Habermas dies at 96

The German philosopher Jurgen Habermas has died, a spokesperson for his publishing house, Suhrkamp Verlag, told AFP yesterday. He died at the age of 96 in Starnberg, in southern Germany, she said, citing information from the family of the politically engaged theorist.

Habermas was considered the most influential German philosopher of his generation, involved in all the major post-war debates and seeing a united Europe, in his view, as the only remedy for the rise of nationalism.

In his later years, he devoted himself to promoting a federal European project and prevent the continent from falling, as it did in the 20th century, into nationalist rivalries.

Throughout his life, Habermas linked philosophy and politics, thought and action.

After serving as the voice of German student protest in the 1960s, he became its target thirty years later while warning



Jurgen Habermas. (AFP)

of the risks of "left-wing fascism".

In 1989, he criticised the terms of German reunification, guided essentially by the demands of the market, and which made "the Deutsche mark its standard." Born on June 18, 1929 in Duesseldorf, Habermas had been enrolled in the Hitler Youth, but he was too young to have taken an active part in the war. As a teenager, he was deeply marked by the collapse of Nazism.. (AFP)

Switzerland refuses US overflights

Switzerland said yesterday it had refused two US requests to fly over its territory in operations linked to the current Middle East war, citing its neutrality under international law. "In total, two requests linked to the war in Iran were refused, while a maintenance flight and two requests for transport aircraft were approved" on Saturday, the government said in a statement. The two Swiss flight refusals concerned reconnaissance flights on March 15, the government said. "The law of neutrality prohibits overflights by parties to a conflict for military purposes related to that conflict," it said, citing the US-Israeli war with Iran. Flights for humanitarian or medical purposes, including the transport of wounded people and flights unrelated to the conflict remain permitted, it said. (AFP)

'A feeling of home in Qatar'

British artist Debbie Wingham was held up in Doha amid the ongoing regional tensions. But she transformed a cancelled business launch in Doha into a charity initiative, praising Qatar's safety, community spirit and government response in light of all challenges facing the country

By Shaima Sheriff
Staff Reporter

World-renowned British sugar artist Debbie Wingham has transformed a cancelled business launch in Doha into a charity initiative, praising Qatar's safety, community spirit and government response amid ongoing regional tensions. What began as an unexpected setback during a period of regional uncertainty has turned into an act of generosity for acclaimed British artist and designer Debbie Wingham, who says her time in Qatar has left her feeling "safe, protected and at home".

Wingham, globally recognised for her extravagant sugar sculptures and couture-inspired cake designs, had travelled to Doha to launch her cookie venture Crumbz Cookies when the regional situation escalated and forced the cancellation of her soft launch. Rather than leave, she chose to stay, and to give back. "To be honest, since the moment I arrived, I felt so safe and protected," Wingham told GulfTimes. "I cannot even put it into words. At first, like anyone, I wondered what was going on would we have water, would we have food? But then I realised how organised Qatar is." She said discovering the country's preparedness and communication systems reassured her quickly.

"I realised Qatar has its own supply of water and warehouses full of groceries and food. I mean, can you imagine being that organised for something they never knew was going to happen?" she said. "So to summarise, I feel super safe." Wingham also praised the government's communication with residents during the situation, describing official updates and notifications as essential.

"All the information we're given from the ministry, the notifications on your phone and everything, gives you the tools to feel safe," she said. "Now I just carry on with my life." Her cancelled launch also led to an immediate act of community support. With hundreds of freshly baked cookies prepared for the event, Wingham chose to donate the entire inventory to a local food bank.

"For me, it's gratitude," she explained. "Even though it's a small thing, gifting several hundred cookies, if that makes families smile after Iftar, then that's wonderful. Just a small amount of sweetness in people's lives."

Inspired by the community around her, Wingham later introduced a charity concept called 'Heroes of the Roads', recognising delivery drivers who continued serving residents during the situation. "They are part of the hero's jigsaw," she said. "The government and ministries protect us, but these drivers are delivering food

and essentials when people can't go out. It was my way of saying thank you!"

The idea emerged unexpectedly while she was alone in her hotel room, sketching on cookie boxes with a pencil. "I started doodling the Doha skyline and thought, I should turn this into something meaningful, something linked to charity," she said. Beyond the immediate charity efforts, Wingham believes Doha represents a long-term opportunity not only for business but also for community living. Although she has previously lived and worked extensively in the UAE, she said, Qatar's sense of community ultimately drew her in.

"Everybody told me Qatar has this village essence," she said. "And for me that's important because my business is a family business, it's my husband, my daughter and me."

In fact, the positive experience has prompted her to consider a more permanent future in the country. "Well, I love it so much that I'm applying for residency," she said with a smile. "Does that seem like the action of someone who regrets coming here? I think not."

For Wingham, the experience has left a lasting emotional impression. "When I first arrived, there was just this sensory feeling," she said. "Like the hairs on the back of your neck standing up, something special."

Then she paused and summed it up simply: "The feeling of home."



Traditional souqs top shopping destination for men's accessories

As Eid al-Fitr approaches, markets across Doha are experiencing more activities, reflecting the festive spirit that accompanies the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Shopping areas are filled with residents preparing for the celebration, particularly by purchasing men's clothing and accessories traditionally worn during the holiday.

One of the busiest destinations is Souq Al Ali, where many Qataris are gathering to buy garments and accessories in preparation for Eid. For many, the process goes beyond simple shopping, as it is a cherished tradition that reflects the cultural and social significance of the holiday. Men aspire to appear in their best attire, wearing new thobes, ghutras, and agals, complemented by a selection of high-quality perfumes.

Many shoppers prefer traditional markets like Souq Al Ali because these offer a wide range of products that combine heritage styles with modern designs, often at prices suitable for different budgets. Local products reflecting Qatari heritage are displayed alongside imported items catering to contemporary tastes.

Vendors say they have prepared well in advance for the Eid season, which is considered one of the most profitable periods of the year. Shops stock the latest designs of men's garments, premium perfumes, footwear, and accessories, often accompanied by promotional offers and discounts. According to merchants, sales rise sharply during the final days of Ramadan as many customers postpone purchases until just before the holiday.

Abdulaleem, a shop owner at Souq Al Ali, said the last two weeks of Ramadan bring the highest footfall. He noted that customers focus on buying a full set of men's essentials, includ-



ing the agal, which ranges from QR150 to QR300 depending on quality.

Some are crafted from Syrian wool and require up to three days to produce. Ghutras typically range between QR140 and QR180, while standard white versions start at QR75. Other brands start from QR50, often made from cotton and polyester. Many buyers choose more than one ghutra to ensure they have a spare for Eid celebrations.

Another vendor, Rashid, said demand is particularly strong for white embroidered thobes and imported luxury ghutras. Customers increasingly look for garments that blend traditional elegance with modern tailoring. He added that many shoppers prefer purchasing most of their Eid requirements from one or two stores to simplify the process.

Additional items complete the traditional look. Undergarments range from QR15 to QR30, while cotton undershirts start at QR20. The "gahfiya" cap can cost between QR10 and QR50, depending on style and size. The price

of those buttons begin at QR60, while sets with decorative pens range from QR120 to QR200. Prayer beads are also popular accessories, with prices ranging from QR100 to QR250.

Khalid al-Marri, a shopper, explained that visiting Souq Al Ali before Eid has become a family ritual. He enjoys buying new clothes for himself and his children. He believes that children should choose their own items rather than being forced into specific purchases. Similarly, Jassim al-Kuwari, another shopper, said he visits the market every year with friends to get new thobes and accessories, noting that the market offers everything needed for a complete Eid outfit.

The pre-Eid shopping rush also extends to men's fragrances. Perfume retailers report rising demand for traditional scents, such as oud oil and musk, alongside popular international fragrances. Watch and accessory stores are also witnessing strong sales, particularly among younger customers eager to complement their Eid attire with stylish pieces.



Wingham believes Doha represents a long-term opportunity not only for business but also for community living.

Why pregnant women should avoid sources of anxiety, stress

Excessive consumption of news and social media can lead to overthinking and stress. Calming activities such as reading, light walking, or spending time with family can help restore a sense of relaxation and emotional balance in tough times

By A Staff Reporter
Doha

During pregnancy, women experience natural physical and emotional changes. They may also become more sensitive to stress and pressure due to hormonal changes and the responsibilities that come with expecting a new baby.

Through clinical practice in the mental support section, it has been observed that some pregnant women may become particularly sensitive to distressing or widely circulated news, especially when the information is unclear or contradictory. Therefore, paying close attention to mental health during this stage is essential.

Dr Sedki al-Shazly al-Sheikh, Clinical Psychologist at Al-Mashaf Health Centre at the Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC), explains that continuous exposure to news through television or social media may increase feelings of anxiety, particularly when it occurs repeatedly throughout the day.

For this reason, it is recommended to limit news consumption to specific times, such as twice a day, and to avoid following distressing news in the evening or before bedtime, as this may lead to excessive thinking and difficulty relaxing.

It is also advisable to reduce constant news browsing on mobile phones and instead spend this time engaging in calming activities such as reading, light walking, or spending time with family. These activities can help restore a sense of calm and emotional balance. Taking occasional breaks from social media can also be beneficial in reducing exposure to anxiety-provoking content.

If it is necessary to stay informed about current developments, pregnant women may consider receiving only essential information from a trusted person, such as a spouse or a close family member, who can follow the news and share the key updates calmly and in a manner that considers the woman's psychological well-being during this period.

Maintaining a daily routine
Maintaining a consistent daily routine can significantly support psychological stability. Pregnant women are encouraged to keep regular times for sleeping and waking, while also organising meals, rest periods, and daily activities. A structured routine



Dr Sedki al-Shazly al-Sheikh

can help reduce constant preoccupation with news and external events, while fostering a greater sense of stability and calm.

Activities that promote relaxation

Certain simple activities can help pregnant women reduce stress and improve mood. These may include light walking or other suitable physical activities, after consulting a doctor to ensure they are appropriate for the individual's health condition. Other helpful practices include deep breathing exercises, reading, or engaging in a favourite hobby.

Some women may also find comfort in spiritual practices such as reading the Qur'an, engaging in remembrance (dhikr), or making supplication (duaa). Such practices can promote



feelings of tranquillity and inner peace. Incorporating these activities into daily life may help calm the body, reduce stress levels, and enhance emotional comfort and stability.

The importance of quality sleep

Good sleep plays a vital role in maintaining both psychological and physical balance during pregnancy. Proper sleep patterns are linked to the regulation of hormones associated with stress and mood, such as cortisol and melatonin, which play an important role in controlling the body's sleep-wake cycle.

Pregnant women are generally advised to aim for 7 to 9 hours of sleep per day to support their physical and mental health during pregnancy. Healthy sleep habits, such as reducing phone

use before bedtime, avoiding distressing news in the evening, and creating a calm, comfortable sleep environment, can help promote relaxation and improve overall sleep quality.

The importance of family support

Emotional support from a spouse or family members plays a key role in reducing anxiety levels among pregnant women. Research in psychology and mental health indicates that social support is a fundamental factor in enhancing feelings of safety and emotional stability during pregnancy.

Talking about feelings or concerns with a trusted person can help pregnant women express their worries in a healthy way, which may reduce stress and increase feelings of reassurance. A supportive family environment can also help alleviate psychological pressure. Positive communication and understanding from a spouse and family members foster a sense of emotional support and containment. Some research also suggests that family support may help regulate the body's physiological response to stress, such as reducing the release of stress hormones, which in turn positively affects the mother's mental well-being.

Providing an atmosphere of calm and understanding within the family is therefore an important factor in helping pregnant women feel secure and emotion-

ally stable during this stage.

When is it recommended to consult a specialist?

Dr al-Sheikh adds that it is normal for pregnant women to experience some anxiety at certain times, especially in the presence of concerning events. However, in some cases, anxiety may become severe or persistent enough to affect daily life.

In such situations, it may be beneficial to consult a doctor or a mental health specialist if certain signs appear, such as persistent anxiety that is difficult to control, prolonged difficulty sleeping, excessive worrying about risks, or ongoing feelings of tension and distress. Receiving appropriate support at the right time can significantly help restore emotional balance and improve feelings of comfort and reassurance during pregnancy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, caring for mental health during pregnancy is just as important as caring for physical health. In times when distressing events are widely discussed, simple steps such as limiting exposure to news, seeking family support, and prioritising rest and sleep can help pregnant women maintain emotional calm. These practices help create a healthier, more stable environment for the unborn child's growth and development.