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Financial Results (FY 2025)

Gross Written Premiums (GWP)

**9%** ▲  
**QAR 9.9B**

Net Profit Before the Impact of P11r, Tax, Etc.

**19%** ▲  
**QAR 874M**

Net Profit Profit attributable to QIC shareholders

**9%** ▲  
**QAR 791M**

Earnings Per Share:

**10%** ▲  
**QAR 0.188**

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# Qatar, Jordan united against aggression

**Amir, King Abdullah urge diplomacy for de-escalation, vow to boost bilateral ties**

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein of Jordan discussed, at the Amiri Diwan yesterday afternoon, developments in the region in the light of the current escalation and the continued Iranian aggression targeting Qatar, Jordan, and a number of countries in the region.

In this context, His Highness the Amir affirmed Qatar's solidarity with Jordan regarding all measures it takes to defend its sovereignty and security and to ensure the safety of its citizens.

King Abdullah renewed his country's solidarity and full support for all measures taken by Qatar to preserve its sovereignty, security, and stability.

The two sides expressed their rejection of these attacks and stressed the need for an immediate cessation of all military actions that could expand the conflict and endanger the security of countries and their peoples.

They also emphasised the importance of intensifying regional and international efforts to de-escalate and contain the ongoing tensions, and to work through diplomatic channels and dialogue



to address existing crises in a way that helps prevent further deterioration in the region and enhances prospects for security and stability.

Both sides also discussed a host of regional and international issues of mutual concern, stressing the importance of continuing co-ordination and consultation

between the two countries, especially in light of current developments and their implications for the region's security and stability.

His Highness the Amir and the Jordanian king also held a bilateral meeting during which they discussed relations between the two sisterly countries and ways to de-

velop them, in addition to exchanging views on a number of regional and international issues of common concern, foremost among them the current crisis and its repercussions on global peace and security.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin

Jassim al-Thani and HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi attended the session, along with a lineup of Their Excellencies senior officials.

Their Excellencies members of the delegation accompanying the king were also in attendance from the Jordanian side. Earlier,

His Highness the Amir led the welcome and farewell accorded to King Abdullah upon his arrival and departure, along with his accompanying delegation at the Doha International Airport.

HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi was also present. (QNA)

## 9 ballistic missiles, drones neutralised, fire extinguished

The Ministry of Defence said yesterday that Qatar was targeted by an attack consisting of nine ballistic missiles and a number of drones launched from Iran. The ministry explained in a statement that the Qatari Armed Forces successfully intercepted all the ballistic missiles and drones. Meanwhile, earlier in the day the Ministry of Interior said the Civil Defence was dealing with a small fire in the Industrial Area caused by falling debris, after a missile was intercepted. No injuries were reported. (QNA)

## Limited Qatar Airways flights from today

Qatar Airways will operate a limited number of flights to and from Doha from today to March 28, 2026. In a statement, the airline said it continues to suspend part of its operational activities currently in light of the ongoing closure of Qatar's airspace, emphasising at the same time its continued efforts to support passengers.

**RAMADAN THOUGHT**

And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour. (Qur'an 17:23)

**Prayer times**

Fajr...4:23; Zuhr...11:42; Asr...3:08; Maghrib...5:47; Isha...7:17

**Fasting times**

Iftar today .....5:47pm  
Imsak tomorrow.....4:12am

## Qatar's unstoppable humanitarian drive

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

While missiles and drones threaten its skies, Qatar has not flinched from one of its most defining roles — that of a global humanitarian lifeline. Far from retreating inward, the country has doubled down on its international aid commitments through February and March, channelling relief to war-torn and crisis-hit communities across the world even as it works to shield its own people from harm.

Despite the pressures of safeguarding its territory, protecting critical infrastructure, and ensuring the safety and well-being of its population, the country has not scaled back its global humanitarian commitments. On the contrary, these efforts have intensified, reflecting a sustained commitment to alleviating suffering in conflict-affected and vulnerable regions worldwide.

Across Qatar, donation collection points have remained fully operational, while residents have continued to contribute generously through both online and

offline channels. This public response underscores a strong sense of solidarity and a shared determination to support communities in need beyond national borders.

In early March, Qatar launched a comprehensive emergency response in Lebanon following a sharp military escalation. By mid-March, Qatar Charity reported delivering urgent assistance to approximately 40,500 displaced families affected by shelling in southern Lebanon, Beirut's southern suburbs, and the Bekaa Valley.

At the same time, relief operations in the Gaza Strip have remained a central focus. Qatar continues to be one of the leading providers of sustained humanitarian aid in Gaza, prioritising shelter, food security, and psychosocial support. During March, the Gaza Reconstruction Committee distributed more than 80,000 tents, benefiting around 400,000 people. Millions of litres of clean drinking water have also been supplied, alongside ready-to-eat meals and food parcels. Mental health and psychosocial support programmes have reached over 730,000 displaced individuals. **To Page 4**



## Call for a new regional security architecture

**Gulf states must reclaim agency over defence: MoFA spokesperson**

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

Qatar has called for a fundamentally stronger and broader military deterrence framework for the region, warning that the assumptions underpinning Gulf security have been upended by the current conflict.

The need for establishing a far more comprehensive military deterrence in the region was highlighted yesterday by Dr Majed bin Mohamed al-Ansari, adviser to the Prime Minister and official spokesperson at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Taking part in a webinar organised by The Middle East Council on Global Affairs, Dr al-Ansari said: "One thing we are sure of, is that we need to establish a military deterrence in the region that goes beyond whatever was there in the past. We need to find a way of diplomatic engagement with all the parties in the region, and we need to take back our agency when it comes to making deci-



sions about regional security over here."

The online open discussion 'Navigating Iran War in the region: Qatar's Position and Strategic Perspectives' also included Dr Mohammed al-Hasemi, an energy expert and Rashid al-Mohanadi, a non-resident fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs and the session was moderated by Dr Cinzia Bianco, visiting fellow, European Council on Foreign Affairs.

The session noted that the escalating confrontation between Iran, the United States, and Israel has resulted in a period of heightened uncertainty in the Middle East, with significant implications for regional stability, security, and global energy markets. **To Page 4**

## Iran's security chief assassinated

Israel said yesterday it had killed Iran's powerful national security chief, Ali Larjani (pictured).

Larjani's death would be a massive blow to Iran just weeks after US-Israeli strikes on February 28 killed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the republic's long-serving supreme leader, throwing the Middle East into war and upending global markets. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said Larjani was "eliminated last night", and has since been confirmed by Iran.

"This morning we eliminated Ali Larjani, the boss of the Revolutionary Guards," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a televised statement. An AFP reporter had earlier yesterday reported blasts in Tehran, and the reported assassination comes as strikes shook countries across the Middle East from the Gulf to Iraq and Lebanon.

## Top Trump security official resigns

A top security official in US President Donald Trump's administration resigned over the war in Iran yesterday, saying the country had posed no imminent threat to the United States.

Joe Kent (pictured), who headed the National Counterterrorism Center, is the first senior official in Trump's administration to resign over the conflict, now in its third week.

"I cannot in good conscience support the ongoing war in Iran. Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation, and it is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful lobby," Kent wrote in a letter posted to social media.

Some experts have said an imminent threat would be required for the United States to launch a war under the international law of war.



BALADNA FOOD SECURITY

# Baladna Reaffirms Commitment to Qatar's Food Security Following Visit by Minister of Municipality



بلادنا ش.م.ع.ق.  
BALADNA Q.P.S.C.



**Doha, Qatar, 17th March 2026:** Baladna Q.P.S.C., Qatar's leading dairy and juice company welcomed His Excellency Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Attiyah, Minister of Municipality, to its production facilities on 16 March 2026. The visit highlighted the strength of Qatar's domestic food production capabilities and Baladna's continued role in supporting national food security.

The visit was hosted by Baladna's senior leadership team, including Group Chairman Moutaz Al-Khayyat, Vice Chairman Ali Hilal Al-Kuwari, Chief Executive Officer Paul Kenny, and Group Chief Financial Officer Saifullah Khan. During the visit, the delegation toured Baladna's integrated dairy farms and production facilities, where they reviewed the Company's operations, supply chain resilience, and ongoing efforts to ensure the uninterrupted supply of high-quality dairy and food products to the Qatari market.

The discussions focused on the outlook for food supply in Qatar and the operational arrangements currently in place across Baladna's production and distribution network, as the Company continues to closely assess regional developments and maintain oversight across its operations.

The visit by His Excellency Abdullah Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah forms part of this continued engagement between Baladna and national authorities, as the Company works alongside government stakeholders to

support the stability of Qatar's food ecosystem and ensure that locally produced, high-quality dairy products continue to reach consumers across the country.

During the visit, Baladna's management team briefed His Excellency on the Company's operational readiness and contingency planning measures, designed to ensure continuity of supply under all circumstances. These measures include robust feed supply management, diversified sourcing strategies, and advanced production capabilities that enable the Company to maintain steady output and distribution.

**Moutaz Al-Khayyat, Chairman of Baladna, said:** "Baladna was established with a clear national purpose to strengthen Qatar's food security and build a resilient local production platform capable of serving the country under all circumstances. Over the years, we have built one of the region's most integrated and dependable dairy operations, and today we remain fully committed to supporting Qatar's needs with the same sense of responsibility and purpose. Today's visit by His Excellency the Minister of Municipality reflects the continued alignment between Baladna's mission and Qatar's national priorities. We remain fully committed to ensuring a reliable supply of high-quality food products for the people of Qatar and the region, regardless of external circumstances."



## BALADNA FOOD SECURITY

Established in 2014, Baladna was created to help strengthen Qatar's domestic dairy production and support the country's long-term food security objectives. Over the past decade, the Company has built one of the region's largest dairy farms and developed an operating model that integrates livestock farming, dairy processing, packaging, and nationwide distribution.

Today, Baladna products continue to reach retailers and food service partners across the country through the Company's nationwide distribution network. Across supermarkets and sales channels in Qatar, Baladna's range of fresh and long-life dairy products remains available, supported by continuous coordination across production, supply planning, and distribution teams.

Baladna's vertically integrated structure gives the Company a significant operational advantage, allowing it to manage the full value chain from fresh milk production through processing, packaging, and delivery to customers.

This integrated model enhances visibility, responsiveness, and operational control, enabling the Company to adapt efficiently to changing conditions while maintaining continuity of supply across the domestic market.

**Chief Executive Officer, Paul Kenny, noted:** "Baladna's strength lies in the resilience of its operating model and the dedication of its people. Our integrated production platform allows us to respond quickly to changing conditions while maintaining stable supply for the Qatari market. We are proud to support the nation's food security and remain focused on delivering high-quality products to consumers every day."

Production schedules, delivery cycles, and inventory planning are reviewed on an ongoing basis to support uninterrupted operations. Baladna also remains in regular communication with the relevant ministries and authorities as part of a coordinated approach to safeguarding the continuity of food supply in Qatar.



بلادنا ش.م.ع.ق.  
BALADNA Q.P.S.C.

The operational scale and resilience Baladna has built over the past several years now provide a strong foundation to support the domestic market. Continued investment in farming capacity, manufacturing infrastructure, and supply chain capabilities has enabled the Company to steadily expand local production and reinforce its ability to respond effectively to evolving circumstances.

Baladna will continue to monitor developments closely and take any necessary operational measures to support continuity across production and distribution, while remaining firmly focused on serving the needs of the Qatari market.





# MoI issues workplace evacuation guidelines

## Guidelines to boost emergency preparedness

Qatar's Ministry of Interior (MoI) has released a comprehensive manual outlining precautionary evacuation procedures for workplaces during emergencies and exceptional situations, aimed at strengthening safety awareness and ensuring swift, coordinated responses across public and private sectors.

The guidelines target employees and staff in government, semi-

government and private institutions, providing clear instructions on how to act before, during and after an evacuation alert.

The MoI said the manual serves as an approved reference to help safeguard lives and support compliance with official directives issued through the National Alert System and on-site safety officers.

The document places strong emphasis on preventive readiness, urging employees to familiarise themselves in advance with emer-

gency exits, evacuation routes and designated assembly points. It also highlights the importance of keeping corridors and exits unobstructed, identifying the locations of safety equipment such as fire extinguishers, and adhering to workplace safety protocols.

In the event of an evacuation alert, the ministry advises workers to stop all activities immediately, remain calm and follow official instructions. Employees are instructed to evacuate promptly using desig-

nated routes without attempting to collect personal belongings, while assisting colleagues and visitors, particularly the elderly and people with disabilities.

During evacuation, individuals are required to use stairs instead of elevators, move in an orderly manner without pushing, and follow directional signage. In the presence of smoke, the guidance recommends staying low to the ground where air is clearer. Workers are also urged to strictly follow directions from safety of-

ficers and emergency teams.

Upon reaching assembly points, employees must remain in place for headcounts and report any missing persons to authorities. The manual also addresses scenarios where evacuation is not possible, advising individuals to move to safe locations inside buildings, close doors to limit hazards, and contact emergency services with their location while awaiting further instructions.

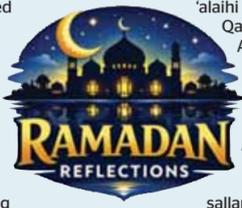
Additional guidance is provided for situations in which

immediate danger arises during evacuation, including halting movement if evacuation routes become unsafe and seeking nearby shelter while avoiding exposed areas, such as glass facades.

The MoI underscored that safety is a shared responsibility, calling on all employees to act calmly, cooperate with authorities and prioritise the protection of lives. It added that fostering a strong safety culture and awareness remains the first line of defence in emergency situations.

## Etiquette of Eid

Eids or festivals are moments of celebration common to all nations. The festivals of non-believing nations are associated with worldly matters such as the birth of a nation or its decline, the appointment or crowning of a ruler, his marriage, or the beginning of a season like spring, and so on. As for Muslims, their festivals (Eids) are associated with their religious rituals. They have only two festivals or Eids: Eid al-Fitr (celebration of the end of Ramadan) and Eid al-Adha (festival of sacrifice). When the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, came to Madinah and found the people celebrating two days he said: "What are these occasions?" They said: "We used to celebrate them in Jaahiliyya (before the coming of Islam)". He, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, then said: "Allah has replaced them for you with the two better days (i.e. Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha)". These two festivals which Allah prescribed to the Muslims are part of the rituals of Islam which should be commemorated and the purposes of which should be understood.



of prayer) and five in the second. This has been confirmed by the companions of the Salaf (our righteous predecessors).

5. It is recommended that the Imam recites in the first Raka'at Surah Al-Aalaa (chapter 87) and Surah Al-Ghaashiah (chapter 88) in the second. Other reports also show that the Prophet, sallallaahu

'alaihi wa sallam, used to recite Surah Qaaf (chapter 50) and Surah Al-Qamar (chapter 54) as is confirmed in Sahih Muslim.

6. There is no Sunnah prayer either before or after Eid prayer as Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that whenever the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, went for Eid prayer, he used to pray two Raka'at (of Eid) but nothing before or after them.

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

### Guidance of the Prophet concerning the Eid day

1. He, sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam, used to always perform the two Eid prayers in the Musallaah (outside prayer grounds). He only performed this Salaah in the Masjid one time, due to rain.

2. He used to wear his best clothing when he went out for the two Eid prayers.

3. He used to eat an odd number of dates before going out for the Eid al-Fitr (prayer). As for the Eid al-Adha (prayer), he would not eat until he returned from the Musallaah (outside prayer grounds), in which case he would eat from the Ad-heeyah (sacrificed animal).

4. He is to take a Ghusl (complete bath) for both of the Eids.

5. He used to go out to the two Eid prayers walking. 6. Whenever he reached the Musallaah he would begin with the Salaah - without Adhaan and without 'Iqaamah, and without saying "as-Salaatu Jaami'atan" (i.e. "Salaah, in Congregation").

7. Whenever he finished the Salaah, he would stand - facing the people - while the people would be sitting. Then, he would deliver the religious advice and exhortation; and he would begin the Khutbah with 'Praise of Allah'.

8. He gave permission to those who attended the Eid prayer to either sit for the Khutbah or leave.

9. He used to go (to the place of prayer) by one road and return by another road.

[Summarised from 'Zaad al-Ma'aad Fee Hadyi Khair al-'Ibaad' by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah]

## Indian ambassador lauds Qatar's leadership for exceptional handling of the current situation

### 'People's well-being foremost concern for Qatari authorities'

I would like to sincerely thank His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and other members of the ruling family, as well as HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani and other departments of Government of Qatar for the exceptional handling of the situation arising from the current conflict and attacks on Qatar. Since the start of the conflict on February 28, the leadership and Government of Qatar have taken steps that have reassured all residents of Qatar, including the large Indian community, that their well-being is a top priority of Qatari authorities.

There has been effective communication from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) about precautions to take in case an attack is taking place. The mobile alerts when an attack is about to take place are timely for people to take shelter, and this has reduced the anxiety that people may be taken by surprise during an attack. We also thank the brave soldiers of Qatar who have been at the forefront of neutralising the incoming attacks and keeping Qatar safe. One Indian who got injured in an attack on the first day



Vipul, Indian ambassador to Qatar.

of the conflict, received timely and full medical help for which we thank the health authorities.

I have to especially thank Qatar Airways for looking after a large number of Indian passengers who got stranded in Qatar when they were transiting through Doha airport. I do not think any other airline would look after its guests in the manner that Qatar Airways did. All such stranded passengers were swiftly moved to hotels and stayed there till they moved out when limited flights started on March 7. We are also grateful that Qatar Airways is operating flights in this difficult scenario, and so far, almost 3,400 Indians have travelled on Qatar Airways flights from Doha over the past few days. The airline has also helped in

prioritising emergency cases.

The conflict has also led to major disruption of supply chains and production schedules. It is testament to Qatar's sagacious leadership that there has been no shortage of food items or medicines in the country. The supermarkets have enough supplies for everyone, which is reassuring for all. India and Qatar are closely tied with respect to energy and food items and we hope that energy supplies from Qatar to India will get restored soon, once the conditions allow.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken to His Highness the Amir after the attacks faced by Qatar and condemned the violation of Qatar's sovereignty. India's External Affairs Minister had also spoken to HE the Prime Minister. India stands in solidarity with the people of Qatar against attacks on the country.

Today I again met a large cross-section of Indian community virtually. Every Indian in Qatar remains steadfast in their commitment to Qatar, which has been welcoming and supportive of Indians throughout history. They were all highly appreciative of the care and support given by Qatar to its residents, visitors and tourists since the conflict began. It was noted that many Indians on short-term visas or emergency visas had been able to travel back to India.

I hope that peace and security prevail in Qatar and the region soon.

## Public Prosecution sets Ramadan, Eid service hours

Qatar's Public Prosecution has announced its official working hours for services during the final days of Ramadan and throughout the Eid al-Fitr holidays, introducing extended evening operations to ensure continued public access.

According to the announcement, evening service hours will be in effect for the remainder of Ramadan starting March 17, and continuing until the end of the holy month. During this period, services will be available daily from 9pm-1am.

These services will be provided at the Public Prosecution Building's Public Services Section, as well as at the Residency Affairs Prosecution located within the Search and Follow-up Department building of the Ministry of Interior.

For the Eid al-Fitr holidays, the Public Prosecution said evening working hours will continue from 6pm to 10pm, beginning on

the first day of Eid and running until March 23. Services during the holiday period will be offered at the same locations.

In addition, the Public Prosecution confirmed that certain essential services will remain available round the clock, including those handled by the Prosecution of Judgment Execution and Cheques at Hamad International Airport, ensuring that urgent matters can be addressed without interruption. The authority also highlighted that its electronic services remain accessible at all times through its official online portal, allowing users to complete transactions remotely. Members of the public can also access services via the Public Prosecution's mobile application, available for download on major app platforms.

The move is aimed at maintaining service continuity and facilitating public access during one of the busiest periods of the year.

### MoI cautions against scam calls, messages

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) strongly advised the public against responding to any suspicious calls or messages that take advantage of the current situation and falsely claim to represent government agencies within the nation, asking the recipient to disclose banking information or transfer funds. In a post on its X account, the ministry also emphasised the critical need to refrain from sharing passwords, bank card information, or one-time verification codes (OTP), and to avoid clicking on links included in such messages. (QNA)

## End of the Liquidation Announcement

The Liquidator – Samer Hussein Jaghoub  
Deloitte & Touche – Qatar Branch

Declares

finalizing the procedures  
of the Liquidation of

Svitzer Wijsmuller Halul W.L.L. (the "Company")  
Commercial Registry No. (30702)

In accordance with the provisions of the law, and accordingly, he disclaims his responsibility from the Company, and its commercial registration was cancelled from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

## Qatar's unstoppable humanitarian drive

From Page 1

Through the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), and in coordination with key partners such as Qatar Charity and the Qatar Red Crescent Society, a wide range of humanitarian projects have been implemented globally. These initiatives have delivered essential services - including food, water, healthcare, and shelter - to millions, helping ease daily hardships and restore dignity in crisis-affected communities.

During Ramadan, large-scale charitable programmes have further expanded their reach. Iftar initiatives have targeted

more than 480,000 beneficiaries across over 40 countries, providing food baskets and daily meals. Zakat Al Fitr distributions are expected to reach more than 706,000 people worldwide. In addition, an Eid clothing initiative has brought joy to approximately 8,300 orphaned children across multiple regions.

Particular attention has been given to countries facing protracted crises and conflict, including Yemen, Sudan, Syria, Djibouti, Somalia, parts of West Africa, and Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Over the years, Qatari humanitarian organisations have developed extensive

experience operating in complex and high-risk environments. Their effectiveness has been strengthened through close cooperation with United Nations agencies, international NGOs, and local partners. These collaborations enable aid to reach some of the most difficult-to-access areas, ensuring timely and efficient delivery to those most in need.

In the face of regional instability, Qatar's sustained and expanding humanitarian outreach highlights a dual commitment: protecting its own people while continuing to stand in support of vulnerable communities around the world.

## Call for a new regional security architecture

From Page 1

Despite these pressures, Gulf governments have exercised restraint, prioritising de-escalation and diplomacy while managing increasing security risks and economic disruptions.

Dr al-Ansari recalled that Qatar was attacked last year by Israel and by Iran. He continued: "Now we are part of this war that we have never been asked to be part of. We have never been consulted on this war. And we have to live through the results. If the US ends this war now, we will be left with an Iran that sees us as a direct threat, that has a vengeance against everybody in the region, including our countries, and we will be the ones left to deal with the neighbourhood post this war."

The official said that two main assumptions have been challenged. He explained: "Assumption number one

**"Now we are part of this war that we have never been asked to be part of. We have never been consulted on this war. And we have to live through the results. If the US ends this war now, we will be left with an Iran that sees us as a direct threat, that has a vengeance against everybody in the region, including our countries, and we will be the ones left to deal with the neighbourhood post this war"**

is that having a strong contingency of US forces in the region would be a deterrent to any other actor attacking the Gulf countries. The second was the main threat that we have always had was non-state actors and countries who have hegemonic tendencies towards the region. Now, both of these assumptions

have been challenged."

Dr al-Ansari also spoke about the need for a US-plus security strategy. "It means you do not move away from the United States, but you diversify along with the United States when it comes to security. And I think one of the realisations of the world that is taking place right now is the invaluable role of Europe," he stressed.

He pointed out: "What this war has shown is that when we are faced with war, the main burden of defending ourselves will be on us, not our partners. If you look at the interception rates here in Qatar, almost all of the interceptions have been by the Qatari armed forces. You look at the fighter jets that are protecting our skies right now and almost all of them are Qatari fighter jets with the joint squadron from the United Kingdom, without anything from anywhere else."

## Turkiye says Mideast war could trigger 'permanent' refugee crisis

AFP  
Istanbul

If the Middle East war spreads, it could create a "permanent" refugee crisis, Turkiye's top diplomat warned yesterday as Lebanon said Israel's bombardment had displaced over a million people.

"If the war... spreads, there is a possibility this will turn into a permanent refugee crisis with refugees seeking shelter outside the borders of their countries," Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan told a joint news conference with his Canadian counterpart Anita Anand.

"This needs to stop as soon as possible."

Lebanon was dragged into

the Middle East war on March 2 when Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei during the US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

Since then, more than 1mn people have registered as displaced, the Lebanese authorities said on Monday – representing more than a sixth of its entire population.

The news came as Israel's military said it had launched a limited ground operation against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

"The humanitarian situation is deeply concerning in Lebanon and has the potential to worsen if there is a ground offensive there," Anand told the news conference.

Fidan said the war "could lead to permanent damage.. between

countries of the region" pointing to the conflict "spreading across Lebanon, and things also becoming much more complicated in Iraq."

He said Turkiye had been "working very hard diplomatically since the outbreak of the war to prevent these crises from escalating", saying he would travel to several countries in the region today.

Anand said Canada appreciated Turkiye's diplomatic efforts and its "role as an interlocutor in the current Middle East conflict" while also expressing its resolute opposition to Iran's "reprehensible" strikes on regional nations.

"Canada absolutely condemns those retaliatory strikes.. Those retaliatory strikes must stop," she said.



A Red Crescent rescue team works next to a building that was damaged by a strike, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Tehran, yesterday. (Reuters)

## Lebanon says Israeli strikes kill three soldiers

AFP  
Beirut

Three Lebanese soldiers were killed in Israeli strikes yesterday, the Lebanese army said, as Israel carried out new raids and again ordered residents of vast parts of southern Lebanon to evacuate.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war on March 2 when Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel in response to US-Israeli strikes that killed Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Israel has responded with intense strikes in multiple Lebanese regions and ground operations in the south, with its finance minister saying this month that Beirut's suburbs would soon "resemble" the badly damaged Gazan city of Khan Younis. From Geneva, the UN rights office said yesterday that threats by Israeli officials "to impose the same level of destruction on Lebanon as inflicted in Gaza are wholly unacceptable".

In the southern city of Sidon, far from the border, displaced people were sleeping in their cars parked along the seafront corniche, according to an AFP team there. The city "is full, we have no more capacity", said Jihan Kaisi, the director of an NGO



Lebanese army soldiers and civil defence members inspect a building that burned following Israeli bombardment on the village of Marjayoun in southern Lebanon close to the border, yesterday. (AFP)

that runs a school-turned-shelter, where more than 1,100 people are crammed together.

"Lots of people are coming every day to ask for shelter but we don't have space anymore, we can't accept them," she said, adding that the road from the south was blocked on Monday with people fleeing north following evacuation warnings.

Israel's military yesterday renewed its call for residents to evacuate a region stretching more than 40 kilometres from the Lebanon-Israel border.

The Lebanese military said three of its soldiers were killed

in two Israeli air strikes in the south, while the Israeli army said its operations were not directed "against the Lebanese army". Lebanon's army has tried to stay out of the war, but three of its soldiers were killed by Israeli shelling earlier this month during a failed Israeli commando operation in eastern Lebanon.

President Joseph Aoun said in a statement that targeting the army "blatantly contradicts" calls from Lebanon and the international community for the military to extend state control across the country and disarm Hezbollah.

## Iranian rescue workers struggle under relentless bombardment in nation

Reuters  
Tehran

As US and Israeli air strikes pound Tehran, Iranian rescue workers are braving the risk of secondary attacks and say they are suffering trauma from the horror of pulling dead children from the rubble.

The rescue teams are responding to a daily barrage of strikes across the city, and one worker told Reuters that on each of the 10 days he had been working since the war began, he had been on between two and 10 call-outs.

More than 1,300 people have been killed in the strikes on Iran, according to local authorities, and there seems no prospect of respite for the Iranian Red Crescent Society workers who deal with the aftermath of the blasts.

Iran's Red Crescent, the local affiliate of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, has built up decades of experience in handling the aftermath of disasters because of Iran's frequent earthquakes.

Nevertheless, Reza Mohammad Doost, a Red Crescent volunteer for 13 years, said rescuers suffered so much from their experience in the current conflict that their hands often shook. "They have problems sleeping, eating and they feel so much stress," he said.

Israel and the US launched the war on February 28, calling Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes a threat, and citing its support for fighter groups in the Middle East and its quashing of internal protests.

Iran, which denies its nuclear programme is a threat, has responded to the attack by firing missiles and drones at Israel and countries that host US bases, and by closing the Strait of Hormuz.

"We take precautions but we are



Members of a Red Crescent rescue team hold a doll, at the site of a building that was damaged by a strike, in Tehran, yesterday. (Reuters)

not fearful," said Navvab Shamspour, a senior Red Crescent official, describing how a rescue team would pull out as soon as they heard warplanes overhead in case of further attacks on the same area.

"The hardest part is that I have to rescue people and take care of my team, because there were missions where a strike takes place just 10 minutes after an initial strike," he said.

In east Tehran's Resalat district, a massive concrete skeleton was all that remained of a residential building, standing amid wrecked cars, rubble, torn shreds of cloth, twisted metal and shattered ceramics.

### RESCUE TEAMS STRUGGLE WITH TRAUMA

A rescue worker pulled items from the rubble – a teddy bear without a head, a photo of a woman wearing a silver bracelet – before the sound of jets overhead sent them all scurrying for cover.

Dealing with distraught relatives watching the team pull bodies from the rubble poses its own difficulties. "This is very hard on

us," Shamspour said. When rescue teams arrive at a bomb site, they are crowded by families looking for loved ones they fear were killed or trapped in the rubble. "Imagine – they can be just satisfied if they find just the dead body. Even the dead body," said Doost.

A strike on the first day of the war hit a school, killing scores of schoolgirls, Iranian officials have said. Israel and the US say they do not target civilians and are investigating. At the Red Crescent office, rescue workers and staff chatted, watched television and played table tennis and table football, trying to ease the tension between call-outs. Mohammad Jannat Ammani, a cleric in a white turban, had started volunteering for the society months ago while visiting his sick grandfather in Tehran from his home in the semi-rural city of Qom.

He joined up on an impulse when seeing Red Crescent members working in the hospital where his grandfather was a patient, he said, adding "it was just an accident... I felt I had to do something".

## US embassy struck 'as blasts heard in Baghdad'

Several loud explosions were heard yesterday evening in Iraq's capital Baghdad, AFP journalists reported, with a security official reporting a drone and rocket attack on the US embassy, AFP reported from Baghdad. In a restaurant in the city, where diners did not react to the initial sounds of the blasts, a witness told AFP he saw detonations caused by the embassy's air defences intercepting projectiles. Another witness saw a fire on the edge of the embassy grounds from her balcony, with the blaze also reported by the security official, who said it was caused by a drone. "The embassy was

the target of a drone and rocket attack," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Another drone, targeting the US diplomatic and logistics centre at Baghdad airport, was shot down, according to a security official. Shortly after the incidents, the powerful Kataeb Hezbollah group issued a statement demanding that every "foreign soldier" leave the country. "Iraq's instability is due to the malicious American presence, and security will not be achieved until the last foreign soldier leaves Iraqi territory," the group's new security chief, Abou Moujahed al-Assaf, said.

## In shadow of Iran war, Gazans prepare for Eid

AFP  
Gaza City

For the first time since war began in Gaza, Raeda Abu Diya has bought special clothes for her daughter for the upcoming Eid al-Fitr holiday, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Bu while a fragile ceasefire now holds in the Israel-Hamas war, Palestinians in Gaza fear the Iran war will make the world forget their suffering, and lead to prolonged shortages of crucial aid.

"This year I decided that my children and I would be happy and celebrate with what is available to us," said 38-year-old Abu Diya, who lives with her daughter and husband in a tent after their home was destroyed. "The shelling is much less than before."

Her 15-year-daughter Fidaa is thrilled, proudly detailing the new jeans, T-shirt and jacket her mother got her to mark the holiday. She still misses her old room filled with all her belongings.

But she hopes the upcoming celebration will mark the "beginning of the return of the sweet life to Gaza". While the family hopes to make the most of the Eid al-

Fitr, which should come either Thursday or Friday depending on the moon, her mother is worried that the US-Israeli war with Iran has drawn focus away from their plight.

With nearly all of Gaza's 2.2mn residents forced from their homes during over two years of war sparked by Hamas's storming of Israel, many people still live in tents or makeshift shelters in enormous camps, facing shortages as well as persistent fear and uncertainty. "Gaza is now forgotten and the world ignores the suffering of its people," Raeda Abu Diya said.

Each day she is glued to the latest news of the Middle East conflict from local radio stations that recently resumed broadcasting.

It is not just the current events that weigh upon her: the memory of relatives – including her brother – killed by Israeli strikes, is always with her. "We are trying to create a little joy, but sadness does not leave us," she said. The truce in place since October between Israel and Hamas has seen the level of violence drop in Gaza – even though there are still regular reports of Israeli strikes and deaths. For other Gazans, the upcoming holiday only compounds the difficulties they're already facing.



Displaced Palestinians shop at a street market as they prepare for Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. (AFP)

Ammar al-Buhaisi, who lives in Deir al-Balah, is struggling to get enough food, let alone new clothes for his children – and has been avoiding their expectant questions. As the US-Israeli conflict with Iran engulfs the region, he said any "optimism for an improvement in the situation is diminishing".

Hussein Duwaima, whose original clothes shop was destroyed, said life was coming back "gradually" in Gaza and demand has picked up ahead of the holiday as

crowds of shoppers pack makeshift markets. Due to a lack of supply caused by the closure of Gaza's borders and steep transportation costs, the prices are high. A child's shirt for example costs the equivalent of between \$15 to \$30, while a kilo of chocolates can be even pricier.

Israeli forces completely or partially destroyed most of Gaza's markets during the war, though the market in Gaza City's Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood has been partly restored already.

## UAE could join int'l effort led by US to secure Hormuz

Reuters/AFP  
Tel Aviv

The United Arab Emirates could take part in a US-led effort to safeguard shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a senior Emirati official said yesterday, though he also said that no formal plan had been agreed and discussions were ongoing.

"We all have a responsibility to ensure the flow of trade, the flow of energy," Anwar Gargash, the diplomatic adviser to the country's president, said at an online event hosted by the American think tank the Council on Foreign Relations.

Gargash also said that once the US-Israeli war with Iran ends, an arrangement would be needed to ensure that Iran cannot use its nuclear, missile or drone programmes "to terrorise the region".

Concerns have mounted over the security of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has effectively blocked, and as President Donald Trump has sought to rally countries to deploy warships to escort tankers through the strategic waterway.

### MISSILE DEBRIS KILLS ONE IN ABU DHABI

Falling debris from missile interceptions killed one person yesterday in the Emirati capital of Abu Dhabi and injured two medical staff in Kuwait, authorities said, as Iran pressed its attacks against Gulf countries, AFP reported from Abu Dhabi.

The Gulf has borne the brunt of Iran's reprisals for US-Israeli strikes that sparked the Middle East war, with Tehran targeting US assets but also civilian infrastructure. In the UAE capital, debris fell in the Bani Yas area "following the interception of a ballistic missile by air defences", the Abu Dhabi Media Office said on X.

Pakistan's embassy there later identified the victim as a Pakistani national, saying it was "saddened by the tragic loss". The day before, a Palestinian was killed on the edge of the city when a missile hit his car.

As well as hitting ports, airports, residential buildings, hotels and military sites around the region, Iran has also struck energy facilities across the hydrocarbon-rich Gulf.

On the east coast of the UAE, the oil industrial zone of Fujairah was hit yesterday morning, sparking a fire but causing no injuries, local authorities said.



# Israeli strike kills three in Gaza as Iran war strains truce

Reuters  
Cairo

An Israeli airstrike killed at least three people including a child in the Gaza Strip yesterday, local health authorities said, the latest violence jeopardising the ceasefire which has been under strain during the Israeli-US war against Iran.

Medics said the airstrike targeted a vehicle in the western area of Khan Younis, south of the enclave, killing three people, including a child, and wounding 12 other people.

There was no immediate Israeli comment.

Israel's military has continued to strike Gaza during the regional war with Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. On Sunday it killed 12 people in Gaza, including nine police officers in one strike that Israel said targeted a Hamas cell. The military has cited threats or fire from Hamas as the reason for its attacks.

Israel's assault has since killed more than 72,000 Palestinians, Gaza's health authorities say, including more than 670 since a ceasefire was reached last October. Gaza health officials said at least 40 people have been killed by Israeli fire since the US and Israel launched joint attacks on Iran at



Displaced Palestinians mourn during the funeral of people that were reportedly killed by an Israeli strike, at the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. (AFP)

the end of February.

Three sources told Reuters on Monday that envoys from US President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" have met representatives of Hamas in Cairo in an effort to safeguard the October Gaza ceasefire, which has come under serious strain.

A Palestinian official with knowledge of the Cairo talks said that Hamas believed Israel

was exploiting the war on Iran to slip away from its obligations under Trump's plan. Israel rejects this. Israel and Hamas have traded blame for ceasefire violations.

Separately, Israeli forces shot and killed a 17-year-old Palestinian and wounded another in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, health officials said yesterday.

Rights groups and medics say

Israeli settlers are taking advantage of curbs on movement imposed during the US-Israeli war on Iran to attack Palestinians in the West Bank, with military roadblocks preventing ambulances from reaching victims quickly. Settlers have killed at least five Palestinians in the West Bank since the Iran war began on February 28, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

# 36,000 Palestinians displaced in West Bank in one year: UN

AFP  
Geneva

The UN yesterday urged Israel to immediately halt its dramatic settlement expansion in the West Bank, raising concerns of "ethnic cleansing" with over 36,000 Palestinians displaced in a single year.

A fresh report from the United Nations rights office, looking at the 12 months up to October 31, 2025, warned that Israel's accelerating expansion of unlawful settlements and annexation of large parts of the West Bank was driving "unprecedented" displacement.

"The displacement of more than 36,000 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank represented the mass expulsion of Palestinians on a scale previously unseen, amounting to unlawful transfer that is prohibited under international humanitarian law," the report said.

Alongside "the extensive displacement of Palestinians in Gaza", it "appears to indicate a concerted Israeli policy of mass forcible transfer throughout the occupied territory, aimed at permanent displacement, raising concerns of ethnic cleansing".

The report pointed to the advancement or approval by Israeli authorities of 36,973 housing units in settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and around 27,200 in the rest of the West Bank.

Also during the 12-month period, "an unprecedented 84 settlement outposts were established across the occupied West Bank, bringing the total number to more than 300", the report said.

In addition to roughly 3mn Palestinians, more than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements and outposts in the West Bank, which are illegal under international law.

Violence in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, has risen sharply since the October 2023 Hamas storming of Israel triggered the Gaza war.

There has also been a spike in deadly attacks by Israeli settlers in the West Bank since the start of the Iran war, Palestinian authorities and the United Nations have said, with at least six Palestinians killed since the start of March.

According to an AFP tally based on Palestinian health ministry figures, Israeli troops or settlers have killed at least 1,045 Palestinians -- many of them fighters, but also scores of civilians -- in the West Bank since the start of the Gaza war.

In yesterday's report, the UN rights office said it had documented 1,732 incidents of settler violence resulting in casualties or property damage over the course of the reporting period.

That compares to 1,400 during the previous 12-month period, it said.

"Settler violence continued in a co-ordinated, strategic and largely unchallenged manner, with Israeli authorities playing the central role," the report said.

UN rights chief Volker Turk called on Israel to "immediately and completely cease and reverse the establishment and expansion of settlements".

In a statement, he also urged "the evacuation (of) all settlers, and an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territory".

And he insisted that Israel "must also enable the return of displaced Palestinians, and stop all practices of land confiscation, forced evictions and house demolitions".

The report also decried that advancing settlement plans were heightening the risk of displacement faced by thousands of Palestinians from Bedouin communities located northeast of East Jerusalem. "Unlawful transfer of protected persons constitutes a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, constituting a war crime," it stressed.

"Under certain circumstances, it may also amount to a crime against humanity."

# Nigeria suicide bombings kill 23, wound more than 100

AFP  
Maiduguri

Co-ordinated blasts by suspected suicide bombers tore through a busy market and other areas in the Nigerian city of Maiduguri, killing at least 23 people and wounding more than 100 others, in one of the worst recent attacks on the capital of Borno state.

Three blasts detonated on Monday evening just after people in the city broke their Ramadan fasts, striking a main market, the entrance of Maiduguri's largest teaching hospital and a post office area.

The military blamed the blasts in the city of around 1.2mn people on suspected Boko Haram militants and warned of "an increased threat" of suicide attacks in the final days of the holy month of Ramadan.

It came after an attack on a military post overnight on Sunday to Monday, which authorities blamed on suspected militants,



A general view of an armoured Police vehicle at a market in Maiduguri, yesterday, a day after blasts in the city. (AFP)

and a day before President Bola Tinubu arrived in Britain for a state visit.

Tinubu ordered the country's security chiefs "to move to Maiduguri to take charge of the situation".

"I want to make it categorically clear that these acts of terror are the final desperate and frantic attempts by criminals and ter-

rorist elements trying to instil and spread fear," Tinubu said in a statement.

Witnesses described panic as people fled from an initial explosion at the market towards an exit that passes through the post office area, where there was a second blast minutes later.

Survivor Mala Mohammed, 31, said that many people "ran to-

ward the post office area because the market entrance and the post office are not far apart".

"Unfortunately, as they were running towards post office, the person who had the explosive device ran into the crowd while people were still trying to escape."

Combined with the attack on the military position and a mosque bombing in December, the assaults have wrecked a peaceful stretch in the city, which had become relatively calm as Nigeria's long-running insurgency was pushed to the rural hinterlands.

Maiduguri is where Boko Haram originated and launched its initial uprising in 2009.

Violence has slowed from its peak in around 2015 but fighters from Boko Haram and rival militant group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have recently stepped up attacks in northeastern Nigeria.

Their campaign has killed more than 40,000 people and displaced around 2mn.

# Congo Republic's Sassou wins re-election

Reuters  
Brazzaville

Congo Republic President Denis Sassou Nguesso has been re-elected with 94.82% of the vote, state television said yesterday, extending his nearly 42-year rule over the Central African oil producer.

Diplomats and political analysts had expected an easy victory for Sassou, 82, who faced six little-known challengers in a race whose run-up was tightly managed by the ruling Congolese Labour Party.

The main opposition parties

opted not to field candidates, citing a lack of transparency, and two of the best-known opposition figures, General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko and Andre Okombi Salissa, have been in jail for nearly a decade.

Ahead of the vote, human rights activists were arrested, several opposition parties were suspended and public gatherings were closely monitored, said Congolese human rights activist Joe Washington Ebina.

Sunday's voting was marred by late openings at some polling stations and a nationwide internet blackout.

State television yesterday

reported turnout of 84.65%, though many polling stations in Brazzaville on election day had short or non-existent lines.

Sassou's closest challenger, Mabio Mavoungou Zinga, 69, a retired customs inspector and former member of parliament, won 1.48% of the vote.

Defeated candidates have five days to file a challenge, and the Constitutional Court has 15 days to examine them before publishing final results.

Sassou is a former paratrooper who took power in 1979. He lost Congo's first multi-party elections in 1992 but seized power again in 1997 after a civil war.

A constitutional change in 2015 scrapped term limits and the presidential age cap, enabling him to run for three additional five-year terms.

This latest term is meant to be his last, sharpening focus on succession within the ruling party.

The economy, heavily dependent on oil, has stabilised in recent years after a decade-long downturn. Congo successfully completed a three-year IMF programme last year. But over half the population lives in poverty, according to the World Bank, and many Congolese lack reliable access to electricity, running water and basic healthcare.

# Belgium orders ex-diplomat to stand trial for 1961 murder of Congo's Lumumba

Reuters  
Brussels

Brussels court yesterday ordered a former high-profile Belgian diplomat to stand trial over the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of Congo, in a final attempt to shed light on the still murky circumstances surrounding his murder.

Lumumba, who became prime minister of the country now called the Democratic Republic of Congo upon its independence from Belgium in 1960, was ousted from power just months later and killed by Belgian-backed secessionist rebels on January 16, 1961.

A Belgian parliamentary investigation into Lumumba's killing concluded in 2002 that Belgium was "morally responsible" for his death. But the trial of 93-year-old Count Etienne Davignon, a former EU Commissioner who was a junior diplomat at the time, constitutes the first prosecution related to the murder. Prosecutors say Davignon, who is accused of war crimes, participated in the unlawful detention or transfer of Lumumba and

deprived him of his right to an impartial trial. They say he subjected Lumumba to "humiliating and degrading treatment".

He is also accused of involvement in the murders of two of Lumumba's political allies, Maurice Mpolo and Joseph Okito. All the other suspects in the case have died. Davignon was not present in the courtroom yesterday, and his lawyer declined to comment.

Though his government lasted just three months, Lumumba became an anti-colonial icon as African nations pushed for independence from their European masters in the 1960s. He remains a folk hero even today.

His murder marked a dark turn for Congo, which boasts vast mineral resources including copper, cobalt, gold and uranium but whose people have lived under dictatorship and the menace of deadly armed conflict for most of its post-independence history. Though he publicly professed his neutrality, Lumumba's overtures to the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War alarmed governments in the West, and some historians have accused Washington's Central Intelligence Agency of involvement in his death.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

I, SEANEEN SHEILA WARNOCK  
holder of

UK Passport No. 535194150  
QID No. 29682600499

hereby change my name  
from

SEANEEN SHEILA WARNOCK

to

SEANEEN WARNOCK

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

# Kenyan court charges two with smuggling live ants

Reuters  
Nairobi

A court in Kenya yesterday charged two men with transporting wildlife illegally after one of them, a Chinese national, was arrested at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport with more than 2,000 live ants last week.

Zhang Kequn, 27, was detained last Tuesday while attempting to leave the country, court documents showed. Kenyan immigration officials had flagged his passport with a "stop order" after he evaded arrest in the country last year.

Prosecutors arraigned a second person, Charles Mwangi, on Monday, accusing him of supplying live ants to foreign traffickers. Authorities linked Mwangi to a shipment of ants seized in Bangkok on March 10, which originated from the Kenyan port city of



Chinese national Zhang Kequn and Kenyan national Charles Mwangi were charged with dealing with wildlife species without a permit and illegal possession of garden ants, at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) Law Courts, in Nairobi, yesterday. (Reuters)

Mombasa. Zhang and Mwangi pleaded not guilty to the charges before Senior Principal Magistrate Irene Gichobi, including dealing with wildlife species without a permit. The court ordered both men to be remanded in custody, pending further directions in the case on March 27.

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

Four men were fined \$7,700 each last year for trying to traffic thousands of



A Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) warden displays some of the syringe cartridges modified to carry live ants at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport law courts in Nairobi, yesterday. (AFP)

ants valuable to Kenya's ecosystem, in a case that experts said showed a move in biopiracy from trophies like elephant ivory to lesser-known species.

# Leftist New York mayor under pressure on Irish unity question

AFP  
New York

New York's leftist mayor, Zohran Mamdani, was facing pressure yesterday over his position on Irish unification as he helped lead the city's St Patrick's Day parade.

ken supporter of self-determination, particularly for the Palestinian people, a position that has put him at odds with pro-Israeli New Yorkers.

On Monday he declined to answer a question from an audience member about his position on Irish unity, saying "I gotta be honest, I haven't thought enough on that question."

And on Tuesday as Mamdani — adorned with an Irish tricolor sash and shamrock boutonniere — prepared to march in the city's parade, he was asked if he'd "had a chance to think more about a united Ireland?"

"There's always more to learn, but I can tell you as someone who believes deeply in the principle of self-determination, that I think

that should also be extended to the Irish. I think when it comes to the future of Ireland, the best people to listen to are the Irish," he said.

Following his answer Monday, Mary Rambaran-Olm, an academic specialising in medieval literature, said "can someone introduce Zohran Mamdani to the writings by his dad on British imperialism?"

"Selective anti-imperialism, the family edition. Anyway, the Irish aren't waiting for Mamdani to comment on a united Ireland, so whatever," she posted on social media.

Mamdani's father is Mahmood Mamdani, a political science professor who has written several books about colonialism.

There is heated debate in both

parts of Ireland — the British-administered north, and the republic in the southern part which was declared in 1949 — about the merits and disadvantages of reunification.

Sinn Fein, which seeks an end to British rule in Northern Ireland and the unification of the whole island of Ireland, currently holds sway in the north having come first in 2022 elections.

# Trump says to make delayed China trip in 'five or six weeks'

AFP  
Washington

US President Donald Trump said yesterday he expected to travel to China in a bit over one month, after postponing the trip slated for the end of March due to his war on Iran.

"We have a very good working relationship with China, so we're making it in about five or six weeks," Trump told reporters in the White House.

Trump sought to play down the significance of the delay and said he had a strong relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"We're working with China. They were fine with it," Trump said of the delay.

"I look forward to seeing President Xi; he looks forward to seeing me, I think."

Trump said that China "has become, economically for us, very good, very good," in what he called a shift for the United States.

Trump has repeatedly hailed his trade negotiations with

China, saying that a better relationship can benefit the United States.

It marks a contrast with Trump's tone before returning to office, in which he cast China as a major adversary and vowed to focus the United States on countering the Asian power.

Trump on February 28 launched a war on Iran alongside Israel, despite the president's earlier criticism of US intervention in the Middle East.

Trump suggested earlier that his trip, which was supposed to run from March 31-April 2, would depend on whether China helped Washington to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, the vital maritime waterway that has been effectively closed by Iran in retaliation for US and Israeli strikes.

In Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said earlier yesterday that it noted that the United States has "has publicly clarified these false reports."

The trip, Lin said, "has nothing to do with the issue of the open navigation of the Strait of Hormuz."

# Trump lambasts Nato on Iran, says US needs no help

AFP  
Washington

US President Donald Trump lashed out yesterday at "foolish" Nato over Iran, saying the US needs no help after allies rebuffed his calls to join efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump said most US allies had rejected his push to escort ships through the crucial waterway, with French President Emmanuel Macron saying his country would "never" do so until the situation was calmer.

"I think Nato is making a very foolish mistake," Trump told reporters as he hosted Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin in the Oval Office. "I've long said that I wonder whether or not Nato would ever be there for us. So this was a great test."

But Trump insisted that Washington was ready to go it alone against Iran, saying that even Nato allies had agreed that the Islamic republic needed to be confronted over its nuclear program.

"We don't need too much help. We don't need any help," Trump said.

Minutes before the meeting,

Trump made a lengthy post on his Truth Social platform saying US forces "no longer need" military help in the Iran war.

Trump said that "most" Nato allies had said they did not want to get involved, along with Japan, Australia and South Korea, describing the decades-old military alliance as a "one way street."

"Because of the fact that we have had such Military Success, we no longer 'need,' or desire, the Nato Countries' assistance — WE NEVER DID!"

The 79-year-old Republican has long criticised Nato, and since returning to power in January 2025 he has pushed its members into increasing their defence spending.

Asked if he would reconsider the US relationship with Nato as he has suggested in the past, Trump said it was "certainly something that we should think about" but added: "I have nothing currently in mind."

But he repeated his criticisms of foreign counterparts over the issue, saying British Prime Minister Keir Starmer "hasn't been supportive, and I think it's a big mistake."

Of Macron, he merely said that "he'll be out of office soon."

The US leader had suggested on Monday that both Paris and London would be ready to help, and said other countries he did not name were already on board.

But Macron insisted Tuesday that France would not participate in operations to open the strait in the current context, but once the situation becomes "calmer" it could participate in an "escort system" alongside other nations.

Britain has also waved off Washington's request for assistance.

Iran has targeted the energy facilities of its crude-producing neighbours and attacked and threatened tankers transiting the Strait of Hormuz, all but closing the vital waterway through which one fifth of global crude oil passes.

Trump meanwhile kept up his mixed messaging about the length and goals of the US-Israeli war on Iran, which has expanded dramatically across the Middle East and caused global oil prices to surge.

He said that Iran's "actual top leader was killed yesterday," in an apparent reference to Israel's claim that it had killed powerful national security chief Ali Larjani.

Iran was "just a military op-



US President Donald Trump speaks during the annual Friends of Ireland Luncheon at the US Capitol yesterday. (AFP)

eration to me" and "we'll be leaving in pretty much the very near future," Trump said, but he remained vague about his political plan for the country after the war.

"We're going to try to get people that are going to run it well," he said.

US-Israeli strikes on February 28 killed ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the republic's long-serving supreme leader, and Iran has named his son Mojtaba Khamenei to replace him, despite reports he is injured.

# Chile orders spending cuts

By Daina Beth Solomon  
Reuters

Chile's government has ordered a blanket spending cut of nearly \$4bn as part of a plan to improve public finances and safeguard social benefits over the medium term, according to a document seen by Reuters yesterday.

In a March 13 memo to the public sector, the budget office said the first part of the plan includes a \$3bn reduction in the 2026 spending ceiling, in addition to another cut announced by the previous administration to reduce gross spending by \$800mn.

"The government will implement a Fiscal Adjustment Plan, with the first phase to be carried out in March 2026. Only in this way can it restore the sustainability of the public finances, safeguard social benefits over the medium term and free up resources to respond to emergencies," the document said.

It said the main areas of focus are combating abuses and bad practices, improving spending efficiency and enforcing fiscal austerity, in line with President Jose Antonio Kast's pledge to conduct audits across government after taking office last week.

The \$3bn will come from an across-the-board 3% cut in the gross spending of each budget item, to be applied uniformly across each expenditure subtitle and implemented in March through a finance ministry decree to be sent to the comptroller's office.

It will also come from an additional \$1bn to be targeted by each ministry individually, based on efforts to identify abuses and bad practices in the use of fiscal resources, as well as areas for permanent efficiency gains and austerity.

Among other measures, it recommends reviewing service contracts, analysing "abuse" of sick leave and absenteeism as well as

tenders that had not been carried out as of March.

"The adjustments made in 2026 will form part of the baseline for drafting the 2027 budget, given the permanent nature of the adjustment, and their effect will be extended to subsequent years," the document said.

It added the adjustment decrees are expected to be issued no later than Friday.

## Chile starts building border barriers with Peru, Bolivia to curb immigration

Chile's new far-right president began delivering on an anti-immigration campaign promise Monday, as construction began on new barriers at a border crossing with Peru.

"Today we begin to stop illegal migration," President Jose Antonio Kast said as an excavator dug a trench at the groundbreaking ceremony, near the Chacalluta border crossing in northern Chile. Kast has vowed to crack down on immigration from Peru and Bolivia to create a "border shield," and travelled to Arica, about 2,000km (1,240 miles) from Santiago, five days after taking office.

Chile's government has set a 90-day deadline for the construction of these barriers, without specifying the type of infrastructure to be deployed.

Trenches that are about three meters deep (10 feet) are planned for Arica and other areas on the border with Bolivia, an epicentre of migrant entry,

particularly from Venezuela. Interior Minister Claudio Alvarado said physical barriers are expected to extend over roughly 500 km. Kast's plan also includes deployment of more military personnel at the borders.

Kast has also pledged to take action to stem the rise in murders, kidnappings and extortion, which he blames on undocumented immigrants.

Kast's election brought the most right-wing president to power in Chile since the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, from 1973-1990, who also came to power with promises to be tough on crime and stop illegal immigration. According to government estimates, there are around 337,000 undocumented foreign nationals in Chile.

Although violent crime has risen in the past decade, Chile remains one of the safest countries in Latin America, with 5.4 murders per 100,000 residents in 2025. (AFP)

# White House piles pressure on Cuba as island fights power cut

AFP  
Havana/Washington

Washington piled pressure on Cuba's communist authorities yesterday to allow free market reforms as the impoverished island scrambled to recover from a nationwide electricity blackout.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Cuba's decision announced this week to let exiles invest and own businesses did not go far enough.

"What they announced yesterday is not dramatic enough. It's not going to fix it. So they've got some big decisions to make," Rubio, a Cuban-American and vociferous critic of the island's ruling party, told reporters at the White House.

President Donald Trump, who just Monday had said he would "take" Cuba, added: "We'll be doing something with Cuba very soon."

Cuba's authorities are under increasingly crushing pressure, with Washington openly stating it wants to end the nearly seven-decades-old US standoff with the one-party communist state.

A total electricity breakdown on Monday underscored the parlous state of the economy. Cuba lost Venezuela as its chief regional ally and oil supplier this January after a US military operation to topple Venezuela's socialist lead-



A street vendor attends customers during a blackout in Havana on Monday. (AFP)

er Nicolas Maduro.

Power was restored to two-thirds of the country early Tuesday, including to 45% of the capital Havana, which is home to 1.7 mn people.

"What we fear all the time is that the blackout will drag on and we will lose the little bit that we have in the fridge, because everything is so expensive," said Olga Suarez, a 64-year-old retiree.

"Otherwise we are used to it because here almost all the time you go to bed and wake up without electricity," she told AFP.

Adding another scare, a 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Cuba early yesterday. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

Cuba's ageing electricity generation system is in shambles, with daily power outages of up to

20 hours the norm in parts of the island, which lacks the fuel needed to generate power.

But since the US ouster of Maduro on January 3, the island's economy has been further hammered by a de facto US oil blockade.

No oil has been imported to the island since January 9, hitting the power sector while also forcing airlines to curtail flights to the island, a blow to the all-important tourism sector.

And Trump is explicitly saying he wants the Cuban government to fall.

"You know, all my life I've been hearing about the US and Cuba. When will the US do it?" Trump told reporters at the White House on Monday. "I do believe I'll be... having the honour of taking Cuba," Trump said.

# Brazil's new climate plan targets deforestation

Brazilian leaders unveiled a new national climate plan on Monday that prioritises enhanced forest protections as a key strategy in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Latin American giant hasn't updated its main program to mitigate climate change since 2008, and the new plan looks forward to 2035, when Brazil is expected to have lowered its emissions significantly.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's leftist government has called for a reduction of greenhouse gases by 67% compared to 2005 levels. Forty percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Brazil are generated by trees being razed, often to clandestinely create more

agricultural land, Brazilian officials said. Lula has pledged to reduce deforestation to zero by 2030.

Brazil has been hit by extreme weather disasters in recent years, including floods, fires and droughts, which experts link to climate change.

"We are living through a very serious situation of climate emergency," Environment and Climate Change Minister Marina Silva told reporters. Claudio Angelo, of the NGO network Climate Observatory, applauded the new Brazilian plan because it "begins to address the thorny issue of how to finance" its climate targets. However, the plan falls "far short of delivering the economic transformation needed" in Brazil. (AFP)

# Colombia, Ecuador leaders clash over bomb dropped near border

The leaders of Colombia and Ecuador sparred yesterday over allegations that the Ecuadorian bombing of alleged criminal hideouts near their shared border had spilled into Colombian territory.

Months of tension between Colombia's leftist President Gustavo Petro and his right-wing Ecuadorian counterpart, Daniel Noboa, an ally of US President Donald Trump, spiked Monday when Petro alleged that explosives were dropped from a plane near the border.

Yesterday, Petro posted on X a photo of an unexploded "bomb" that he said had fallen on the Colombian-Ecuadorian border. He called for a thorough investigation, saying, "It fell 100m from

the home of a poor family!"

Noboa, posting on the same platform, retorted yesterday that Ecuador is "currently bombing locations that served as hideouts" for criminal groups that are "largely Colombian, and which your government allowed to infiltrate our country due to negligence regarding your border."

"President Petro, your statements are false," Noboa said. "We are operating within our own territory, not yours."

Colombia and Ecuador share a 586km (364-mile) border where Colombian guerrilla groups and criminal organisations from both countries operate. They engage in trafficking of drugs, weapons and people, and illegal mining. (AFP)

# US strikes against suspected drug boats kills 157 people

The United States military has so far killed 157 alleged members or affiliates of drug organisations in 45 strikes against drug trafficking vessels in the Western Hemisphere, a senior US defence official said yesterday.

Since September 2025, the United States military has carried out a series of strikes in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific against suspected drug vessels.

The lethal strikes are part of a broader campaign that the Trump administration says is aimed at cutting off the supply of illegal drugs. Legal experts and Democratic lawmakers have questioned the legality of the strikes.

In a written statement to lawmakers, Joseph Humire, a senior Pentagon official responsible for homeland defence and Americas security affairs, said 47 "narco-trafficking vessels" had been destroyed in the strikes so far.

Humire said the strikes had a "significant and profound" impact, including a 20% reduction in the movement of drug vessels in the Caribbean and a 25% reduction in the Eastern Pacific.

While the United States has put out videos after most of the strikes on social media, it has provided few other details, such as what type of drugs the vessels were carrying, how much or details about those killed. (Reuters)

## China says takes note of US 'clarifications' on possible Trump visit delay

AFP  
Beijing

China said yesterday it had "noted" clarifications from the United States about the reasons for a possible delay to President Donald Trump's planned trip.

Trump expected to visit Beijing at the end of March, but said on Monday he had asked Beijing to delay his summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping by around a month while due to the war in the Middle East.

"Because of the war I want to be here, I have to be here, I feel. And so we've requested that we delay it a month or so," Trump told reporters at the White House when asked about the China trip.

Trump insisted that he maintained a "very good relationship" with China and was not trying to play games by postponing the highly anticipated trip to the rival superpower.

Previously, Trump suggested his visit could depend on whether China helped Washington to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, the vital maritime waterway that has been effectively closed by Iran in retaliation for US and Israeli strikes.

But China acknowledged Trump's request yesterday, in a statement rejecting any connection to the issues surrounding Hormuz.

"We have noted that the US side has publicly clarified these false reports by the media, stating that the relevant reports are complete-

ly wrong, and emphasised that the visit has nothing to do with the issue of the open navigation of the Strait of Hormuz," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said during a news briefing on Tuesday.

"Both China and the US are maintaining communications on Trump's visit to China," he said, without providing further details.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent also said on Monday that meeting to Trump's demand for China to help reopen the waterway was a "false narrative".

About a fifth of global oil supplies normally pass through the Strait of Hormuz, and its closure has sent oil prices soaring above \$100 a barrel.

Washington has said Trump would visit China from March



China's President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump. (AFP)

31-April 2 to reset ties and extend a US-China trade truce, although Beijing had not confirmed those dates, in line with its usual practice.

On Monday, both countries hailed "constructive" trade talks between Bessent and Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng in Paris over the weekend that were widely

seen as setting the stage for the summit.

Bessent told journalists discussions "show the stability of the relationship", while He said the exchange would inject "greater certainty" into bilateral trade ties.

Also at the talks were US trade envoy Jamieson Greer and Chinese trade negotiator Li Chenggang.

Officials also discussed creating a "US-China Board of Trade", Greer said. This would help formalise and identify what the United States should be importing from and exporting to China, he added, to ensure "we can focus on areas of mutual benefit."

However, the Paris talks follow a turbulent year in ties between the world's two largest economies since Trump returned to power.

## N Korea's new legislature to convene on March 22

AFP  
Seoul

North Korea's rubber-stamp legislature will convene on Sunday to consider revisions to the authoritarian nation's constitution and the election of state leadership, state media reported.

The gathering of the 15th Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) follows a five-yearly gathering of the ruling party last month which elevated leader Kim Jong-un's powerful younger sister Kim Yo-jong to a top position.

On Sunday 687 deputies were "elected" to the SPA, with all North Koreans over 17 given the choice of approving or rejecting the sole candidate put forward by the ruling party.

The candidates were duly approved with 99.93% of votes in favour and 0.07% against, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported, with turnout at 99.99%.

The result reflected citizens' "ardent desire and self-confidence to reliably defend their glorious state political system", the news agency said.

It followed the ninth Workers' Party congress in February, which directs efforts on everything from diplomacy to war planning and which closed with a grand military parade.

The SPA is expected to formalise decisions made in that congress, Hong Min, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, told AFP.

"The regime appears intent on swiftly codifying the decisions of the party congress," Hong told AFP.

The gathering elevated Kim Yo-jong — long considered one of her brother's closest lieuten-



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un votes in an election for the Supreme People's Assembly, at a coal mine run by young workers in North Korea, on Sunday. (Reuters)

ants — to department director within the party's apex central committee, according to KCNA.

She has in recent years emerged as one of the most powerful figures in North Korea, playing a highly visible role in diplomacy, nuclear negotiations and other matters of state.

The SPA will also deliberate on the re-election of Kim as president of the State Affairs Commission, the country's top state post, and possible revisions to the constitution, KCNA said.

Kim is the third-generation ruler of the nuclear-armed state founded by his grandfather Kim Il-sung in 1948 and has ruled the country since his father's death in late 2011.

The possible constitutional amendments could include formally codifying inter-Korean relations as those between "two hostile states", analyst Hong said.

## China to provide humanitarian assistance to Iran, Mideast

AFP  
Beijing

China said yesterday it will provide humanitarian assistance to Middle Eastern countries, including Iran and Lebanon, targeted in US and Israeli strikes in the conflict now in its third week.

Beijing is a close partner of Iran and has urged the US and Israel to cease their attacks on the country, while also criticising Tehran's

strikes against Gulf states housing US military bases.

China's foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said the war had caused "grave humanitarian catastrophes" in Iran and other Middle Eastern nations.

"China has decided to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to Iran, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. It is hoped this will help alleviate the humanitarian plight faced by the local populations," Lin told a press conference, without providing further details.

"China will continue to make every effort to promote peace and stop the war... and to prevent further spreading of the humanitarian crisis," he added.

China has sought to mediate in the Middle East, Zhai Jun, urging de-escalation when he recently met Saudi Arabia's foreign minister for talks.

China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, has also said that the war "should never have happened" and called for an end to fighting.

The humanitarian aid announcement came after US President Donald Trump said he would delay a planned visit to Beijing.

Trump, who postponed his planned visit to Beijing due to the war, according to the White House, has also pressured China to help Washington reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

The vital sea passage, through which a fifth of global oil supplies normally pass, was effectively closed by Iran in retaliation to US and Israeli strikes.

## 'Rubio, S Korea FM agree Strait of Hormuz key to global economy'

Reuters  
Seoul

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a phone call with his South Korean counterpart on Monday that co-operation among countries to secure the Strait of Hormuz is more important than ever to stabilise the global economy and oil prices, Seoul said.

Foreign Minister Cho Hyun later declined to say whether Washington had asked South Korea to deploy a naval ship to the strait, despite intense questioning by members of parliament, some of whom suggested such a move could breach domestic laws.

"The question of how we're going to respond to an ally's demand is a very important one," Cho said. "As we make a decision, I assure you we will act ac-

ording to the constitution and the law," he told a parliament committee hearing.

US President Donald Trump has accused some Western allies of ingratitude after several countries rebuffed his demand to send warships to escort oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, which carries 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG). The closure of the strait has spiked energy prices and sparked fears of inflation around the world.

South Korea has said it would carefully consider Trump's call for countries, which in Asia include South Korea, Japan and China, to deploy navy ships to the Middle East to form a coalition to ensure safe passage through the waterway.

South Korea already has some forces in the Middle East after deploying the Cheonghae unit in 2009 to escort its merchant ves-

**South Korea has not received a request to deploy naval ships or troops to the Strait of Hormuz: Seoul**

sels sailing near the Somali coast in anti-piracy operations and has since sent a rotation of destroyers with an attack helicopter and about 260 crew.

The Asian country is ranked among the world's top naval powers, with a diverse fleet of more than 150 modern warships and submarines, largely deployed for regional deterrence and defence against North Korea.

Asia's fourth-largest economy relies almost totally on imports for its energy, buying about 70% of its oil and 20% of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Middle East, according to Korea International Trade Association data.

South Korea's Defence Ministry said yesterday it had not received a request to deploy naval ships or troops to the Strait of Hormuz.

Defence Minister Ahn Gyu-back told a parliamentary hearing yesterday that sending a warship or troops to the Strait of Hormuz would require legislative approval.

In his call with Rubio, Cho agreed on the importance of the freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz for the security and economies of South Korea and other countries, and he suggested the allies continue close consultations, South Korea's foreign ministry said.

The vital waterway has been effectively closed for most of the world's tanker traffic since the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28 at the start of an intensive bombing campaign hitting targets across the country.

## Cash handouts, fare hikes as Philippines battles fuel costs

AFP  
Manila

Hundreds of Philippine tricycle drivers lined up yesterday in Manila for cash handouts they hope will provide temporary relief from a war-driven surge in fuel prices that has left the country scrambling for short-term answers.

Since US-Israeli strikes on Iran triggered the Middle East war last month, the archipelago nation has implemented a four-day work week for civil servants, seen ferry schedules reduced in some areas, and begun eyeing the possibility of Russian oil imports.

As the drivers awaited their handouts Tuesday, officials unveiled a series of price hikes across a range of local transportation, including the ubiquitous smoke-belching jeepneys millions of Filipinos rely on to get to work each day.

But the increases did not extend to the country's hundreds of thousands of tricycle drivers, who earn money by carrying passengers down narrow, winding alleys on small motorbikes and carriages.

"These are the highest fuel prices I've ever experienced," said Romeo Cipriano, who has driven a tricycle for four decades.

The subsidy of 5,000 pesos (\$84) would be "better than nothing", the 60-year-old said, describing how he had arrived at 6:00am to avoid standing in the tropical heat, something his high blood pressure would not allow.

Al de Ocampo said his daily



Tricycle drivers queue for the distribution of a fuel subsidy in Manila yesterday. (AFP)

earnings had been halved from 1,000 to just 500 pesos in recent weeks. The handout he received would last no more than a week, he told AFP.

"The price of fuel rose again today, but the fare is still the same," with customers unable to afford to pay any more, de Ocampo said.

"They must remove the fuel tax if possible... If they can't remove the tax entirely, then reduce it 50%. That would be a great help until the end of the war."

The Senate was expected to vote later in the day to grant President Ferdinand Marcos, who was on hand for the subsidy dispersal, the authority to temporarily suspend or reduce excise taxes on oil.

At a press briefing yesterday, Vigor Mendoza, chair of the country's transportation regulator, announced fare hikes that he said were "proof of... genuine concern" for both commuters and the embattled sector.

Most rides in jeepneys, the backbone of the country's transport system, were set to jump about eight percent on average, the regulator announced.

The Philippines, which depends almost entirely on the Middle East for its crude oil, is now also eyeing the possibility of purchasing from Russia, after a temporary easing of US restrictions on some oil sales following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Yesterday, Ramon Ang, CEO of the Philippines' sole oil refiner Petron, confirmed to AFP the company was "in talks" to potentially purchase Russian oil, while declining to provide details.

Patiently awaiting his subsidy at the Manila community centre, Cipriano said he could only pray for a quick end to the war.

"We're not the only ones affected," he said of his fellow drivers. "No one wins in war."

## Australia hikes key interest rate by 25 bps

Australia's central bank hiked its key interest rate yesterday, pointing to "sharply higher fuel prices" driven by the US-Israel war on Iran.

The Reserve Bank of Australia became one of the first major central banks to lift rates in response to the turmoil, raising its key cash rate 25 basis points (bps) to 4.10%.

Global oil prices have surged more than 40% since the US and Israel began their strikes on February 28, leading Iran to choke off access to the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of global oil and gas passes.

Many economists have warned that a protracted war could fuel an inflation shock similar to that seen after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The RBA said "the conflict in the Middle East has resulted in sharply higher fuel prices, which, if sustained, will add to inflation." "Higher prices and prolonged uncertainty may cause growth to be lower in Australia's major trading partners and also in Australia," the bank said in a statement.

Australia is heavily reliant on fuel imports from Asia, with many people accustomed to driving long distances for work or leisure. (AFP)

## Hong Kong firm says Panama failed to respond to lawsuit over ports seizure

AFP  
Hong Kong

A subsidiary of Hong Kong conglomerate CK Hutchison said Panamanian officials had not responded to its lawsuit opposing the suspension of its Panama Canal operations because they had failed to hire lawyers.

A Panamanian court declared in January that a contract, which had allowed CK Hutchison unit Panama Ports Company (PPC) to manage the Pacific port of Balboa and Cristobal on the Atlantic since 1997, was "unconstitutional".

PPC filed a lawsuit in February under the rules of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), and said this month that it was seeking at least US\$2bn in damages.

However, Panama did not file any responses to the arbitration by the original deadline of March 13 set by the ICC's Court of Arbitration, PPC said in a statement issued on Monday in Panama.

It said a country that respects foreign investors "does not disregard consultations and international dispute procedures".

"Panama stated that it was not

prepared and was not able to respond on time because it had not hired lawyers, was unfamiliar with the dispute, and needed time to develop a plan, to obtain a partial extension," the PPC statement said.

Panama had also failed to resolve the broader issues involved, it said, which "suggests that Panama may eventually simply invent and announce more unfounded attacks in arbitration".

Panamanian officials asked Chinese shipping giant Cosco this month to reconsider its decision to suspend its operations at the Balboa port because of the PPC suspension.

The Central American country has been caught up in broader tensions between Washington and Beijing, with US President Donald

Trump last year claiming, without evidence, that China effectively runs the canal. China had threatened Panama with a payoff after the court's decision in January.

CK Hutchison said this month it had intensified its legal actions over the takeover by Panamanian authorities of the two Panama Canal ports it controlled.

It said it had also filed an administrative petition urging Panamanian officials to reconsider the executive action that "led to the occupation of facilities and confiscation of property".

Authorities searched PPC's office in Panama in late February, with the CK Hutchison unit describing the occupation and seizure of its property as acting "in disregard of the rule of law".



(Reuters/File photo)

# 7 foreigners arrested in India for training Myanmar rebels: reports

AFP  
New Delhi

Indian investigators have arrested seven foreigners, including six Ukrainians and an American, on suspicion of illegally crossing into neighbouring Myanmar to train armed militia groups, the public radio broadcaster reported yesterday.

Myanmar descended into civil war after a junta seized power in a 2021 coup, with pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic-minority armed groups fighting for control of large parts of the country.

India has long been suspicious of certain Myanmar factions that have the same ethnicity as populations on the Indian side of the border, fearing a spillover of violence and unrest.

On Monday, a closed court in New Delhi remanded the seven foreign nationals in custody for 11 days of interrogation after they allegedly illegally entered sensitive Mizoram state without an official permit, All India Radio (AIR) reported.

The seven then allegedly passed

from Mizoram into neighbouring Myanmar, where they were "training ethnic war groups... associated with insurgent groups in India", according to AIR.

They are also suspected to have illegally transported a "huge consignment of drones from Europe" into India for use in Myanmar, AIR said, without specifying the type of drones or their countries of origin.

After they returned to India, officials from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested the Ukrainians in the cities of Delhi and Lucknow, and the American in Kolkata, the report said.

The Indian Express newspaper reported that they had been charged with conspiring to commit terrorist acts against the Indian state, a crime that carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

Multiple calls by AFP to the NIA spokesman went unanswered yesterday.

The Ukrainian foreign ministry confirmed yesterday its citizens were detained by India on March 13 and requested the country's authorities to provide "unimpeded

consular access" to them.

"As of now, there are no proven facts confirming the involvement of the aforementioned Ukrainian citizens in illegal activities on the territory of India or Myanmar," it said in a statement.

"The embassy is in contact with other relevant Indian authorities to clarify all circumstances and reasons for the detention," it added.

The US embassy in New Delhi said in a statement yesterday they were aware of the matter but "cannot comment on cases involving US citizens" for privacy reasons.

Mizoram's chief minister claimed last year that "thousands" of Western mercenaries had passed through the state on the way to Myanmar, but the assertion is hard to verify.

India is building a 1,643-kilometre (1,020-mile) fence along its porous border with Myanmar, which runs through remote jungles and snow-capped Himalayan peaks.

Thousands of villagers, mainly from Myanmar's Chin state, have fled into India since the civil war has intensified.

# Freed Ladakh activist renews calls for talks with Indian govt

AFP  
New Delhi

Prominent Ladakh activist Sonam Wangchuk called for fresh talks yesterday with India's government, just days after being released from prison where he had been held for six months over deadly protests in the Himalayan region.

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

On Saturday, India's home ministry said it had decided to end Wangchuk's detention "with immediate effect" after "due consideration".

Wangchuk told reporters yesterday the government had offered "constructive meaningful dialogue", and that is "what we wanted right from the start." "Talk(s) are a give and take process, both sides have to be flexible," the 59-year-old said, adding that it should not be a "loss" for one side.

On Monday, several thousands rallied in Ladakh repeating long standing demands for statehood and the inclusion in the "Sixth Schedule" of India's constitution, which would allow a local legislature to make laws on land use and jobs.

Wangchuk said "all movements in Ladakh are appealing to start talks and dialogue process", including Monday's demonstrations.

An engineer by training, Wangchuk is best known for pioneering water conservation projects



Environmental activist Sonam Wangchuk addresses a press conference in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

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

India's government under Narendra Modi split Ladakh off from Indian-administered Kashmir in 2019, imposing direct rule on both. India's army maintains a large presence in Ladakh, which includes disputed border areas with China.

# Starmer tells Zelensky 'focus must remain on Ukraine' amid Iran war

AFP  
London

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in London yesterday that "the focus must remain on Ukraine" despite the US-Israeli war with Iran.

Starmer welcomed Zelensky to his official Downing Street residence for talks after the Ukraine leader met King Charles III at Buckingham Palace.

"I think it's really important that we are clear that the focus must remain on Ukraine," said Starmer.

"There's obviously a conflict in Iran going on, in the Middle East, but we can't lose focus on what's going on in Ukraine and the need for our support," he added.

Washington has partly rolled back sanctions against Moscow to cool oil prices sent soaring by the Middle East war, which appears to have scuttled US-led talks on ending Russia's four-year invasion.

Yesterday's meeting came after Downing Street had earlier announced that Britain and Ukraine are set to sign a defence partnership aimed at addressing the threat of low-cost drones.

Zelensky's visit in London -



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer greets Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at 10 Downing Street, in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

ahead of a trip to Spain today - comes as his European allies have vowed to keep up support for Kyiv in the conflict with Russia.

"Our resolve is unbreakable," said Starmer, reiterating the UK's long-standing backing of Ukraine.

Earlier, Zelensky and King Charles shook hands during a private audience at Buckingham Palace.

"I thank His Majesty and the entire Royal Family for their unwavering support and solidarity with Ukraine," Zelensky wrote on X.

The Ukrainian leader was later due to meet Nato chief Mark Rutte in London, his spokesman said.

He was also expected to address members of the UK parliament.

# UK investigates leak of information from meeting about US base request

Reuters  
London

The British government yesterday opened an inquiry into how details of a top-secret national security meeting to discuss a US request to use British military bases at the start of the Iran conflict were leaked to a journalist.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer initially blocked the US from using the air base of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and RAF Fairford in England, before later allowing the US to use the bases for "defensive" strikes against Iranian targets.

Senior ministers who attended a meeting of the National Security Council were divided over whether to grant the initial US request, the Spectator magazine reported.

While Starmer was in favour of giving the US permission to use the bases, there was opposition from his energy minister Ed Miliband and his finance minister Rachel Reeves, according to the report in the Spectator, which was then picked up by several media outlets.

Antonia Romeo, the government's most senior official, said in a letter to an opposition party politician that the leak inquiry had started. She said leaks undermine Britain's relations with other countries, particularly the US-led

"Five Eyes" intelligence alliance.

The government "is conducting an inquiry into this unauthorised disclosure which draws on the full range of powers at their disposal," she wrote in the letter.

Asked for comment, a government spokesperson said: "We don't have anything to add to the letter for now." US President Donald Trump has repeatedly hit out at Starmer since the conflict with Iran started, complaining he was not doing enough to help him.

On Monday, Trump said there were "some countries that greatly disappointed me" before he singled out Britain, which he said had once been considered "the Rolls-Royce of allies".

Reuters  
New Delhi

India yesterday denied holding talks with Iran about releasing three tankers seized in February in exchange for ensuring safe passage for Indian ships through the Strait of Hormuz.

Indian authorities seized the three Iran-linked ships near Indian waters alleging they had concealed or altered their identities and were involved in illegal ship-to-ship transfers at sea.

Reuters reported on Monday, citing sources, that Iran had asked India to release the US-sanctioned ships as part of talks seeking the safe passage of Indian-flagged or India-bound vessels out of the Gulf via the Strait.

Traffic has ground to a near standstill on either side of the Strait since the beginning of the US-Israeli war with Iran.

India's foreign ministry spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, called the report baseless.

"There has been no discussion of this nature," he told a news briefing. "I would also like to say the three vessels you referred to are not Iranian-owned."

The seized tankers, Asphalt Star, Al Jafzia and Stellar Ruby, are currently docked off Mumbai. Stellar Ruby is Iranian-flagged, while the other two vessels are flagged to Nicaragua and Mali, according to LSEG data.

A police complaint filed by the Indian Coast Guard on February 15, and seen by Reuters, said Asphalt Star was involved in the

smuggling of heavy fuel oil that was transferred to Al Jafzia and bitumen to Stellar Ruby.

All three ships are tied to entities under US sanctions for allegedly helping transport Iranian oil. The consultant for the vessels, Jugwinder Singh Brar, is himself on a US sanctions list, though he denies any illicit activity.

At the time of the seizure, Iranian state media cited the National Iranian Oil Company as saying that the three tankers had no connection to the company.

Iran has in recent days allowed some Indian ships to safely pass the Strait and Jaiswal said discussions were ongoing to ensure the safe transit of the other ships. At least 22 Indian vessels are still in the waterway, the government says.

# Sri Lanka arrests 135 in alleged Chinese-run cyberscam

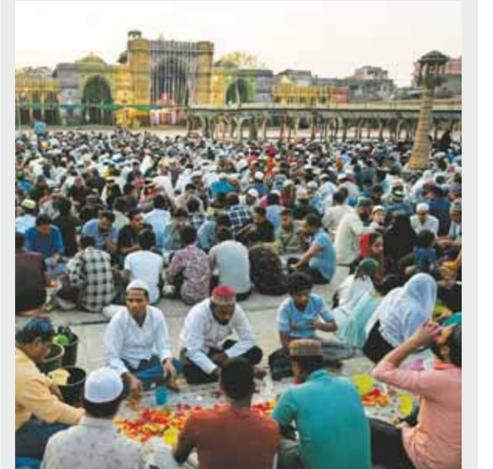
Sri Lanka's immigration authorities raided an alleged Chinese-run online scam operation, officials said yesterday, arresting 135 suspects. Most of the detainees were Chinese men and women, an official involved in the raid told AFP on condition of anonymity. The official said the majority would be charged with violating the conditions of their tourist visas and working illegally. "We are still in the process of compiling a list of the suspects," the official said, adding that computers and mobile phones used by the suspects had also been seized.

Yesterday's arrests in the northcentral district of Anuradhapura were the biggest since October 2024 when authorities detained 230 Chinese nationals operating cybercrime centres in several parts of the island, immigration officials in the capital said. At the time, the Chinese embassy said Beijing's crackdown on cybercriminals may have pushed some abroad. In 2024, Sri Lankan police arrested 200 suspects, mainly Indian nationals, who were also accused of operating online financial scams. (AFP)

# UK warship stops in Gibraltar on way to eastern Mediterranean

A British warship stopped in Gibraltar yesterday as it heads to the eastern Mediterranean amid the US-Israeli war with Iran. HMS Dragon stopped in the British territory to take on supplies and conduct a personnel changeover, Britain's defence ministry said in a statement. The warship, capable of shooting down drones and ballistic missiles, left its base in Portsmouth in southern England on March 10. Britain deployed the vessel following criticism from opposition politicians and the Cypriot government over a perceived slow response to a drone attack on Britain's Akrotiri base in southern Cyprus. Gibraltar, a rocky outpost at the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula, is a strategic gateway between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. (AFP)

# Iftar in Ahmedabad



People break their fast with Iftar meals during the holy month of Ramadan at the Jama Masjid in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

# Britain rushes to contain 'unprecedented' meningitis outbreak

AFP  
London

The British health minister yesterday described a deadly outbreak of meningitis linked to a nightclub as "unprecedented" after two students died and 13 people were hospitalised.

Health Minister Wes Streeting told parliament that the outbreak was "rapidly developing situation" with the number

of confirmed cases rising to 15.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has reported two dead from the outbreak in Kent in southeastern England - a 21-year-old university student and an 18-year-old school student.

The outbreak has been linked to Club Chemistry in the city of Canterbury, a large three-storey venue popular with students.

The health security agency said that it had been "notified of 15 cases", including those who died, up

from 13 previously reported.

Four cases have been identified as Meningitis B, a bacterial strain rarer and deadlier than the viral type, it said.

Meningitis B causes death in around one in 10 cases, according to the National Health Service.

Meningitis is an infection affecting the protective membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord and is most common in young children, teenagers and young adults.

It can spread through close con-

tact, including "prolonged kissing or sharing vapes and drinks," Streeting said.

The focus of public health measures was on the University of Kent, which has around 18,000 students, some of whom are among those hospitalised with meningitis.

The university held a clinic offering antibiotics Tuesday as students lined up for treatment. Streeting also announced a vaccination programme for students living in university halls.

The minister added that French authorities reported a case on Saturday involving a person in France who had attended the University of Kent, without providing further details.

The UKHSA Tuesday urged anyone who went to a nightclub in Canterbury between March 5 and 7 to get preventative antibiotics.

The health security agency has faced criticism for an alleged delay in informing the public of the outbreak.

It first announced deaths Sun-

day, two days after it was first notified of cases.

UKHSA's deputy head Gyatri Amirthalingam said the agency took "urgent action" to identify and inform close contacts of those infected.

"I don't believe there's been any delay in terms of the public health response," she said.

Club Chemistry said on Instagram that one of its staff members was being treated for meningitis and it has closed as a precaution.

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**GULF TIMES**

## Tapping oil reserves seen not a lasting solution to price volatility

Global oil prices remain above \$100 a barrel, having surged as a result of the US-Israeli war on Iran with shipping through the vital Strait of Hormuz coming to a near-halt. The International Energy Agency's member countries could release more oil into the market from strategic stockpiles "as and if needed" after they have agreed the largest-ever reserves release to offset shortages and a spike in prices, its executive director Fatih Birol said on Monday.

The IEA has described the crisis as the biggest supply disruption in the history of the oil market. As conflict chokes off oil exports from the Arabian Gulf, governments around the world are activating a critical line of defence against price shocks: emergency crude stockpiles. To ease surging prices, member nations of the International Energy Agency have agreed to release 400mn barrels from such reserves, which would be the group's largest discharge ever.

Among the stockpiles that will be tapped are the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) created in the 1970s as a safety net against energy crises. Earlier, US President Donald Trump had expressed reluctance to release oil from the US reserve, characterising high energy prices as temporary. According to the IEA, the 38 mostly wealthy members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) collectively have at least 1.2bn barrels of oil put aside in emergency public stores.

### To ease surging prices, IEA member nations have agreed to release 400mn barrels from the reserves, which would be the group's largest discharge ever

The Paris-based energy group, which coordinates stockpile discharges for OECD countries, has helped implement five such interventions in the past: in the buildup to the 1991 Gulf War, after hurricanes Rita and Katrina in 2005, following the outbreak of civil war in Libya in 2011, and twice in 2022 in response to disruptions connected to the war in Ukraine.

Among IEA members, the US has the largest buffer, which is made up of four heavily-guarded sites along the Gulf of Mexico. These deep and massive underground caverns have the capacity to hold more

than 700mn barrels of oil. According to Energy Department data, they currently hold about 415mn barrels, so are just 60% full.

The Trump administration plans to release 172mn barrels as part of the IEA's coordinated effort. China — the world's biggest oil importer — has in recent years built up what appears to be an even larger reserve capacity. The country has about 1.4bn barrels of crude in strategic storage, according to estimates from Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy.

As part of the IEA's coordinated plan, countries in Asia committed to release well over 100mn barrels, with a similar amount in Europe and over 170mn barrels in the Americas, on top of "over 20mn barrels from increased production." Analysts have questioned if the release will be sufficient to overcome the disruptions, and stressed that the pace of the release is also crucial.

Birol has said further releases of stocks could only constitute a "buffer" against the current choking off of supplies, which has forced Gulf producers to slash production. Further releases from strategic reserves are "not a lasting solution." Oil traders have expressed doubts about the extent of reserves making up for the oil that's being choked off by the war.

Even if the US SPR's maximum drawdown rate is coupled with flows from other IEA members, it might cover just a portion of the millions of barrels of supply from the Gulf that's being curtailed daily. It will take about 120 days to fully deliver the amount the US plans to release, according to the Energy Department.

For sure, oil reserves can help alleviate market shortages, but they are generally viewed as a short-term emergency measure rather than a permanent solution. The historic 400mn barrel release is estimated to account for only about three-four days of global production, or roughly two weeks of the typical flow through the Strait of Hormuz.

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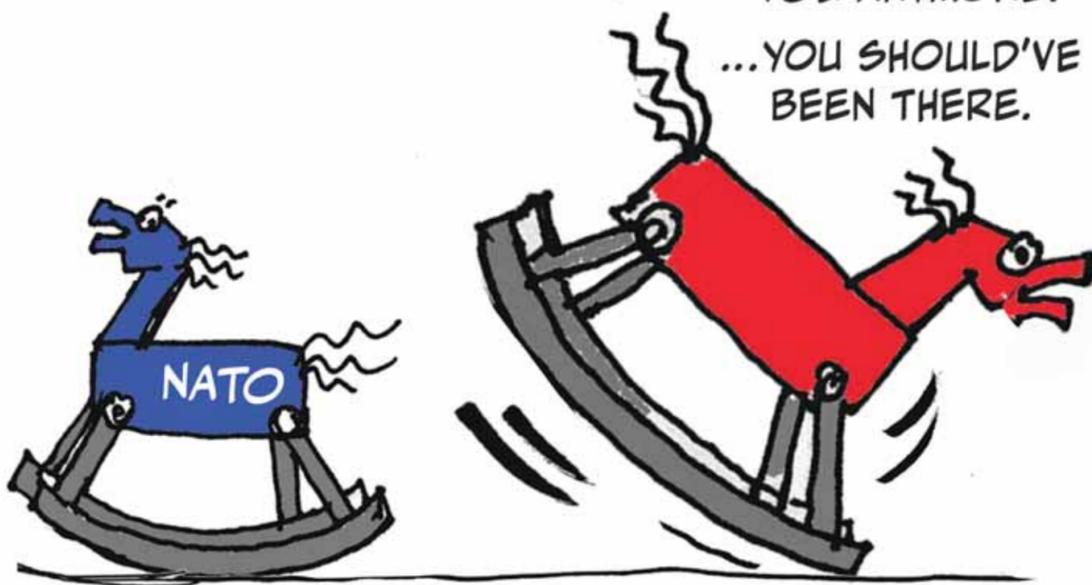
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*RYNOLD*  
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## US bases in Gulf: Between regional security equations and sovereignty challenges



By Khalid al-Jaber  
Doha

The deployment of US military forces in the Arabian Gulf has constituted a defining feature of the regional security architecture since the final decade of the 20th century. As the Middle East's geopolitical environment has grown increasingly complex, American military bases have become a central component in the regional balance of deterrence and stability within a geographic space of exceptional strategic and economic significance.

The geostrategic importance of the Arabian Gulf extends beyond its vast hydrocarbon reserves — among the largest globally — to include its controlling position over the Strait of Hormuz, one of the most vital maritime chokepoints in the international energy trade. Accordingly, the American military presence was never a temporary tactical arrangement; rather, it crystallised gradually into an integral component of a broader strategic approach aimed at managing regional equilibria and safeguarding global economic interests.

**Challenges Arising from the Military Presence**

Despite its stabilising intent, this security arrangement generates a complex set of political and strategic dilemmas. The presence of foreign military bases in a region characterized by persistent security tensions is liable to draw host nations indirectly into the dynamics of regional and international conflict. This dynamic has become particularly visible during the recent confrontation between the United States and Israel on one side and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the other, which has led to massive Iranian ballistic missile and drone attacks on Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. Tehran claims that it is targeting its Gulf neighbours because these countries host American military installations, despite their own lack of direct involvement in combat operations.

Moreover, these states have consistently and categorically prohibited the use of their territories as launchpads for

offensive military actions against Iran, adhering to a deliberate policy designed to avoid direct engagement in the conflict. Nevertheless, they continue to find themselves at the centre of regional escalations simply because of their geographic location and security partnerships.

**Historical Context of the American Military Presence**

The roots of the American military presence in the Gulf can be traced back to the structural transformations that reshaped the region beginning in the late 1970s. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 brought down one of Washington's most important strategic allies in the Middle East, creating a significant vacuum in its regional security architecture and a need for a new arrangement.

However, the decisive expansion of the US military footprint occurred in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This crisis fundamentally altered the Gulf security order and reinforced the conviction among regional states that the nature and magnitude of regional threats could exceed their own defense capabilities. In the years that followed, the United States steadily expanded its network of military installations, establishing air, naval, and ground facilities across several member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which itself was formed in the wake of the Iranian revolution.

**Strategic and Economic Dimensions of the Security Partnership**

Internationally, available estimates indicate that the United States maintains military bases in approximately 80 countries — typically through bilateral defence arrangements based on mutual interests. For the Gulf states, this military presence represents one of the most effective instruments of strategic deterrence against regional threats, particularly

given the chronic state of tension with Iran.

These bases provide more than a conventional security umbrella, however; they also offer access to advanced defence systems, intelligence capabilities, and military technologies that would be exceedingly difficult to develop independently. Furthermore, the military partnership with the US contributes to the institutional enhancement of the Gulf armed forces through joint exercises, operational coordination, and intelligence sharing.

Economically, the stability underpinned by this security architecture not only ensures the uninterrupted flow of energy supplies and the steadiness of global markets — an essential factor for Gulf economies whose revenues remain heavily dependent on hydrocarbon exports — but plays a pivotal role in the diversification of Gulf economies away from hydrocarbons, by allowing them to attract capital and talent for other sectors.

**The Normative Paradox in Iranian Discourse**

These bases are not without controversy, however, especially within Iranian political discourse. Yet within the ongoing debate over the legitimacy of foreign military bases in the region, a striking normative paradox emerges in Iran's own position. While Tehran consistently condemns the foreign military presence in the Gulf as an infringement upon regional sovereignty, in practice the Islamic Republic has developed an extensive network of military influence beyond its own borders, particularly in Arab states such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

In Lebanon, for example, Iran helped establish Hezbollah as part of its "forward defence" strategy against Israel, enhancing the armed group's capabilities to the point that it is the most powerful organization in the

country and challenges the sovereignty of the Lebanese state. In Syria, Iran provided direct military, logistical, and political support to the massively unpopular regime of Bashar al-Assad, while keeping the country as a land bridge for its proxy network. Tehran also played an instrumental role in persuading Russian President Vladimir Putin to deploy Russian forces on Syrian soil to prop up the regime — an intervention that led to the establishment of permanent Russian military bases under long-term agreements.

Despite its opposition to the American presence, Iran has actually engaged in indirect coordination with the US military at various points, including in Iraq during operations against armed groups. Iranian officials even acknowledged that this tacit co-operation with Washington helped stabilize the political situation in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Taken together, these realities raise questions about the internal consistency of Iran's criticism of foreign military bases while it simultaneously projects military influence in ways that undermine the sovereignty of other states.

**Future Prospects for the American Military Presence in the Gulf**

The question of American military bases in the Arabian Gulf sits at the intersection of national security considerations, national sovereignty requirements, and geopolitical balance calculations. As the international political order undergoes structural changes and competition among major powers intensifies, the US military presence in the Gulf is likely to persist. However, it is expected to evolve in form and function. Future deployments are likely to rely increasingly on flexible basing arrangements, advanced military technologies, rapid-response units, and remote operational capabilities.

Ultimately, the success of this security equation will remain contingent upon the ability of the US and Gulf states to strike a precise and sustainable balance between the requirements of collective security and the preservation of sovereign decision-making autonomy within an international system characterized by accelerating shifts in the balance of power and influence.

*(Dr Khalid al-Jaber serves as the Executive Director of the Middle East Council on Global Affairs in Doha. A leading researcher and academic, he is widely recognized for his expertise in international relations, political communication, and the dynamics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.)*



Smoke rises after an explosion in Baghdad, Iraq, following a drone attack. (Reuters)

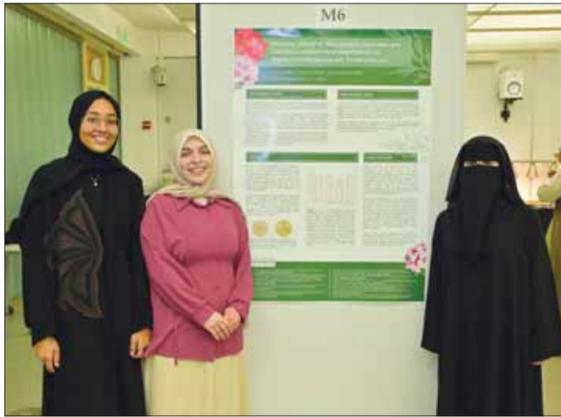
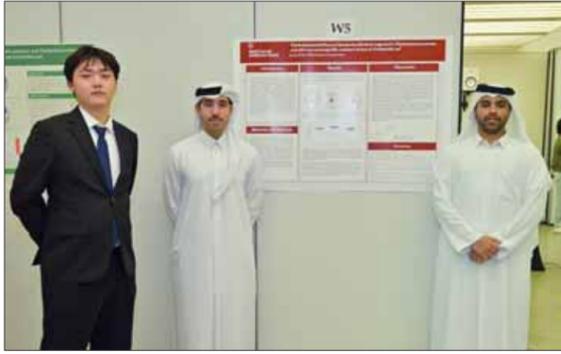
## WCM-Q pre-medical students present research posters at annual event

A total of 56 first-year pre-medical students at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) recently presented posters from their biology laboratory research. Their findings focused on the antimicrobial effects of natural substances obtained from plants, particularly specific plant parts. The students, divided into groups of two and three, presented 20 posters, providing them with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to conduct and communicate science.

The annual event, which marks the culmination of two semesters of research, allowed students to search the literature for a topic, after which they were provided with different bacterial species to test in the laboratory. The students then analysed the inhibitory effects of the phytochemicals for each plant species they used.

Dr Kuei-Chiu Chen, professor of biology, said: "This project gives students a chance to design and execute their own experiments and then eventually write and communicate their results through poster presentations. By working through each step themselves, they develop important skills for their future careers as physicians and researchers."

Students Jassim al-Hail, Taleb Dahman, and Junseo Yoon presented a poster on the antibacterial effects of barberries (*Berberis vulgaris*) on *Staphylococcus aureus* and wild-type and ampicillin-resistant strains of *Escherichia coli*. Al-Hail said: "We decided to explore the antimicrobial effects of barberry fruit since there has been a global rise in antimicrobial



resistance, and we wanted to investigate natural alternatives. The plant has a long history of medicinal value, though many studies have focused on roots and leaves, and we decided to use the fruit." Another poster, titled 'Inhibito-

ry effects of *Pelargonium graveolens* and *Cupressus sempervirens* essential oils on *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli*, was presented by Bayan Arabi, Fatima al-Kaabi, and Heba Abdelrahman. The group used geranium and cy-

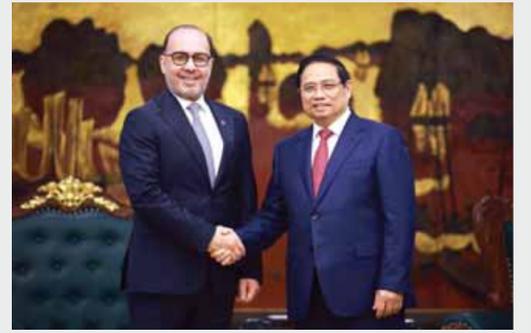
press essential oils, both of which have historically been used to treat gastrointestinal conditions and respiratory illnesses, respectively.

Al-Kaabi said: "We tested an essential oil from cypress and geranium flowers, and we used them on the two types of bacteria, which differ in their membranes. We found that *Staphylococcus aureus* showed greater inhibition, probably because it is Gram-positive, whereas *Escherichia coli* cell membranes are probably harder to penetrate. Our results demonstrated the potential of essential oils as complementary natural antimicrobial agents amid rising antibiotic resistance."

Another group, composed of Sofia Raza, Haya al-Bustami, and Aldana al-Dosari, presented a poster titled 'Antibacterial Activity of Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum sp.*) Extracts on *Escherichia coli* and *Staphylococcus aureus*, where they investigated the antimicrobial properties of *Cinnamomum sp.* extract on the two bacterial species, as well as the relationship between extract concentration and antibacterial activity.

Ayham Alsughair, Ayaan Khan, and Abdullah Qureshi presented a poster comparing the antimicrobial effects of thyme, oregano, may chang, and citronella essential oils on *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli*, and found that all four inhibited the growth of both bacterial species. Other student research projects investigated the antimicrobial effects of manuka honey, raspberry, blackberry, garlic, coriander, eucalyptus, rose of Jericho, tulsi, pomegranates, and white Thai guava, among others.

## Vietnam PM meets Qatar ambassador



Prime Minister of Vietnam Pham Minh Chinh met yesterday with ambassador of the State of Qatar to Vietnam Khalid bin Ali Abdullah Abel. The meeting reviewed co-operation relations between the two countries. (QNA)

## Poland's Deputy PM meets Qatar's envoy



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence of Poland Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz met with ambassador of Qatar to Poland Saoud bin Abdullah Zaid al-Mahmoud. The meeting discussed bilateral cooperation relations. (QNA)

## Ministry calls for strict safety compliance at social events

The Ministry of Interior has called on the public to strictly adhere to precautionary measures when organizing social events, including weddings and condolence gatherings, in light of the current circumstances. In a statement, the ministry stressed that such events must be held only in designated halls and indoor venues, warning against hosting them in tents or open spaces due to potential risks that could threaten public safety. The ministry underscored the

importance of following all instructions issued by relevant authorities and avoiding any practices that could endanger individuals or the wider community, emphasising a shared responsibility to protect lives and property. It also expressed appreciation for public cooperation, noting that compliance reflects strong community awareness and contributes to enhancing public safety, as well as safeguarding the security and stability of society. (QNA)

## Kabul says Pakistan air strike kills 408 at rehab centre, Islamabad rejects claim

Reuters  
Kabul

More than 400 people were killed in a Pakistan air force strike on a drug rehabilitation centre in Kabul, the Afghan Taliban administration said yesterday, in the deadliest incident since the two neighbours began fighting late last year.

Pakistan rejected the statement as false and misleading, saying it had "precisely targeted military installations and terrorist support infrastructure" on Monday night.

The air strike on Kabul happened hours after China said it was ready to continue mediating efforts to ease tensions and urged both states to return to negotiations.

Mediation efforts by Qatar, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia had previously failed.

Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban's foreign minister, said Afghanistan had lost trust in Pakistan's intentions regarding a diplomatic solution, according to a statement from his office.

The conflict is the worst between the South Asian Islamic neighbours, who share a 2,600-km (1,600-mile) border.

Hamdullah Fitrat, the deputy spokesman for the Taliban, said in a post on X the air strike took place at 9pm (1630 GMT) on Monday and hit the state-run Omid Hospital, which he said was a 2,000-bed drug rehabilitation centre.

The Pakistani information ministry said Omid Hospital was miles away from the target it had attacked, which it named as Camp Phoenix, a "military terrorist ammunition and equipment storage site".

"The visible secondary detonations after the strikes clearly indicate the presence of large ammunition depots," Pakistani Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said in a post on X.

Kabul residents, including a Reuters journalist, said Camp Phoenix, an abandoned Nato military base in the city, was turned into a drug treatment centre about a decade ago, and locals referred to it as Omid Camp, or "camp of hope", although its official name was "Ibn Sina Drug Addiction Treatment Hospital".

It was this centre that had been hit, they said, adding that Omid Hospital and Omid Camp were not related.

Fighting between the former close allies intensified last month with Pakistani air strikes in Afghanistan that Islamabad said hit Afghanistan's military and militant strongholds.

Islamabad says Kabul provides a safe haven to militants launching attacks on Pakistan. The Taliban deny the allegation, saying tackling militancy is Pakistan's internal problem.

At the site of the air strike at Omid Camp a blackened single-storey structure bore the marks of flames. In other places, buildings were reduced to heaps of wood and metal, with only a few bunk beds still intact, while blankets, personal belongings and bedding were strewn about.

Afghan Interior Ministry spokesperson Abdul Mateen Qamie said 408 people were killed and 265 wounded. Afghan authorities said casualties were taken to hospitals around Kabul, but gave no details of how they were counted.

At least 102 bodies were taken to Kabul Forensic Medical Department, said another Taliban official Hafizullah Maroof. Those killed were mostly civilians and addicts, added Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid. Reuters could not verify the casualty numbers. Both sides have claimed to have inflicted heavy damage on the other during the conflict but independent verification has not been possible.

## 'State's food security policy resulted in self-sufficiency'

QNA  
Doha

HE Minister of Municipality Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah, and Chairman of the committee for follow-up on the implementation of food security policies, affirmed that the progress achieved by the State of Qatar in its food production system reflects the success of national policies aimed at enhancing self-sufficiency and supporting market stability.

He noted that the country has achieved 99% self-sufficiency in the production of dairy and its derivatives. HE the Minister said that this continued progress underscores the vital role played by national companies in supporting local production and enhancing the sustainability of food supplies, thereby contributing to market stability and ensuring the consistent availability of food products.

This came during an inspection visit by HE the Minister to Baladna Food Industries, attended by Chairman of the com-



pany Moutaz al-Khayyat to review the food security system and strengthen local production.

During the visit, HE the Minister reviewed operations at the farm and production lines at the company's factories, which cover about 99% of the local market's needs for fresh dairy products and their derivatives.

HE al-Attiyah also reviewed the stock of agricultural and industrial production inputs, which is sufficient to meet the com-

pany's needs for more than 10 months, further supporting the stability of food supplies in the local market.

HE the Minister was also briefed by company management on its efforts and capacity to provide dairy products and their derivatives, as well as its ongoing plans to develop the production system and enhance operational efficiency in line with local market needs. For his part, al-Khayyat said that HE the Minister's

visit reflected the significant attention the state awards to the food production sector. He emphasized the company's continued commitment to developing its production capabilities and strengthening its contribution to food security while meeting local market demand.

Al-Khayyat added that the support provided by the state has enabled the company to develop an integrated production system in line with the highest international standards, enhancing its ability to supply dairy products and their derivatives efficiently and sustainably.

This visit is part of a series of inspection tours conducted by the Minister of Municipality to several companies and facilities operating in the agricultural, livestock, and food production sectors. The aim is to monitor the readiness of the local production system, review the progress of national projects, and ensure the stability of food supplies and the availability of products in the markets, thereby strengthening the country's food security system under the current circumstances.

## Kallas calls on the US, Israel to end Iran war

Reuters  
Brussels

European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas called on the US and Israel yesterday to end their war with Iran and said the EU was consulting with governments in the Middle East about how to bring the conflict to a conclusion.

In an interview with Reuters in Brussels, Kallas said the door was not closed to European participation in efforts to restore freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz but it would be most likely to come as part of a diplomatic solution.

Multiple European nations have rebuffed US President Donald Trump's calls to take part in a mission to free up the Strait, a key transit point for oil, gas and other goods now largely blocked by Iran.

European leaders have said they are not willing to put their forces in harm's way in the middle of a war that they did not start, even though Trump has warned their reluctance could



EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas at an interview with Reuters in Brussels, Belgium yesterday. (Reuters)

have negative consequences for the Nato alliance.

Kallas said Europe did not understand some of the United States' actions under Trump or its objectives in Iran but had become used to his unpredictability and "more calm" in its responses.

Asked if it was time to bring the war to an end, Kallas said: "Absolutely. I think... it would be in the interest of everybody if this war stops. The problem with wars

is that it's easier to start than to stop them, and it always gets out of hand."

Kallas, a former prime minister of Estonia who serves as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the 27-nation EU, said the bloc was willing to help "diplomatically to bring the parties together to really stop this war".

"We have been consulting with regional countries like the Gulf

countries, Jordan, Egypt, (about) whether we could also bring forward proposals for Iran, Israel and the US to get out of this situation so that everybody saves face."

She gave no further details on the consultations.

The war is the latest in a series of events that have severely strained relations between Europe and the US since Trump returned to the White House in January last year.

"The main concern of the European countries is that we were not consulted with (before) starting this war - actually the opposite. There were many Europeans who were trying to convince the US and Israel not to start this war," Kallas said.

Nevertheless, the war is already having a major impact on Europe, most immediately through higher energy prices due to Iran's chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

"Nobody is ready to put their people in harm's way in the Strait of Hormuz," Kallas said. "We have to find... diplomatic ways to keep this open so that we don't have a... food crisis, fertilisers crisis, energy crisis in the world."



# Qatar's resilience shows commitment to diplomacy in resolving regional disputes

QNA  
Paris

President of the France-Qatar Friendship Group in the French National Assembly (Parliament) Laurent Mazauray affirmed his rejection of Iran's attacks against the State of Qatar and the Gulf region, adding that any action that aims to drag the countries of the region into the conflict is a violation of humanitarian and international values.

A member of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the French National Assembly Mazauray told Qatar News Agency (QNA) that Qatar has not sought to go to war despite being subjected to these attacks, noting that Qatar's resilience exemplifies its commitment to diplo-

macy and mediation in resolving regional disputes. France attaches great importance to co-operation with Qatar, said Mazauray, adding that recent regional interventions have taken place under complex circumstances, including the US administration annulling the nuclear agreement.

The president of the France-Qatar Friendship Group pointed out that Qatar is not a party to the conflict, and that any attempt to draw it into the conflict is contrary to international values, noting that these attacks affect Qatar's independence, its people, and its economy, and pose a threat to the credibility of mediation efforts carried out by countries such as Qatar and Oman in the region.

The French official indicated that parliamentary diplomacy

plays a vital role in strengthening dialogue between governments by promoting regular communication among parliamentarians, adding that this day-to-day contact enables governments to engage in direct and frank dialogue. He pointed out that Qatar is, by its nature, open to such communication, particularly with France, and that Paris and Doha's strong bilateral ties enhance Qatar's role as a partner capable of mediation and conflict resolution.

The French official said that Qatar's success in mediating the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and Israel is an example of the country's success in this domain.

Mazauray called on Qatar and countries that adopt this medi-

ating approach to continue to adhere to it, in order to preserve this capacity for mediation, urging them to remain morally steadfast and not to be drawn into this conflict, as to maintain the ability to negotiate, as France does.

He added that Qatar's continued resilience and avoidance of involvement in the conflict strengthens its position as an influential mediator and helps Europe defend its economic and political interests. The president of the France-Qatar Friendship Group stressed that France has deployed its naval forces solely for self-defence and to fulfill its defence commitments, without participating in the conflict, underscoring the need to respect international law and state sovereignty.

In his remarks to QNA, Mazauray

said that the ramifications of the war in the Middle East are catastrophic both economically and politically, pointing to its direct impact on fuel prices in France and regional stability, noting that such conflicts threaten countries' efforts to develop diversified economies.

The solution requires Qatar, the Gulf states, and Europe to cooperate and restore peace through wisdom, said the French official, adding that Qatar's role as a mediator will be pivotal once the war ends, given Qatar's ability to engage in dialogue with all parties. From a French, European, and even an international perspective, the war in the Middle East causes economic challenges that include threatening fuel and gas supplies, soaring prices, and disrupting global trade, said the President of the France-



Laurent Mazauray

Qatar Friendship Group, stressing that Europe must not become involved in the war, but may maintain a defensive military presence to protect its interests and those of its allies in the Gulf.

Mazauray concluded by saying that even with diversified suppliers, Europe will remain affected by navigation difficulties in the Strait of Hormuz and Bab Al Mandab, as well as feeling the effects of increased production and distribution costs that major companies have to shoulder.

## QPC renews condemnation of ongoing Iranian attacks

The Qatar Press Centre (QPC) has renewed its strong condemnation of the ongoing, treacherous Iranian aggression against the State of Qatar, carried out through the launch of ballistic missiles and drones. It described these acts as a blatant violation of the country's sovereignty and a direct threat to its security and territorial integrity, constituting a dangerous escalation that endangers regional security and stability.

The Centre affirmed that targeting vital infrastructure by Iranian aggression represents a serious precedent that could expose the peoples of the region to grave risks, as well as wide-ranging humanitarian and economic consequences.

QPC also highlighted remarks by Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari, Advisor to the Prime Minister and official spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during a media briefing on Monday. He announced that an Iranian missile had been launched on Saturday toward a residential neighbourhood in Doha

and was successfully intercepted, prompting a precautionary evacuation of parts of the area.

Additionally, HE Dr Hind Abdulrahman al-Muftah, Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva, stated during her participation in the 61st session of the Human Rights Council that the deliberate or indiscriminate targeting of civilians, civilian facilities, and residential areas constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. She expressed deep concern over the persistence of such acts and stressed the need not to remain silent about them.

QPC lauded the high level of efficiency and bravery demonstrated by the Qatari Armed Forces in confronting this aggression, noting that since the beginning of the attacks, they have successfully thwarted all missile and drone strikes targeting the country.

The centre also saluted the armed forces and brave soldiers for

their courage and vigilance in defending the nation and safeguarding its sovereignty. It commended the significant efforts of the Ministry of Interior and all relevant authorities in addressing these challenges, enhancing security and stability, and countering rumours and misinformation to ensure public safety and awareness.

In light of these sensitive circumstances, the QPC stressed that responsible and professional media serves as the first line of defence in times of crisis and a national shield in protecting the internal front, strengthening social cohesion, and combating misinformation. Such efforts, it said, help reinforce national awareness and build confidence in state institutions and their ability to protect the country and preserve its security and stability.

"My Lord, make this land secure."

May God protect Qatar, its Amir, its people, and all residents from all harm.

## Ambassador Fahad conferred RIBA Honorary Fellow for 2026

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has announced that ambassador Fahad bin Mohammed al-Attiya has been appointed as a RIBA Honorary Fellow for 2026, in recognition of his significant contribution to the advancement, advocacy, and cultural promotion of architecture and the built environment.

Each year, RIBA awards Honorary Fellowships to distinguished individuals who are not architects but have made an outstanding contribution to architecture and the built environment worldwide. The fellowship recognises individuals who have helped advance the quality of design, influenced the delivery of more sustainable and humane environments, promoted architecture culturally, and nurtured future generations. Fahad bin Mohammed al-Attiya has been widely recognised for his leadership in promoting traditional architecture, craftsmanship, and human-centered urbanism through his work with the Caravane



Ambassador Fahad bin Mohammed al-Attiya

Earth Foundation and related initiatives. His work focuses on revitalising craft-based building traditions, advancing ecological approaches to architecture, and fostering dialogue between culture, sustainability, and the built environment. Through initiatives spanning education, cultural programming, research, and development projects, Al-Attiya has advocated for a renewed architectural paradigm rooted in local materials, traditional knowledge systems, and

community-centered design. In a press statement, Fahad Bin Mohammed al-Attiya said: "I am deeply honoured to receive this recognition from the Royal Institute of British Architects. I would like to express my sincere thanks to RIBA and its President for this distinction and for their continued commitment to advancing architectural culture and excellence."

"At a time of profound environmental and social challenges, I believe the future of the built environment lies in rediscovering the wisdom embedded in traditional architecture and urbanism. These traditions offer enduring principles of beauty, sustainability, and human scale that are essential for building resilient and meaningful places for future generations." The RIBA Honorary Fellowship is among the Institute's highest distinctions and celebrates individuals whose work has had a transformative influence on architecture and the built environment globally.

## Students adapt to online learning and dormitory life amid regional tensions

By Shaima Sheriff  
Staff Reporter

University students in Qatar are adapting to online learning and dormitory life during regional tensions, balancing academic responsibilities, Ramadan routines and uncertainty while highlighting resilience and confidence in institutional support systems.

Students at Qatar University (QU), both local and international, say the transition has required quick adaptation but also highlighted the importance of institutional organisation and community support.

For Asad Khan, a final-year mechanical engineering student living in the male dormitories, the situation unfolded unexpectedly during an exam.

"When I received the notice, I was actually in the middle of a midterm... it started all of us," Khan said. "Only after finishing the paper did I realise the university would effectively be shut down." In the days that followed, Khan said students were focused on understanding the situation and assessing their safety.

"I concluded that the university dormitories should be one of the safest places, as civilians reside here," he said, praising the staff. "The hospitality from the housing never changed and was pristine."

The move to online learning brought both advantages and challenges. "With classes online, there is no commute ... it gave me more



Asad Khan

energy and time during Ramadan," Khan noted. However, he added that the closure of facilities such as engineering workshops disrupted practical learning.

"I would prefer to be on campus presenting projects in front of professors," he said. "Online classes can also bring back the feeling of Covid days... the lethargy can settle in."

For international students, the experience has been shaped by distance from family and the emotional impact of uncertainty. Mamdouh Alwan, a pharmacy student at QU, said online learning has made it harder to stay en-

gaged. "Online classes tend to be less interactive... it's harder to focus," he said, adding that his family abroad remains concerned. "They call me daily to check on me."

Despite this, Alwan lauded the university's response. "What impressed me was how organised everything is and how efficient the response was," he said. "It makes you respect the institution."

Similarly, Karen D'Souza, a third-year student in economics and business analytics, said the initial phase was stressful and disruptive. "It was challenging at first, and I couldn't study properly for a few days," she said. "But after some time, I was able to return to my routine."

She noted that staying connected with family helped ease concerns. "They were worried in the beginning, but once they knew we were safe, they felt reassured," she said. Students also highlighted efforts to support their well-being, including communication from university officials and sessions aimed at emotional and spiritual stability.

Despite the challenges, many expressed confidence in Qatar's environment and systems. "For as long as I've been in Qatar, they have maintained safety and care for residents," D'Souza said. "Even during uncertainty, life continues as long as we follow precautions." Khan echoed a similar sentiment, emphasising resilience.

"We cannot let the situation stop our learning," he said. "We take it one day at a time, and things will work out."

## QRCS raises QR167mn in Ramadan campaign

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has raised QR 167mn (\$45.8mn) during its "Qatar Stands as One" charity campaign, aimed at supporting humanitarian projects inside the country, organizers said. The fundraising drive took place on Sunday night, the 27th night of Ramadan, and was organised in co-operation with Rafeeq Company and the Msheireb Media.

The campaign featured a live broadcast lasting two and a half hours, hosted by social media influencer Hamad al-Jameela, with the participation of senior QRCS officials. It attracted significant engagement from the public on social media, reflecting what organizers described as a strong spirit of solidarity and generosity during the holy month.

According to the charity, the total amount raised included QR 23.09mn in cash donations that will be directed towards local initiatives under its Ramadan campaign "Keep Your Balance of Good Deeds Alive". These projects support vulnerable families and individuals registered in the organization's beneficiary database in Qatar. The remaining donations consisted of medical supplies worth QR144mn that will be delivered to people in need abroad.

HE Ibrahim bin Hashim al-Sada, QRCS' managing director and secretary-general, praised the swift response from the community, saying the campaign highlighted the spirit of unity and compassion within Qatari society.

"What has been achieved in these circumstances reflects the depth of humanitarian awareness and social responsibility in our community," he said, adding that generosity remains a deeply rooted value among the people of Qatar.

Mohammed Ahmed al-Bishri, assistant secretary-general for communications and resource development, said the strong participation demonstrated the community's awareness of the importance of humanitarian solidarity. He also thanked contributors and partners, including Amwaj Group, Alfardan Corporation, United Development Company and Taiba.

Hussein Aman al-Ali, assistant secretary-general for volunteering and local development, said the funds raised within Qatar would support debtors, vulnerable families and patients requiring urgent medical procedures, as well as other people in need registered with the organization. He added that the campaign reflected a long-standing culture of charity and humanitarian work in Qatari society, with individuals and institutions alike contributing to the effort. (QNA)

## Gulf Journalists Union denounces Iranian attacks, urges action on misinformation

The Gulf Journalists Union has issued a second statement renewing its strong condemnation and denunciation of the ongoing Iranian attacks targeting the interests of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. It warned of the consequences of this military escalation, which threatens to expose the region and the world to further tension and instability, amid the ongoing war involving Iran on one side and the United States and Israel on the other.

The union affirmed that the continuation of these attacks constitutes a dangerous escalation, a blatant violation of state

sovereignty, a breach of the principles of good neighbourliness, and a clear violation of the United Nations Charter and international law. The statement noted that targeting civilian facilities, economic installations, and vital infrastructure constitutes an act of aggression condemned by all legal and humanitarian standards, given the risks posed to civilian lives and the severe damage inflicted on communities. These attacks have resulted in casualties and injuries among civilians, in addition to significant damage to public and private property and critical infrastructure.

The union further stressed that attacks

on ports, energy facilities, transport lines, and supply chains pose a direct threat to regional security and stability, affecting international trade routes and global energy security, with potential repercussions for global trade flows and market stability. It called on international and regional organisations to take a clear and firm stance in condemning these attacks, to work toward halting them, and to adopt measures capable of deterring such practices that threaten regional and international security and stability.

The union also urged Arab and international bodies, institutions, and as-

sociations to express solidarity with the Gulf states in the face of these violations and attacks targeting their security, stability, and economic and civilian assets. The union praised the wisdom of GCC leaders in handling these developments, highlighting their political responsibility and commitment to avoiding escalation into war while prioritising diplomatic solutions. At the same time, it affirmed the Gulf states' capability to safeguard their security and sovereignty, thanks to the readiness of their security and military institutions.

It also commended the peoples of

the Gulf for their cohesion and national awareness in confronting these circumstances, noting that such unity strengthens Gulf societies' ability to overcome current challenges.

The union called on Gulf media outlets and press institutions to uphold their professional and national responsibilities by supporting Gulf positions, countering misinformation, confronting attempts to distort facts and spread division, and reaffirming that the security and stability of the Gulf are fundamental pillars of Arab, regional, and international security.