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QatarEnergy in force majeure on LNG contracts

QatarEnergy yesterday declared force majeure on some of its long-term LNG supply contracts, affecting customers in Italy, Belgium, South Korea and China, as production and supply disruptions caused by the US-Israeli war on Iran rippled through global energy markets. Petroleum companies in Kuwait and Bahrain have also recently invoked the clause, which permits parties to suspend contractual obligations due to unforeseeable events beyond their control. The disruption stems from a conflict that has convulsed energy markets since the US and Israel began striking Iran on 28 February. Iranian retaliatory missile and drone attacks across the Gulf region have targeted oil and gas facilities, drawing international condemnation, while Tehran has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz — the critical waterway through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil and LNG supplies pass — sending energy prices soaring. Qatar has been among the hardest hit. Last week, Minister of State for Energy Affairs and President and CEO of QatarEnergy HE Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi disclosed that an Iranian strike on the Ras Laffan gas facility had destroyed approximately 17% of the country's LNG export capacity, inflicting an estimated \$20bn in lost annual revenue and threatening supplies to both Europe and Asia. — Reuters

Qatar is 'not engaged in US-Iran mediation'

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar has firmly ruled out playing any current direct mediation role between the United States and Iran as its chief foreign ministry spokesman set out in stark terms the scale of the military and economic damage the country has suffered during the ongoing war. HE the Adviser to the Prime Minister and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari, said at the ministry's weekly press briefing that while Doha "fully supports all diplomatic efforts" to de-escalate tensions and end the conflict, there is "no direct Qatari effort" under way between Washington and Tehran. Qatar, he stressed, is presently focused on defending its territory and addressing the aftermath of repeated attacks. Dr al-Ansari said Qatar's position since the first day of the war had been "crystal clear": that every conflict ultimately ends at the negotiating table and that the sooner diplomacy begins, the fewer victims there will be. He stressed that this approach is consistent with Qatar's broader foreign policy in crises worldwide.



Dr Majed bin Mohamed al-Ansari, MoFA spokesperson

Doha, he added, backs all initiatives, whether official or unofficial, that could lead to an end to the fighting, and remains engaged in intensive contacts with regional and international partners through multilateral meetings and international institutions. The spokesman underlined that Qatar will remain vigilant amid ongoing military operations

and their security, economic and political repercussions. Attempts to misrepresent the situation, he warned, have taken two forms: efforts to fabricate rifts and imaginary alliances, and efforts to sabotage any opening for de-escalation.

In this context, he said, Qatar's coordination with the United States has been extensive, with both sides working to share a full picture of developments and to limit what he described as "catastrophic" consequences for the Qatari economy.

Dr al-Ansari revealed that the country has come under more than 200 missile attacks and a substantial number of unmanned aerial vehicles, of which he said over 90% were intercepted. The strikes on gas facilities in Ras Laffan led to a 17% decline in production, he added, with total losses projected to reach about US\$100bn over five years and repair and restoration expected to take a similar length of time.

The damage to Qatar's energy sector, he cautioned, does not affect Doha alone but has wider implications for global energy markets. He reiterated Qatar's condemnation of attacks targeting energy facilities or infrastructure, insisting such strikes were unprovoked. **To Page 2**

Calls of support for Amir from Turkish, Slovenian and Greek leaders

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received yesterday a phone call from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. At the outset of the call, His Highness the Amir and the president exchanged condolences for the martyrs of Qatar's Armed Forces helicopter crash, wishing them mercy and to inspire their families with patience and solace. The call also dealt with the latest developments in the region and the efforts made towards de-escalating and boosting stability. The Amir thanked Erdogan for Turkey's efforts to stop the military escalation in the region. The two sides exchanged views on continuing co-ordination and dialogue between the two countries to enhance bilateral co-operation and joint interests. The Amir also received a telephone call yesterday from Slovenia President Nataša Pirc Musar, who extended her condolences and sympathy to the Amir and the people of Qatar over the martyrs of the helicopter crash. The president enquired about the situation in Qatar and expressed her satisfaction with the measures taken by the country to ensure its security and stability, as well as the safety of its citizens and residents. She underscored that Slovenia stands in full solidarity with Qatar and strongly condemns Iranian aggression, particularly the attack that targeted infrastructure, especially the energy sector.



In addition, the president praised the active role Qatar has been playing in mediation and resolving disputes through peaceful means, whether on the regional or global stages. The Amir expressed his thanks to the president for her heartfelt condolences as well as her solidarity and support for Qatar, commending her country's position. Both sides reemphasised the importance of de-escalation and prioritising dialogue. The Amir also received a phone call from Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who renewed his country's solidarity with Qatar and inquired about the situation. He commended Qatar's role and diplomatic efforts as a trusted partner in supporting regional stability and enhancing energy security. His Highness the Amir praised the friendly relations between Qatar and Greece, as well as the latter's supportive positions in this regard. **(QNA)**

Deputy PM, French minister hold talks



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani met yesterday with French Minister of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Catherine Vautrin during her visit to the country. They discussed the latest developments and security updates in the region and aspects of co-operation and joint co-ordination in light of the current circumstances. **(QNA)**

US prepares to send elite troops amid new strikes

● Trump reposts Pakistan talks tweet

Iran and Israel traded fresh strikes yesterday even as a fragile diplomatic push gathered pace, with Pakistan emerging as a potential host for talks between Tehran and Washington — and the Pentagon preparing to send thousands of elite American troops to the region. Iran's atomic energy organisation also accused the US and Israel yesterday of attacking its Bushehr nuclear power plant, saying a projectile had landed within its compound but caused no damage. "The American-Zionist enemy has attacked the Bushehr nuclear power plant site again," the organisation said in a statement, adding that "a projectile hit inside the enclosure of the Bushehr power plant".

Meanwhile, the US military is expected to deploy soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division, currently stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to an unspecified location in the Middle East. The move follows last week's deployment of thousands of Marines and sailors aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Boxer. Officials, speaking anonymously, stressed that no decision had been taken to send troops into Iran itself, but that the build-up was intended to expand capacity for potential future operations. The three-week-old war, triggered by US-Israeli strikes that killed Iran's supreme leader, has convulsed global energy markets and destabilised the wider region. — AFP, Reuters **To Page 11**

Manufacturing sector expands across households, industry

By Ayman Adly
Staff Reporter

Qatar's household goods and consumables manufacturing sector is steadily expanding, with locally produced items increasingly competing with imports on both quality and price, according to industry data. Production of household items has grown consistently in recent years, supported by rising consumer confidence in locally made products and their competitive pricing. Industry observers note that domestic manufacturers are not only meeting local demand but also positioning themselves for further expansion as preferences shift toward reliable, cost-effective alternatives to imports. Around 198 firms are currently engaged in the production and processing of plastic and rubber products. **To Page 2**



Moderate to heavy rains; weather to persist

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Qatar experienced moderate to heavy rains yesterday and the weatherman has forecast similar weather conditions in the coming days. As the residents woke up to heavy rains yesterday, several areas of Doha had persistent rains right from morning to afternoon while other parts of the country also witnessed downpour for a significant part of the day. At some of the areas, the rains started in the early hours of the morning and continued until noon time. Throughout the day, the sky was overcast with less sunlight. With the Eid al-Fitr holidays



Rain and overcast conditions: PICTURE: Thajudheen

coming to a close yesterday, most residents had to commute in the early morning to their workplaces. Moreover, the gov-

ernment had directed all the employees to start onsite work in full capacity which had been restricted due to the ongoing

regional conflicts, and most employees had to attend their workplace in the early morning. **To Page 11**

Qatar slams Israel's systemic 'inhuman' treatment of Palestinians

Qatar has affirmed that the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, occupied since 1967, which details arbitrary arrests, torture, and inhuman treatment perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people through detention centres and ongoing campaigns of mass killing, forced displacement, deprivation and destruction of the foundations of life, has become a structural feature of the ongoing Israeli genocide and the broader settler-colonial apartheid regime, stressing that it is a grave violation of international law, a war crime and a stain on humanity.

This came in the statement delivered by HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Office in Geneva Dr

Hend bint Abdalrahman al-Muftah during the interactive dialogue with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Item 7, within the framework of the 61st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

She said that these crimes against children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and women, and the methods of torture used, including starvation, beatings, insults, death threats, assault, cruel and inhuman treatment, denial of healthcare, and obstruction of legal assistance, cannot be ignored or tolerated by the international community.

Dr al-Muftah said it is imperative to ensure all those responsible for these crimes and violations committed against the Pal-

estinian people are held accountable.

She stressed that what the Israeli occupation aims for in terms of physically humiliating the Palestinians, destroying their psychological well-being, and undermining their ability to collectively resist, has not and will not succeed.

Dr al-Muftah added that the Palestinians will continue their resistance to the occupation until they regain all their legitimate rights, foremost among them the right to self-determination and the establishment of their fully sovereign independent state on the borders of June 4, 1967.

She thanked UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese for her report, which expressed condemnation of the Israeli authorities' refusal to allow her access to the

occupied Palestinian territories.

On Monday Dr al-Muftah read out a statement that Qatar affirmed its support for efforts aimed at strengthening humanitarian responses, stressing the importance of consolidating international solidarity in sharing responsibilities amid unprecedented rise in refugees and displaced persons.

The statement was delivered during a briefing for UN Member States on the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East, with a focus on Lebanon, organised by the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Geneva.

Dr al-Muftah stressed that addressing the root causes of conflicts remains the basis for any sustainable response, and that investing in peace, conflict prevention and

promoting inclusive dialogue is an urgent necessity to create the conditions for a safe return and to achieve stability.

She noted that the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) announced that it would provide urgent humanitarian support to those affected in Lebanon, where it provides urgent relief intervention through its partners, Qatar Charity and the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), with the aim of providing urgent humanitarian assistance to more than 40,000 displaced and affected families, through the distribution of food baskets and basic materials.

She urged the international community to assume its responsibilities and provide sufficient support to refugees and their host communities, in order to ensure an effective and sustainable response. - QNA



QRCS launches Hakeem digital health platform

The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) recently launched the Hakeem digital health platform and mobile app (for iOS and Android), inspired by an ambitious strategic vision of providing patient-centred digital health services that improve healthcare quality and safety.

"The QRCS has made one more achievement in developing health services and enhancing patient satisfaction," said Abdullah Sultan al-Qattan (pictured), the assistant secretary-general - executive director of Medical Affairs Division at the QRCS.

"The new digital health portal is an integrated platform that gives the patients easy and secure access to the healthcare services they need and ensures effective one-to-one commu-



nication between patients and health care providers," he said. "By embracing the latest digital transformation developments, it will help optimise patient experience."

"Hakeem allows the users to access their essential health data, such as medical appointments, lab results, prescriptions, medical history, and treatment plans," al-Qattan said. "They can also receive health-related notifications/alerts."

"This is another milestone in the QRCS's rich history, which boasts ISO 9001:2015 certification for quality management system (QMS) and platinum-level accreditation by Accreditation Canada for meeting international standards of excellence in quality care and services, in recognition of the QRCS's capabilities, efficiency, and special attention to institutional governance, transparency, and administrative excellence," he added.

The patient portal offers a comprehensive range of features designed to enhance healthcare access and convenience.

It provides secure access to personal health data anytime and anywhere, allows users to manage medical appointments

and request or change them as needed, and provides access to attendance certificates, sick leave certificates, and other official documents.

Patients can view test results and medical reports, access prescriptions and treatment instructions, and receive health education messages and guidelines.

The portal also enables patients to submit suggestions and complaints, reduces waiting times and paperwork, and allows faster access to medical information.

It supports smoother healthcare experiences, continuous monitoring of health conditions, well-informed medical decision-making, and improved communication between patients and QRCS health facilities. - QNA

UN Human Rights Council to hold debate

The United Nations Human Rights Council will hold an urgent debate today on Iran's military attacks against Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan, which have targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure and resulted in casualties.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Council said that the urgent debate is being convened following an official request submitted by Bahrain on behalf of the Gulf Co-operation Council countries and Jordan on March 18. - QNA

Qatar condolences with UAE over civilian death

Qatar has expressed its deepest condolences and sincere sympathies to the United Arab Emirates over the death of a civilian contractor serving with the UAE armed forces.

The victim was reported killed during a routine mission in Bahrain following an Iranian missile attack targeting the kingdom.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed Qatar's full solidarity with the UAE and Bahrain. - QNA

Qatar's ambassador conveys Doha's condolences to Turkiye

Qatar's ambassador to Turkiye Faisal bin Abdullah al-Hanzab has conveyed Qatar's condolences to Turkiye over the death of two Turkish civilians, following the crash of a helicopter in Qatar's territorial waters due to a technical malfunction while performing a routine duty.

Four members of the Qatari Armed Forces were also martyred in the crash.

The came during separate meetings of the envoy with Turkiye's Minister of Defence Yasar Guler and Chief of the General Staff Selcuk Bayraktaroglu.

During the two meetings, al-Hanzab affirmed Qatar's full solidarity with Turkiye in this tragic event, wishing for mercy for the deceased and to inspire their families with patience and solace. - QNA



Qatar's ambassador joins Turkiye foreign minister's meeting with GCC envoys

Qatar's ambassador to Turkiye Faisal bin Abdullah al-Hanzab participated yesterday in a meeting with Turkiye Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan and the envoys of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries and Jordan.

The meeting discussed the latest developments in the region and international efforts aimed at reducing tension, in addition to exploring ways to strengthen joint co-operation. - QNA

Qatar's envoy joins Polish meeting with Arab diplomats

Qatar's ambassador to Poland Saoud bin Abdullah Zaid al-Mahmoud participated in a meeting convened by Poland's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Radoslaw Sikorski with Arab ambassadors accredited to Warsaw.

The meeting discussed the latest regional developments.

During the meeting, Sikorski expressed his country's appreciation to Qatar for its support in facilitating the evacuation of Polish citizens who faced difficulties leaving the region. - QNA



MoJ incorporates 'Lessons Learned' programme

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has announced the inclusion of the "Lessons Learned" programme from judicial rulings within the Case Management System.

In a statement issued yesterday, the ministry said that these lessons are based on rulings and legal principles established by the Court of Cassation in cases where administrative bodies were a party. - QNA

Sheep and goat grazing to resume

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has announced the resumption of nationwide grazing for sheep and goat following the end of the annual seasonal ban, which ran from December 1 to March 15. - QNA

Qatar 'not engaged in US-Iran mediation'

From Page 1

Qatar, al-Ansari said, reserves the right to respond and take appropriate measures in response to any further attacks, even as it continues working with the US administration to clarify the impact of the assaults and to co-ordinate the protection of its territory.

On relations with Iran, he described the country as an enduring neighbour in a region where no war or political event will cause peoples to disappear.

Iran, al-Ansari pointed out, "has existed in this region since ancient times and will remain here, just as the other neighbouring countries will remain", making it imperative to find ways to coexist.

However, he underlined that Qatar has been attacked, with direct consequences for its economy and for the daily lives of individuals, and that Doha does not underestimate such developments.

Al-Ansari made clear that communication with Iran will depend on its positions and actions, particularly in relation to the attacks suffered by Qatar and other states in the region.

Iran, he stressed, must decide how it intends to rebuild the trust that was lost when it violated Qatar's sovereignty.

In this context, al-Ansari confirmed that Qatar has requested, through official diplomatic channels, the departure of both the military attaché and the security attaché at the Iranian embassy in Doha.

Turning to regional affairs, he said that one of the most significant outcomes of the war has been to expose the breakdown of the regional security system in the Gulf.

That architecture, al-Ansari said, had been based on principles that have now been widely disregarded. Gulf states, which have worked in parallel and in

co-ordination to safeguard their security, need a thorough reassessment of what a common regional security system should mean after the war.

Al-Ansari pointed to Gulf defence partnerships that had demonstrated their effectiveness during the conflict, but stressed that any end to the war or any subsequent agreement must take into account the national interests of the affected countries.

These states, he insisted, must have an active role in reshaping the regional security system in line with their strategic interests.

The threat they face, al-Ansari added, does not only target people but also land and economies, making joint regional co-operation essential.

Co-ordination between Qatar and its neighbours, he noted, is currently built on three pillars: ensuring a cessation of attacks, pushing for a diplomatic solution and co-ordinating positions on escalation.

On the military track, al-Ansari said there is no indication of an inevitable ground invasion of Iran, but warned that continued escalation will not yield positive results.

At home, he said, no attack had been recorded in recent days that would justify issuing fresh public warnings, although a state of vigilance and caution remains in place.

The decision to return to work and resume classes was linked to the security situation and based on security and strategic assessments, al-Ansari added.

The briefing opened on a sombre note as he paid tribute to the "martyrs of the nation" from the Qatari Armed Forces, the joint Qatari-Turkish forces and civilian collaborators who were killed when an AW139 helicopter crashed in Qatari territorial waters at 10.42pm last Saturday following a technical malfunction during a routine mission.

Manufacturing expands across households, industry

From Page 1

These factories manufacture a wide range of everyday consumables, including disposable containers, plastic bags, and household cleaning products, and supply the local market at competitive prices.

Over time, these products have gained stronger acceptance among consumers as manufacturers continue to improve quality standards.

At the same time, the production of household paper goods, such as tissues and paper rolls, is gaining momentum, with the segment offering promising opportunities in a relatively underdeveloped area of manufacturing.

The furniture manufacturing segment is also contributing to the sector's growth.

More than 120 small-scale factories operate in this field, supported by a network of carpentry workshops focused largely on woodwork.

These businesses, in turn, sustain a broader ecosystem of small enterprises that provide services such as upholstery, painting, and interior design, reinforcing linkages across related industries.

A significant number of factories also cater to the needs of the construction and services sectors.

There are 216 firms producing fabricated metal products, including cable management systems, structural steel, carbon steel tanks, fire-rated steel doors, steel furniture, light poles and plastering accessories, as well as stainless steel design and glazing solutions.

These products play a critical role in supporting Qatar's ongoing urban development and infrastructure expansion.

Similarly, the non-metallic mineral products sector continues to record steady growth, with 217 registered firms manufacturing cement, glass, ceramics, ready-mix concrete and a range of green building materials.

The number of factories in this segment rose sharply during 2024 and 2025, reflecting strong demand driven by construction activity in Qatar and neighbouring markets.

Qatar is also home to 124 firms producing chemical-based consumables, ranging from large joint ventures to specialised manufacturers.

Key subsectors include construction chemicals such as epoxy coatings, waterproofing materials, tile adhesives and concrete admixtures.

Other areas cover industrial gases and specialty fluids, including oxygen, nitrogen and hy-

drogen, as well as chemicals used in water treatment and oilfield operations.

Consumer-oriented products such as personal care items, hygiene products, lubricants and cleaning agents are also part of this segment.

The Qatar National Manufacturing Strategy 2024-30 identifies six priority sectors: chemicals and petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, plastics, food and beverage, metals and fabricated metals, and construction materials.

To support growth, the government has introduced initiatives and incentives to encourage private-sector investment in local manufacturing, while streamlining processes to make them accessible and cost-effective.

These efforts form part of a broader strategy to diversify the national economy and reduce reliance on hydrocarbons.

Small and medium-sized enterprises account for nearly 90% of manufacturing activity, underscoring the sector's strong private sector base.

With expanding capabilities and untapped potential across multiple segments, manufacturing is increasingly viewed as a promising area for business growth, both within Qatar and in neighbouring markets.

Deadly strikes in Iraq blamed on US, Iran

AFP/Reuters
Baghdad

An air strike in Iraq killed 15 members of a former paramilitary coalition, the deadliest attack on the group since the Middle East war began, as missile fire elsewhere killed six Kurdish security personnel.

Iraq has been pulled into the war sparked by US and Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28, and which has since engulfed much of the region.

The Hashed al-Shaabi coalition, part of Iraq's regular armed forces but which also includes brigades belonging to Iran-backed groups, blamed the strike that killed a commander and 14 other fighters on the United States.

In Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, a ballistic missile attack killed six peshmerga fighters, with the region accusing Iran of conducting the first such deadly attack on Kurdish security forces since the war began.

Neither the United States nor Iran commented on the accusations.

Since the war began, pro-Iran armed groups have claimed responsibility for attacks on US interests in Iraq and across the region, while strikes have also targeted these groups.

In a statement, the Hashed al-Shaabi, also known as the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), said those killed in the strike targeting its fighters included a top provincial commander.

It described the strike as a "treacherous American attack that targeted the operation headquarters".

The overnight strike targeted a base in the western Anbar province bordering Syria, long the scene of operations against the Islamic State (IS) group.

Since the start of the Middle East war, Baghdad has repeatedly denounced attacks on the Hashed al-Shaabi, formed in 2014 to fight IS.

After the religious militants were defeated in 2017 in Iraq, the coalition gained influence within the security forces. Its armed factions also developed political roles, including representation in parliament, as well as economic interests.

Some of these factions, backed by Iran, have claimed responsibility for dozens of drone and rocket attacks against US military personnel and interests since the start of the Middle East war.

Last week, the Pentagon acknowledged

that combat helicopters had carried out strikes against pro-Iran armed groups in Iraq during the current conflict.

Yesterday the PMF urged "political forces to take responsibility and confront these repeated American violations".

The PMF also said a "Zionist-American strike" yesterday morning had targeted their Mosul office in northern Iraq.

A security official said the building was coalition leader Faleh al-Fayyad's second home, adding that he was not present during the attack.

The Kurdish defence ministry in the north separately said the strike that targeted their peshmerga forces killed six fighters and wounded 30 others, blaming the attack on Iran.

Although close with Washington, Iraq's Kurds have sought to maintain neutrality

in the Iran war, after relations with the Islamic republic had warmed in recent years.

Such damaging strikes against the PMF create political difficulty for Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who has to walk a careful line maintaining the support both of Washington and of factions in the Shia-majority country that are aligned with Iran.

Sudani ordered an emergency meeting of the Ministerial Council for National Security to be convened, said a statement from the Iraqi military's joint operations command.

Following the meeting, a statement from the prime minister's office issued late yesterday said that Iraq has granted former paramilitary groups the right to respond and defend themselves against "military attacks" from drones or aircraft targeting their bases.

Commercial Bank launches 'CB Connect' first-in-region in-app direct call feature

Commercial Bank has announced the launch of "CB Connect", a mobile app direct call dial functionality, becoming the first bank in the region to offer customers the ability to connect with a call centre agent directly from the app.

CB Connect enables customers to speak to a live agent from the bank without the need for repetitive identity verification, as authentication is securely completed during the app login process.

By eliminating manual verification steps, the solution reduces call handling time, streamlines support interactions, and significantly enhances the overall customer experience.

"At Commercial Bank, we continuously focus on removing friction from our customers' banking journeys while maintaining the highest standards of security and trust," said Shah Nawaz Rashid, executive general manager and head of Retail Banking at Commercial Bank. "The introduction of CB Connect reflects our commitment to delivering practical innovation that enhances both customer convenience and service efficiency."

CB Connect will initially be introduced to the Sadara segment and will subsequently be extended to the wider customer base.



Recall orders issued for BMW, Kia vehicle models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Alfardan Automobiles, Qatar's BMW dealership, has announced the recall of BMW 520i - 735i - 740i - i5 eDrive 760i xDrive - M5 - i7 2022-25 models.

The recall is due to the possibility that the damaged vehicle cockpit wiring harness may lead to a short circuit and may cause overheating during vehicle operation and air conditioning malfunction.

The MoCI, in co-operation with Al-Attiya Motors and Trading, Qatar's Kia dealership, has also announced the recall of Kia EV6 - EV5 - K8 Hybrid - Carnival - Sorento Sorento Hybrid - Tasman 2025 models.

The recall is due to a possible software fault in the Cluster Module that may cause the instrument cluster

to unnecessarily enter an overheat protection mode, resulting in the instrument cluster screen temporarily going blank while driving.

When this occurs, the instrument cluster may not display important information such as the speedometer, Tyre Pressure Monitoring System warning, or other warning indicators.

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

Call Centre: 16001, e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa, ministry's accounts on social media: @mociqatar, ministry's Mobile App: MOCIQATAR (available on iOS and Android devices)



Wild meadows and desert areas cleaned during Eid holidays

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) carried out an extensive cleanup campaign across several beaches, desert areas, and camping sites during the Eid al-Fitr holidays, as part of the "Cleanliness and Rawdat Campaigns" project.

The project targets all wilderness areas and Rawdat (meadows) to preserve the local environment, protect the ecosystem, and maintain ecological balance.

The ministry said that the campaign, organised by the Departments of Wildlife Protection and Natural Reserves, resulted in the collection and removal of 26 tonnes of waste from 23 sites in the central and northern regions.

Civil Defence holds workshops on safety in emergency situations

As part of efforts to enhance security and safety, the General Directorate of Civil Defence is organising awareness workshops on safety guidelines in emergency and exceptional situations for members of various educational institutions and bodies in the country.

The workshops are held at the Officers' Club over four days, with the participation of about 1,200 school principals and their deputies, along with male and female security and safety officials from public and private educational institutions.

The workshops cover safety and

precautionary evacuation guidelines for emergencies and exceptional circumstances, serving as a complementary reference to traditional evacuation procedures.

They aim to unify response procedures for alerts from the national warning system and to organise evacu-

ation or sheltering operations to ensure the safety of students, educational and administrative staff.

The workshops also review the level of preventative preparedness, mechanisms for dealing with the national alert system, and the roles of safety officials.

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"The Day After the War: Gulf Energy, Maritime Chokepoints, and the Reshaping of Global Markets."



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Editor-in-Chief of Gulf Times



Aida Araissi
Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Bilateral Chamber of Commerce



Kristian Coates Ulrichsen
Fellow for the Middle East, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy



Jim Krane
Jim Krane, Ph.D., is the Diana Tamari Sabbagh Fellow in Middle East Energy Studies and co-director of the Middle East Energy Roundtable at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy Roundtable at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy



Rashid Al-Mohanadi
Rashid Al-Mohanadi is a nonresident fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs. He has experience in the defense industry and geopolitical risk advisory



Kenneth B. Medlock III
Kenneth B. Medlock III, Ph.D., is the James A. Baker, III, and Susan G. Baker Fellow in Energy and Resource Economics at the Baker Institute and the senior director of the Center for Energy Studies



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Ghana, EU sign accord to counter west Africa insecurity

Ghana and the European Union have signed their first formal defence partnership, as the country presents itself as a regional bulwark against the growing jihadist violence roiling west Africa.

The agreement, signed in Accra by EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas and Ghanaian Vice-President Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang, is aimed at strengthening co-operation in areas including counterterrorism, intelligence sharing and crisis response.

It comes as coastal west African nations seek to prevent a spillover of violence from the neighbouring Sahel, where armed groups linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group have intensified attacks in recent years.

"This partnership allows us to work more closely in areas that matter for the security of our citizens, both in Europe and Ghana," Kallas said, describing the deal as the first of its kind between the EU and an African country.

The agreement builds on a broader €50mn (\$54mn) EU support package delivered since 2023, which has included advanced communication systems and boats aimed at bolstering Ghana's border security.

The Ghanaian military will also receive surveillance drones, "anti-drone guns" and motorcycles, Kallas said.

Ghana's National Security Coordinator Osman Abdul-Razak said the partnership comes at a time of evolving threats at both national and regional levels.

The country shares a border with Burkina Faso, which, combined with other countries in the Sahel, accounted for nearly half of all terrorism-related deaths for the third consecutive year in 2025, according to a tally from the *Global Terrorism Report* released this month.

"The nature of security challenges continues to change, requiring stronger collaboration and improved capacity among security agencies," he said. — AFP

Islamabad 'ready' to host talks to end Mideast war: PM

AFP/Reuters
Islamabad/Jerusalem/Tel Aviv

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said yesterday that Islamabad is prepared to host negotiations to stop the US-Israeli war with Iran, after mounting speculation that it could act as a mediator.

"Pakistan welcomes and fully supports ongoing efforts to pursue dialogue to end the war in Middle East, in the interest of peace and stability in (the) region and beyond," he wrote on X. "Subject to concurrence by the US and Iran, Pakistan stands ready and honoured to be the host to facilitate meaningful and conclusive talks for a comprehensive settlement of the ongoing conflict."

Tehran's foreign ministry suggested on Monday that messages had been received from "some friendly countries indicating a US request for negotiations at ending the war", according to the official IRNA news agency.

Sharif then said he had spoken with Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian, promising his government's help in bringing peace to the region.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar also said that he had been in touch with his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi.

Foreign ministry spokesman Tahir Hussain Andrabi told AFP earlier yesterday that Pakistan is "always willing to host talks" and had "consistently advocated for dialogue and diplomacy to promote peace and stability in the region".

Pakistan's former ambassador to Oman, Imran Ali Chaudhry, told 92 News late on Monday that Pakistan's army chief recently held talks with US negotiators in the Gulf.

"Around two to two-and-a-half weeks ago, Field Marshal Asim Munir went to Oman on a trip that was not disclosed and he held a four-hour meeting with (Steve) Witkoff and (Jared) Kushner," he said.

Iran is a long-standing ally of Pakistan and Islamabad has condemned the killing of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

It also sent congratulations to his son and successor, Mojtaba.

The US and Israel launched strikes on Iran on February 28 after saying that they had failed to make enough headway in talks aimed at ending Iran's nuclear pro-

gramme, although mediator Oman said significant progress had been made.

Since then, Iran has attacked countries that host US bases, struck Gulf energy infrastructure and effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, conduit for a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, creating the worst energy supply shock in history.

A Pakistani government source said that discussions on a meeting were at an advanced stage and that if it did happen, "a big 'if'", it would take place within a week.

The war is already taking a toll on major economies around the world, according to business surveys yesterday which showed how a surge in energy prices and rising uncertainty were dampening activity and pushing inflation expectations higher.

Iran gave US 'gift' linked to Strait of Hormuz: Trump

AFP/Reuters
Washington

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that Iran has given him a "very big present" related to the Strait of Hormuz, boosting his confidence that he was talking to the right people in Tehran to end the war.

The cryptic announcement came a day after Trump unexpectedly postponed threatened attacks on Iran's power plants and said that Washington was in negotiations with unspecified figures in Iran.

Tehran has denied being part of any talks to end the war, which is now in its fourth week and has disrupted global oil supplies passing through the strategic Hormuz Strait.

"They did something yesterday that was amazing actually. They gave us a present and the present arrived today. And it was a very big present worth a tremendous amount of money," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. "That meant one thing to me - we're dealing with the right people."

Speaking at the swearing-in ceremony for new US Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin, he said that the "gift" was "very significant", adding that it was "oil and gas-related".

Asked if it was related to his demand that Iran reopen the Strait of Hormuz to oil traf-

fic, Trump replied: "Yeah, it was related to the flow and to the strait."

The US president added that the "present" was not related to Iran's nuclear programme, but repeated his claim that the Iranian side "agreed they will never have a nuclear weapon".

Trump has not yet revealed who the United States is negotiating with in Tehran, saying only on Monday as he postponed a threat to attack Iran's energy sites by five days that it is a "top person".

"We're actually talking to the right people, and they want to make a deal so badly," Trump said.

Former Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei was killed on the first day of the joint Israeli-US air campaign, and successor Mojtaba Khamenei has not been seen in public.

However, Trump said that the killing of Khamenei senior and a host of other top Iranian officials meant "we have really regime change. The leaders are all very different with the ones that we started off with".

US Vice-President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, global envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner were all involved in the Iranian talks, Trump said.

Trump meanwhile joked that Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth "didn't want it to be settled" because he wanted to keep striking Iranian targets.

"We see ourselves as part of this negotiation as well. We negotiate with bombs," Hegseth said when he was called to the podium by Trump.

The *Financial Times* (FT) meanwhile reported, citing a letter, that Iran has told the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) member states that "non-hostile vessels" may transit the Strait of Hormuz if they coordinate with Iranian authorities.

The US-Israeli war against Iran has all but halted shipments of about one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) through the Strait of Hormuz, causing oil supply disruption.

In the letter circulated among IMO members yesterday, Iran's foreign ministry said that Tehran had "taken necessary and proportionate measures to prevent the aggressors and their supporters from exploiting the Strait of Hormuz to advance hostile operations against Iran", the newspaper said.

Tehran said in the letter that vessels linked to the US and Israel, as well as "other participants in the aggression, do not qualify for innocent or non-hostile passage," the FT said.

Reuters could not immediately verify the report.

The London-based UN shipping agency is responsible for regulating the safety and security of international shipping and preventing pollution, and comprises 176 member states.

Lebanon orders Iran's envoy to leave

Lebanon's foreign ministry said yesterday that it had withdrawn its approval of the Iranian ambassador's accreditation, giving him until Sunday to leave the country.

The ministry said in a statement that it had summoned the Iranian charge d'affaires in Lebanon and informed him of "the Lebanese state's decision to withdraw approval of the accreditation of the appointed Iranian ambassador, Mohammad Reza Sheibani, and declare him persona non grata, demanding that he leave Lebanese territory no later than next Sunday".

The ministry said it had also summoned Lebanon's ambassador to Iran "in light of what the Lebanese state described as Tehran's violation of diplomatic norms and established practices between the two countries", after Beirut accused Iran's Revolutionary Guards of commanding Hezbollah's operations in its war against Israel.

Hezbollah has called the decision by Lebanon's foreign ministry a "sin", and demanded the authorities "immediately reverse" the move.

"Hezbollah calls on the president of the republic and the prime minister to demand that the foreign minister... immediately reverse this decision because of its dangerous repercussions," the Iran-backed group said in a statement, calling the move a "national and strategic sin".

A source from Hezbollah told AFP that "the foreign minister's decision violates the most basic diplomatic norms and is an insult to the Shia community in Lebanon".

The foreign ministry clarified in a separate statement that its decision does not constitute a severing of diplomatic relations with Iran, but rather "a measure against the ambassador for violating diplomatic protocol and his obligations as an appointed ambassador to Lebanon".

The ministry accused him of making statements "interfering in Lebanon's internal politics and evaluating the decisions taken by the government". — AFP



A woman holds a child in a school turned into a shelter for displaced families, in Dekwaneh, Lebanon. — Reuters

Israel's military to occupy swathe of south Lebanon, says minister

Israel will occupy southern Lebanon up to the Litani River to create a "defensive buffer", Defence Minister Israel Katz said yesterday, spelling out for the first time Israel's intent to seize territory amounting to nearly a tenth of Lebanon.

At a meeting with the military chief of staff, Katz said Israeli forces would "control the remaining bridges and the security zone up to the Litani", a river that meets the Mediterranean about 30km (20 miles) north of Israel's border.

Lebanese armed group Hezbollah said it would fight to prevent Israeli troops from occupying southern Lebanon, calling such a move an "existential threat" to the Lebanese state.

Senior Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah said any Israeli occupation south of the Litani would be met with resistance.

"We have no choice but to confront this aggression and cling to the land," he told Reuters.

Israel has destroyed five bridges over the river since March 13 and accelerated the demolition of homes in Lebanese villages near the border, part of what it says is a campaign against Hezbollah rather than civilians.

Under international law, attacks on civilian infrastructure, including homes and bridges, are generally prohibited.

Katz has previously warned Lebanon's government that it would lose territory if it failed to disarm Hezbollah, the group

backed by Tehran that drew Lebanon into the US-Israeli war on Iran when it fired into Israel on March 2.

The Israeli military declined to comment on Katz's remarks.

It has previously said ground troops were carrying out limited, targeted raids near the border.

Israel has repeatedly invaded Lebanon in recent decades, and occupied the south until 2000.

There was no immediate comment from the Lebanese government.

Residents who have fled the south decried the silence.

"If our government isn't standing with us, what is it we can do?" said Najib Hussein Halawi, who fled his hometown of Kfar Kila near the border weeks ago.

He says the village is in ruins.

Israel's strikes across southern Lebanon and parts of Beirut have caused widespread destruction and killed more than 1,000 people, according to Lebanese authorities, with over 1mn residents forced from their homes.

The UN human rights chief has criticised Israel's actions, particularly its use of evacuation orders.

Among those killed are almost 120 children, 80 women and 40 medical personnel, according to Lebanon's health ministry, which does not otherwise distinguish between civilians and militants.

Two Israeli soldiers have been killed in fighting in Lebanon.

Israel kept up strikes across

Lebanon yesterday, with the state-run National News Agency (NNA) reporting attacks in the country's south and east, as well as near Beirut, after a night of bombardment on the capital's southern suburbs.

In south Beirut, an AFP photographer saw vast destruction near the site of an Israeli strike overnight, with rubble piled up and debris covering the street.

The Israeli army said that overnight its forces "struck Hezbollah terrorist infrastructure in Beirut and in additional areas in Lebanon".

In Bshamoun, a mixed town in the Aley region southeast of Beirut, outside of Hezbollah's traditional strongholds, AFP correspondents saw destruction to an apartment building hit by an Israeli strike.

"There's nothing left. It's all burned or destroyed... No walls, the windows are gone, the facade is gone, all my hard work has been lost," said Abbas Qassem, 55, weeping at the damage to his unoccupied flat near the targeted apartment.

"What have I done to have my home destroyed? I'm just a normal person," said Qassem, who works for the state telecoms provider.

Lebanon's health ministry said three people were killed including a three-year-old girl, and reported five others killed in Israeli strikes in south Lebanon. — Reuters/AFP

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

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US expected to send thousands more soldiers to Middle East, sources say

Reuters
Washington

The Pentagon is expected to send thousands of soldiers from the US Army's elite 82nd Airborne Division to the Middle East, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters yesterday, adding to a massive US military buildup even as President Donald Trump talks about a possible deal with Tehran to end the war.

Reuters first reported on March 18 that Trump's administration was considering deploying thousands of additional US troops, a move that would expand options to include deployment of forces inside Iranian territory. Such an escalation could dramatically raise the stakes in the conflict, which is already in its fourth week and has roiled global markets.

The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, did not specify where in the Middle East the troops would go or when they would arrive in the region. The soldiers are stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

The US military referred questions to the White House, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

No decision had been made to send troops into Iran itself, one of the sources told Reuters, but they will build up capacity for potential future operations in the region.

One of the sources said the Pentagon was set to send between 3,000 and 4,000 soldiers. The soldiers' deployment follows Reuters' March 20 report about the US decision to send thousands of Marines and sailors aboard the USS Boxer, an amphibious assault ship, along with its Marine Expeditionary Unit and accompanying warships to the Middle East. Prior to the additional forces being sent to the region, there were 50,000 US troops there. News of reinforcements comes just a day after Trump postponed threats to bomb Iranian power plants, saying there had been "productive" talks with Iran.

But after Trump's Truth Social comment on Monday, Iran denied that any talks had been held. Sources had previously said the US military was looking at

options in the Iran war including securing the Strait of Hormuz, potentially by deploying US forces to Iran's shoreline.

The Trump administration has also discussed options to send ground forces to Iran's Kharg Island, the hub for 90% of Iran's oil exports, Reuters has reported.

The 82nd Airborne Division, which can deploy within 18 hours of receiving orders, specialises in carrying out parachute assaults.

Any use of US ground troops — even for a limited mission — could pose significant political risks for Trump, given low American public support for the Iran campaign and Trump's own pre-election promises to avoid entangling the US in new Middle East conflicts.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll published yesterday found that 35% of Americans approve of the US strikes on Iran, down from 37% in a survey conducted last week. Some 61% disapproved of the strikes, compared to 59% last week.

The US has carried out strikes against 9,000 targets inside Iran since US and Israeli military operations against Iran started on February 28.

Ousted Venezuela president to return to New York court

AFP
New York

Lawyers for the ousted Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro are expected to push for the dismissal of his drug trafficking charges when he appears in a New York court tomorrow.

The Manhattan hearing comes as Washington cautiously warms ties with Caracas, with the question of who will pay the legal fees of the former autocrat and his wife expected to take centre stage.

Venezuela's government is seeking to pay Maduro's legal fees but because of Washington's sanctions on the oil-rich south American nation, Maduro's lawyer Barry Pollack must obtain a US government license that has not been issued.

Pollack argued in a court submission that the license requirement violated Maduro's constitutional right to legal representation, and demanded the case be thrown out on procedural grounds.

Maduro, who autocratically

ruled Venezuela since March 2013, was ousted as president in a January 3 raid by the United States.

Detained in Brooklyn's Metropolitan Detention Center, a federal prison known for unsanitary conditions, Maduro is alone in a cell, with no access to the Internet or newspapers.

The man some of his fellow detainees call "president" in the hallways, according to a source close to the Venezuelan government. He is only allowed to communicate by phone with his family and lawyers, for a maximum of 15 minutes per call, the source added. "The lawyers told us he is strong. He said we must not be sad," said his only son, Nicolas Maduro Guerra, quoting his father as saying "we are fine, we are fighters."

Maduro, 63, has pleaded not guilty to the US drug trafficking charges and declared that he is a "prisoner of war" in a hearing on January 5.

He is accused of having allied himself with guerrilla movements, particularly Colombian groups Washington considers

"terrorist," as well as with criminal cartels to ship tonnes of cocaine to the United States.

Pollack previously said that the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, responsible for enforcing sanctions, initially granted licenses on January 9 allowing him to take payment for representing Maduro and his wife, co-accused Cilia Flores.

But Pollack said that three hours later, OFAC issued an amended license that blocked him from taking payment for the former president.

"By its failure to allow the government of Venezuela to pay Mr Maduro's defence costs, OFAC is interfering with Mr Maduro's ability to retain counsel and, therefore, his right under the Sixth Amendment to counsel of his choice," Pollack said in a letter to the court dated February 20.

He said his team had lodged a challenge with OFAC and that if it failed to act, he would formally complain to the court, saying that Maduro "cannot otherwise afford counsel."

SC judges lean towards Trump in asylum-processing case

Reuters
Washington

The US Supreme Court yesterday appeared likely to rule in favour of President Donald Trump's administration in its defence of the government's authority to turn away asylum seekers when officials deem US-Mexico border crossings too overburdened to handle additional claims.

The justices heard arguments in a legal dispute involving a policy called "metering" that the Republican president's administration may seek to revive after it was dropped by Trump's Democratic predecessor Joe Biden in 2021. The policy let US immigration officials stop asylum seekers at the border and indefinitely decline to process their claims.

The Trump administration has appealed a lower court's finding that the policy violated federal law. The metering policy is separate from the sweeping ban on asylum at the border that Trump announced after returning to the presidency last year. That policy also faces an ongoing legal challenge.

Under US law, a migrant who "arrives in the United States" may apply for asylum and must be inspected by a federal immigration official. The narrow legal issue in the current case is whether asylum seekers who are stopped on the Mexican side of the border have arrived in the US.

The Supreme Court has a 6-3 conservative majority. Most of the conservative justices and one of the liberal justices appeared sympathetic toward the administration's position.



Visitors walk across the plaza of the US Supreme Court building in Washington, DC, yesterday. (Reuters)

Conservative Justice Amy Coney Barrett pressed Kelsi Corkran, the lawyer who argued on behalf of the immigrant advocacy group Al Otro Lado that challenged the metering policy, on what it means to arrive in the US.

"How close do you have to be to the border?" Barrett asked. "Could you say that someone arrives in the US if they're at a portion of the border that does not have a port of entry? Like, what is it, if it's not crossing the physical border? What is the magic thing, or the dispositive thing, that we're looking for where we say, 'Ah, now that person, we can say, arrives in the US?'"

Corkran asserted that under the statute, people arrive in the US when they are at the "threshold of the port's entrance about to step over."

Under the metering policy, Corkran said, "that process of arriving is interrupted by the border officer physically blocking them

from completing the arrival." Some of the court's conservatives and liberal Justice Elena Kagan pushed back on Corkran's suggestion that, prior to the metering policy, arriving in the US had long been understood as analogous to knocking on a front door.

"There's been talk about knocking at the door," conservative Justice Samuel Alito said. "Does a person 'arrive in' the house when a person is not in the house and is knocking at the door asking to be admitted to the house?"

Conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch asked: "So anybody at the water's edge of the Rio Grande on the Mexican side has 'arrived in'... but somebody who's on the water's edge has not arrived?"

Vivek Suri, the Justice Department lawyer who argued on behalf of the Trump administration, said, "You can't 'arrive in the United States' while you're still standing in Mexico. That should be the end of this case."

Nasa to build \$20bn moon base, pause orbital lunar station plans

AFP
Washington

Nasa's chief yesterday said the US space agency will invest \$20bn to develop a base on the Moon, while suspending its plans to create the lunar orbital space station known as Gateway.

"The agency intends to pause Gateway in its current form and shift focus to infrastructure that enables sustained surface operations," Jared Isaacman said in a statement given during a day-long event at Nasa headquarters in Washington.

"Despite challenges with some existing hardware, the agency will repurpose applicable equipment and leverage international partner commitments to support these objectives," he said.

The European Space Agency among other international organisations were partners on the planned Gateway project.

It's the latest shake-up at Nasa in the wake of changes to the Artemis programme, which aims to send Americans back to the Moon and establish a long-term presence there, paving the way for eventual missions to Mars.

The Gateway orbital lunar station was meant to serve both as a point of transfer for astronauts headed to the Moon as well as a platform for research.

The suspension of the initiative isn't entirely surprising: some had criticised it as wasteful or a distraction from other lunar ambitions.

Isaacman said Nasa now plans to spend \$20bn

over the next seven years to construct the lunar base over dozens of missions, "working together with commercial and international partners towards a deliberate and achievable plan."

"There will be an evolutionary path to building humanity's first permanent surface outpost beyond Earth, and we will take the world along with us."

Isaacman, who took the helm of Nasa late last year, abruptly announced less than a month ago that it was reshuffling its Artemis programme that has suffered multiple delays in recent years, as it aims to ensure Americans can return to the Moon's surface by 2028.

That goal remains unchanged, but the US space agency is shifting its flight lineup to include a test mission before an eventual lunar landing to improve launch "muscle memory," Isaacman said.

That strategic revision came amid repeated delays to the Artemis 2 mission, which was originally due to take off as early as February, but is now targeting early April. It is meant to see the first flyby of the Moon in more than half a century.

During his first term, President Donald Trump announced he wanted Americans to once again set foot on the lunar surface.

China is forging ahead with plans for its first crewed mission to the Moon by 2030 at the latest.

The US effort depends in part on the progress of Nasa's private partners. SpaceX and Blue Origin, the respective space companies of duelling billionaires Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, are contracted to develop lunar landers used in the Artemis programme.

Trump votes by mail as he dubs mail-in voting 'cheating'

US President Donald Trump took advantage of mail-in voting this week in a special election in Florida, even as he criticised mail-in ballots as "cheating" in his push for national legislation to enact new regulations on voting.

Trump voted by mail ballot in the Palm Beach County election held yesterday for a state senator and a state representative, according to county public records.

At an event in Memphis, Tennessee on Monday, Trump dismissed the option with unfounded allegations that mail-in voting is more susceptible to fraud.

"Mail-in voting means mail-in cheating. I call it mail-in cheating, and we got to do something about it all. And it's part of Homeland Security," Trump said at a roundtable on crime.

Trump said on Sunday his fellow Republicans should not reach an agreement on funding the Department of Homeland Security until Democrats in Congress approve a bill — the SAVE America Act — that requires people registering to vote to provide proof of US citizenship.

Trump also pushed for Democratic approval of other

items he wants added to the bill, including banning transgender women from women's sports, outlawing "transgender mutilation of our children" and restricting mail-in ballots except in cases of illness, disability, military service or travel.

The White House said Trump is a resident of Palm Beach and participates in Florida elections but lives primarily at the White House.

"As President Trump has said, the SAVE America Act has commonsense exceptions for Americans to use mail-in ballots for illness, disability, military, or travel — but universal mail-in voting should not be allowed because it's highly susceptible to fraud," White House spokeswoman Olivia Wales said in an e-mail.

However, election fraud is rare in voting by mail. Routine methods and the decentralised nature of US elections make it very hard to interfere with mailed ballots, experts say.

It was not the first time Trump has voted by mail. He voted by absentee ballot in the 2018 midterm elections, a White House spokesman said at the time. Trump had requested an absentee ballot but decided to vote in person in 2020. (Reuters)

VEHICLE RECALL

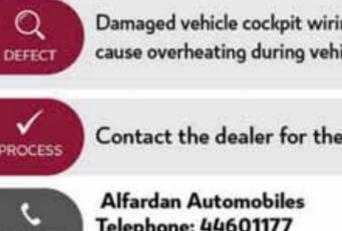
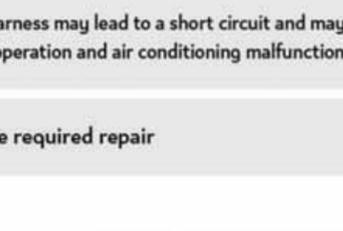
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Aid flotilla arrives in Cuba as US oil blockade bites

AFP
Havana

The first boat of a flotilla carrying medical supplies, food and solar panels reached Cuba yesterday to aid the island as a US fuel blockade deepens its energy crisis.

The Maguro shrimp fishing boat docked in Havana three days later than hoped after battling strong winds, currents and a pesky battery during its journey from Mexico.

As they approached Havana's colonial-era fortification, the international activists stood on the cabin roof of the boat – symbolically renamed “Granma 2.0” as a tribute to the yacht used by Fidel Castro's guerrilla fighters to launch their revolution in 1956.

They held a sign reading “Let Cuba live” while others waiting for them on the dock chanted “Cuba yes! Blockade no!”

“I wish everyone would unite, even Cubans abroad, and come and do the same because it is the people who are suffering,” said Amado Rodriguez, a 59-year-old driver walking near Havana Bay.

The first shipments arrived by plane from Europe, Latin America and the United States last week as part of an air and sea mission, dubbed Our America Convoy, to bring some 50 tonnes of aid to Cuba.

Two more ships were due to arrive Tuesday or Wednesday.

Activists say the mission, which had the support of the government, aims to bring relief to Cubans amid a de facto US oil blockade that President Donald Trump launched in January.

Critics have slammed the effort as benefiting the communist government more than ordinary people.



A boat with activists and members of a flotilla coming from Mexico and carrying aid arrives to Havana's bay, Cuba, yesterday. (Reuters)

Convoy organiser David Adler, a US citizen, told AFP the mission brought urgently needed aid directly to Cubans and showed the world “the human costs of Trump's siege on Cuba.”

“It demonstrated that international solidarity can triumph over forced isolation,” said Adler, co-ordinator of global left-wing group Progressive International.

Cuba has suffered seven nationwide blackouts since 2024 – two of them this past week – due to ageing thermoelectric plants and oil shortages.

The situation has deteriorated since Cuba's chief regional ally, Venezuelan socialist leader Nicolas Maduro, was captured by US forces in January and Trump threatened tariffs against countries that ship oil to the island.

The Sea Horse, a Hong Kong-flagged tanker that was previously reported to be taking Russian diesel to Cuba, ended up in Venezuelan waters, data from

maritime tracker Kpler showed yesterday.

The Maguro left from Mexico's Yucatan peninsula Friday carrying 32 people, including activists from Australia, Brazil, Ecuador, Italy, Mexico and the United States, and AFP journalists.

As the boat motored across the sea, Brazilian activist Thiago Avila said other nations should come to Cuba's aid.

“We cannot allow the world and international law to be buried under the greed of Donald Trump,” Avila told AFP.

“That's why we are here, that's why people decided to mobilise for this and decided to donate.”

Avila was among the organisers of a flotilla that had tried to bring aid to Gaza last year despite a naval blockade. That effort was intercepted by Israeli forces.

Fellow Brazilian activist Lisi Proenca said the group was applying the experience it gained from the Gaza flotilla.

“The interesting thing is that we're able to carry much larger items, like solar panels,” she told AFP.

In addition to daily outages, fuel prices have soared, public transport has become rare and trash is piling up as garbage trucks are no longer running.

Cuba has blamed Washington for the country's hardship, pointing to the fuel blockade and a decades-old trade embargo.

Cuban exiles and other critics, who say the communist government is to blame for the economic crisis, said the convoy is giving political support to Havana.

“All of this is nothing more than a political sideshow,” Luis Zuniga, a former Cuban political prisoner now based in Miami, told AFP.

“The electricity crisis in Cuba does not stem from the oil embargo imposed by (Trump). It dates back to long before that,” Zuniga said.

New Chile president withdraws support for Bachelet UN chief bid

AFP
Santiago

Chile's new hard-right President Jose Antonio Kast yesterday withdrew Santiago's support for former socialist president Michelle Bachelet as candidate for the post of UN secretary-general.

Kast's leftist predecessor Gabriel Boric had in February backed two-term president Bachelet's attempt to become the first woman to head the United Nations, in a move also supported by leftist-led Brazil and Mexico.

A foreign ministry statement yesterday however said Santiago “has decided to withdraw Chile's backing for ex-president Michelle Bachelet as candidate for the post of secretary-general of the United Nations.”

“The fragmentation of candidacies among Latin American states and the differences with some of the key players shaping this process render this candidacy and its

eventual success unviable,” the ministry said, while adding it would not back another contender if Bachelet were to seek to stay in the race.

Even without having Chile's backing, Bachelet, 74, can still proceed with her candidacy, as she retains Brazil's and Mexico's backing.

Each potential candidate must be formally nominated by a state or group of states, but not necessarily by their country of origin.

Bachelet, a paediatrician by profession, is the only woman to have served as president of Chile (2006-2010 and 2014-2018), under the Socialist Party's banner.

She has been hoping to succeed Portugal's Antonio Guterres, 76, who will conclude his second term at the UN helm on December 31.

To date, no woman has held the post of UN secretary-general.

An unwritten rule has it that the top UN post rotates among the world's main regions, and now it's the turn of Latin America.

Brazil court places Bolsonaro under house arrest on health grounds

Former president Jair Bolsonaro will serve prison time under house arrest after he is released from a hospital where he is being treated for pneumonia, Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes decided yesterday.

Bolsonaro, 71, has been serving a 27-year prison sentence since November for plotting a coup after losing the 2022 election to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. In the decision, Moraes said Bolsonaro would be reassessed after 90 days to determine whether house arrest should be extended. Lawyers for the right-wing leader, who governed from 2019 to 2022, had long sought Moraes' permission for him to serve his sentence under “humanitarian house arrest,” but the justice had previously denied those requests.

The reversal comes after Bolsonaro was admitted earlier this month to the intensive care unit of a Brasilia hospital with an acute form of pneumonia. He has been discharged from the ICU, a Tuesday medical note showed. Bolsonaro has a history of hospitalisations and surgeries related to an abdominal stabbing during a 2018 campaign event. In December, he underwent medical procedures to treat a hernia and persistent hiccups. He was hospitalised in January for a series of exams after falling and hitting his head. (Reuters)

Argentina marks 50 years since coup



Aerial view of demonstrators holding portraits of disappeared people during a march to Mayo Square on the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) in Buenos Aires yesterday. In Argentina, March 24th is a day of mourning, marches and political disputes. Fifty years on from the coup d'etat, thousands of people are taking to the streets again to commemorate the victims of a dictatorship that the government of far-right leader Javier Milei is seeking to rewrite. (AFP)

Eight people held in Brazil for ‘brutal’ attack on capybara

Rio de Janeiro police said Monday they had arrested eight people for brutally beating a capybara – the world's largest rodent whose chill demeanour has inspired countless memes online in recent years. Resembling a giant, gentle guinea pig, the shaggy, light brown capybara (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*) is often seen roaming in the Brazilian city, particularly near streams and lagoons. In an incident filmed by security cameras before dawn on Saturday, a group of attackers beat the capybara with sticks and iron bars in the working-class neighbourhood of Ilha do Governador. “This is a brutal crime that shocks society,” said Felipe

Santoro, the police commissioner in charge of the investigation, was quoted as saying by the O Globo daily newspaper. “It is an act of extreme cruelty toward a creature that posed absolutely no threat...yet was deliberately attacked nonetheless,” he added. The attackers – including two minors – were identified through CCTV footage and arrested on Saturday, police said in a statement. The capybara, a 65-kilogram (143-pound) male, was taken to the Wildlife Care Center (CRAS) at the private Estacio University in southwestern Rio. (AFP)

Trump has destroyed Venezuela's socialist ideology: opposition leader

AFP
Houston

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado told AFP yesterday that her country's formerly all-powerful socialist ideology has been fatally “wounded” by US President Donald Trump.

The regime known as “Chavismo” that held Venezuela in its grip for quarter of a century under Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicolas Maduro is “wounded irreparably and is being dismantled,” Machado said.

The oil-rich Latin American country was thrown into turmoil this January when US military forces toppled leftist Maduro, who has now been replaced with his former deputy Delcy Rodriguez.

While Rodriguez served under



Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado speaks during an interview at the 2026 CERAWEEK in Houston, yesterday. (AFP)

Maduro, she has proved eager to bend to Trump's demands, including reopening the country to US oil companies. Last week, she ordered a wide-ranging reshuffle of senior military leaders.

“Following President Trump's instructions, they are dismantling

their own repressive and corrupt structures – a crucial step toward the transition,” Machado said during an interview with AFP in Houston, Texas, where she was attending the CERAWEEK global energy forum.

Machado, the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize winner, said that when presidential elections are held again in Venezuela, she will participate “in that electoral process.” However, she did not specify whether she would run.

Machado said she believed that “Venezuelans will freely decide who they want” as leader in the next elections.

Machado was banned from running for president in the 2024 election. After Maduro claimed a re-election victory, a wave of repression forced her to remain in hiding for more than a year.

Oil refinery explosion reported in Texas

Local officials warned residents near a Texas oil refinery on Monday to immediately shelter-in-place “in light of the recent explosion” at Valero's Port Arthur Refinery. “To ensure the safety of all residents in the vicinity and in light of the recent explosion at the Valero refinery, an immediate shelter in place is ordered,” Port Arthur emergency management officials wrote in an alert, noting the order applied to a large swath of land surrounding the refinery. “Currently there is a fire in a unit at Valero's Port Arthur, Texas

refinery. All personnel have been accounted for,” Valero said in a statement, adding worker safety is a “top priority.” Local media reports showed tall flames and a plume of black smoke rising from the refinery, and nearby residents reported a loud boom that rattled windows. Located about 90 miles east of Houston, the Port Arthur refinery employs nearly 800 employees to “process heavy sour crude oil and other feedstocks into gasoline, diesel and jet fuel,” moving about 435,000 barrels per day, according to Valero's website. (AFP)

ANNOUNCEMENT

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QID No. 28505032230

hereby change my name

from

BASHER MD ZAKIR HOSSAIN

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within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

Colombia military plane crash death toll rises to 68

AFP
Bogotá

The death toll in one of Colombia's worst air accidents in recent history rose to at least 68, an updated tally released yesterday showed, as the government faulted a “junk” aircraft donated by the United States.

The C-130 Hercules plane, acquired for Colombia's military in 2020, crashed to the ground Monday one kilometre from the runway it had taken off from in the Amazonian town of Puerto Leguizamo, near the border with Peru.

The aircraft was carrying 128 people as well as ammunition, according to the latest information, although the numbers are still being finalised.

The accident, which is still under investigation, left dozens injured, including residents who rushed in trying to rescue survivors and were subsequently wounded by exploding munitions in the wreckage.

Authorities also reported that one soldier is missing.

Left-wing President Gustavo Petro is blaming his predecessor Ivan Duque for having accepted a “junk” plane manufactured in the United States in 1983.

“Why did you buy such an old plane? Who advised you to do something so foolish?” Petro wrote on X, adding he had requested the replacement of the Hercules aircraft a year ago.

Duque called Petro “vile and unintelligent” and urged



An excavator works at the crash site of the Air Force Hercules aircraft that crashed during takeoff in Puerto Leguizamo, Colombia, near the southern border with Ecuador, yesterday. (AFP)

him to conduct “an investigation that includes the weight” the plane was carrying at takeoff and the condition of the small airport's runway. Duque maintains that it was in fact a donation – not a purchase – from

Washington.

The Defence Ministry ruled out an attack by guerrilla groups operating in the territory, which is rife with coca crops.

Jhon Molina, governor of the Putumayo department

where the crash occurred, told Blu Radio that the airport “has several problems” and “needs more investment.”

The crash site can only be reached by plane or a five-hour boat journey from the departmental capital Puerto Asis.

The help provided by local residents during the rescue was key to preventing the death toll from being even higher, Molina said.

Images of people forming human chains to throw water and residents taking the injured away on motorcycles went viral on social media.

The bodies of the victims will be transferred to Bogotá for forensic investigations, the National Institute of Legal Medicine said.

China protests after man breaks into Tokyo embassy

AFP
Beijing

China expressed deep shock and said it had lodged a protest yesterday after a man described as a member of Japan's Self-Defense Forces broke into its Tokyo embassy and threatened to kill diplomats.

The incident further soured relations between Beijing and Tokyo that have suffered since comments by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi about the self-ruled island of Taiwan.

Japan's national broadcaster NHK said the man had entered the heavily guarded embassy grounds on Tuesday morning and that a knife was later found at the scene.

NHK, citing unidentified investigation sources, said no one was hurt but added that the man was "believed to be a member of the Ground Self-Defense Force".

However, China's foreign ministry said the unidentified man had threatened to kill Chinese diplomats. A ministry spokesman told a scheduled news conference



An entrance to the Chinese embassy is seen in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

in Beijing that the intruder had scaled the embassy walls before he was apprehended.

"The individual admitted that his actions were unlawful and threatened to kill Chinese diplomatic personnel 'in the name of God,'" spokesman Lin Jian said.

"The Chinese side is deeply shocked by this incident and has lodged solemn representations and a strong protest with the Japanese side," he said.

Police in Tokyo could not be reached immediately for comment. Japan's Defense Ministry said it

was aware of the incident but declined to comment further, citing an ongoing investigation.

Lin demanded that Tokyo investigate the incident thoroughly.

Ties between Japan and China have deteriorated since Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi suggested in November that Japan might intervene militarily in any Chinese attempt to take Taiwan.

China, which regards the democratic island as part of its territory and has not ruled out force to annex it, was furious over the comments.

China's Xi urges progress in his 'city of the future' project

Reuters
Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping made a rare visit to the ambitious Xiongan project still under construction near Beijing, calling on officials to "throw themselves" into completing a task on which he has staked his name and legacy.

Located about 100km (60 miles) southwest of the capital in the province of Hebei, the Xiongan New Area ranks among three special zones "of national significance", along with the tech and financial hubs of coastal Shenzhen and Shanghai Pudong.

"The Xiongan New Area should take reform and innovation as the driving force to promote the deep integration of technological innovation and industrial innovation," Xi said during Monday's visit, according to official news agency Xinhua.

Xi is looking to relocate state-

owned enterprises, universities, sci-tech firms and financial institutions to Xiongan, roughly comparable in size to Greater London, to alleviate overcrowding and congestion in Beijing.

Sinochem and China Satellite Network Group are among at least eight state-owned enterprises moving their headquarters to Xiongan, state media said, with some up and running, but others still being built.

Nearly a decade since ground was broken in 2017, central Xiongan remains sparsely populated, though the city is targeted for basic completion in 2035.

Officials should "be bold in taking responsibility, throw themselves into the work of implementation, and strive to deliver satisfactory results to the Party and the people," Xi urged during his inspection tour, Xinhua said.

China's top leadership tends to keep a distance from specific projects, but Xi has tied his own

name to Xiongan as he cemented his position as paramount leader of the ruling Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic.

Official documents and state media hail the decision to build the city as one of lasting importance for the coming millennium, emphasising Xi's personal role in planning, making decisions and driving forward the project.

Xi first visited the site in 2017, the year he got a second term as general secretary of the Communist Party, followed by a 2019 visit after a historic constitutional amendment the previous year paved the way for a third leadership term.

Monday's tour of the newly built headquarters of state-owned power generator China Huaneng Group and a high school was Xi's fourth since an inspection in May 2023.

Officials should "promote the early implementation of innovative policies in fields including sci-tech and finance" in Xiongan, Xi said, as China pursues breakthroughs in key technologies.

South Korea's Lee calls for energy saving campaign

Reuters
Seoul

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung yesterday called for a nationwide energy-saving campaign over risks to oil and gas supplies from the Iran war, saying public institutions would cut back on their use of passenger cars.

Energy Minister Kim Sung-whan told a Cabinet meeting private-sector vehicle curbs were voluntary for now, but could be reviewed if the energy alert level increased.

The government is calling on people to adopt 12 energy-saving practices like shorter showers, charging phones and electric vehicles during the day and using washing machines and vacuums over the weekend.

The government will ask the top 50 oil-consuming businesses to cut use, and encourage staggered commuting hours and other conservation steps, he said.

Kim also said Seoul would restart five nuclear reactors by May, ease restrictions on coal plants and expand renewable energy to reduce longer-term dependence on LNG, and could extend the lives of three coal power plants scheduled to close this year. The energy mix adjustment is expected to save up to 14,000 tonnes, or up to 20% of South Korea's average daily LNG consumption of 69,000 tonnes for power, Kim said.

HD Hyundai has introduced energy-saving measures across affiliates such as HD Hyundai Heavy and HD Hyundai Oilbank, including voluntary vehicle restrictions, reduced plastic use and taking steps to cut power use such as turning off lights, a company official said.

South Korea also plans to draft a supplementary budget of 25tn won (\$16.6bn) as soon as possible which could include cash vouchers for consumers and financial support for companies, amid growing stimulus

Government urges shorter showers, daytime charging; \$16.6bn stimulus planned, including consumer vouchers; oil reserves may last under two months in real terms

talks by other economies.

"Right now, what matters most is not saving government finances, but deploying funds swiftly and effectively where they are needed most," Lee told the Cabinet meeting, as the finance ministry said it would submit the budget to parliament by end-March.

The ongoing US-Israeli strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliation have brought severe disruption to global energy markets, bringing tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz to a near standstill. South Korea imports around 70% of crude oil through the Strait of Hormuz, according to lawmakers and the industry ministry. The country faces a looming energy crisis despite holding about 190 million barrels of oil reserves - 100mn barrels by the government and 90mn by private companies.

While standards from the International Energy Agency (IEA) suggest reserves could last 208 days, officials note this figure excludes uses such as petrochemical exports, making the actual buffer significantly shorter.

Based on a daily consumption rate of 2.9mn barrels as of 2024 according to Korea National Oil Corporation data, analysts said the reserves might not last two months.

The government has secured pledges from the UAE for 24mn barrels of oil, but the timing of shipments remains unclear.

Taiwan to skip WTO conference after 'Province of China' labelling

AFP
Taipei

Taiwan said yesterday it will skip a high-level World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting for the first time following a dispute with host nation Cameroon over the name used for the democratic island in visa documents.

The Taiwanese foreign ministry said it had lodged a "stern protest" after Cameroon designated the island "Taiwan, Province of China" in paperwork issued to the island's delegation before it departed for the March 26-29 event. Cameroon then granted members of the group a "visa exemption", but the document did not mention their nationality, misspelled some English names and identified almost all of them as female, the ministry said.

The ministry also said in a statement it was clear that the central African country "had no sincere intention of resolving the issue". China claims Taiwan is part of its sovereign ter-

ritory and has tried to erase the self-governed island from the international stage by blocking or hindering its access to global forums. It also opposes the designations "Taiwan" or "Republic of China", its official name.

"The one-China principle is the political prerequisite for the Taiwan region of China to participate in the WTO," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a regular news briefing in Beijing yesterday. Taipei called its WTO snub a matter of "national dignity".

"Considering that our delegation members might encounter obstruction if they attempted to enter Cameroon with a document full of incorrect information, and in order to uphold our national dignity, we had no choice but to be absent," the Taiwanese foreign ministry said.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterates that our country joined the WTO as a 'separate customs territory' not subordinate to any other member, and that our equal right to participate must not be infringed."

North Korea's Kim vows 'irreversible' nuclear status

AFP
Seoul

North Korea will never give up nuclear weapons, leader Kim Jong-un said, indicating that it will soon designate South Korea the "most hostile state", according to a state media report yesterday.

Kim also told the country's rubber-stamp legislature in a policy address on Monday that the US was committing "state terrorism", in an apparent reference to its military attacks on Iran.

"We will continue to firmly consolidate our status as a nuclear-armed state as an irreversible course, while aggressively stepping up our struggle against hostile forces," Kim told the Supreme People's Assembly.

"We will, in line with the mission entrusted by the Constitution of the Republic... further expand and advance our self-defensive nuclear deterrent," Kim said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

While the US and Israel have said that their attacks on Iran are to stop the Islamic republic from developing nuclear weapons - an aim Tehran denies - Pyongyang is thought to be light years ahead by comparison.

Despite years of sanctions and diplomatic isolation, the Chinese ally is estimated to have dozens of nuclear warheads and the fissile material for many more.

It has also unveiled increasingly sophisticated delivery systems, including new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles that can launch with little warning.

Kim, a day after his reappointment as head of the authoritarian nation's highest policymaking body, the State Affairs Commission, also did not mince words about his southern neighbour.

"We will designate South Korea



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (centre) delivers a policy speech at the First Session of the 15th Supreme People's Assembly at the Assembly Hall in Pyongyang. (AFP)

as the most hostile state and deal with it by thoroughly rejecting and disregarding it," Kim said.

The announcement came despite repeated overtures by President Lee Jae Myung, a doveish leader who took office in June, for dialogue without preconditions. Pyongyang has ignored these gestures.

Pyongyang will "make it pay mercilessly - without the slightest consideration or hesitation - for any act that infringes upon our Republic," Kim added.

Hong Min, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, said that Kim's comments on consolidating its nuclear status showed Pyongyang sees US actions in Iran and Venezuela with "deep concern and seriousness".

"It indicates that Kim and the leadership... interpret these developments as reinforcing their decision to pursue the further advancement of North Korea's nuclear capabilities," Hong told AFP. Andrei Lankov, a professor at

Kookmin University in Seoul, said that: "Iran's experience once again confirmed what the North Koreans have always known, (that) in the modern world, the only security guarantee is, well, nuclear weapons."

Donald Trump met Kim in his first term and there has been speculation of a re-run when the US president makes his delayed visit to China next month.

Kim, who was greeted with cheering crowds and received a standing ovation in the assembly, said Monday that the US is "carrying out acts of state terrorism and aggression across the world."

Washington and its allies "are constantly bringing nuclear strategic assets into the areas surrounding our country, shaking the foundations of regional security," Kim said.

This refers to systems capable of carrying nuclear weapons, even if the US does not actually deploy them with nuclear payloads, explained Lim Eul-chul,

an expert on North Korea at Kyungnam University.

Pyongyang also thinks it is possible that nuclear-powered submarines that South Korea wants to make could be armed with nuclear weapons - "a potential that is not entirely unfounded," Lim told AFP.

On the economy, Kim outlined a goal of increasing industrial output by 1.5 times.

Progress made "shattered... false claims of hostile forces that there can be no prosperity without nuclear abandonment", he said.

Kim said 15.8% of the total spending for 2026 will be on defence, compared to 15.7% in 2025.

He also proposed creating a formal "police system," signalling a shift from the traditional reliance on broader public security forces.

He said this would strengthen legal frameworks and elevate public order, calling it "essential" for national security and social stability, and "advantageous" to "realise cooperation with police organisations in other countries."

Vietnam to cut domestic flights

AFP
Hanoi

Vietnam's national air carrier will suspend nearly two dozen domestic flights a week starting next month because of limited fuel supplies caused by the Mideast war, the nation's aviation authority said.

The price of jet fuel has soared since the start of the conflict more than three weeks ago, which has sent oil prices surging and sparked fears of fuel shortages.

"Vietnam Airlines plans to temporarily suspend operations on several routes from April 1," totalling 23 flights a week, the country's civil aviation authority said in a statement late Monday.

"The limited supply of aviation fuel (Jet A-1) due to the conflict in the Middle East has put domestic airlines at risk of fuel shortages," prompting the flight cuts, the authority said. Major domestic routes and international flights are being maintained, it said.

Airlines in Vietnam were working on adding fuel surcharges on international routes that may be

applied in April, it added. Vietnam has recently asked for fuel support from several countries, including Qatar, Kuwait, Algeria and Japan, and on Monday signed a deal with Russia on oil and gas production in both countries.

The price of 95-octane petrol and diesel in the manufacturing hub has soared by 50% and 70%, respectively, since the war began in late February.

Vietnam's finance ministry proposed on Tuesday halving the environmental protection tax on gasoline and diesel, to 1,000 dong (four cents) per litre and 500 dong per litre, respectively, and reducing the same tax on aviation fuel from 1,500 dong to 1,000 dong.

Elsewhere in the region, Myanmar's national carrier announced on Sunday that it would also cancel some domestic flights "due to unavoidable circumstances", without providing details.

United Airlines said last week that it was scaling back its flight capacities because of the rising cost of jet fuel, which the US airline anticipated would keep surging as the war in the Gulf continues.

Thai court orders firm to pay villagers for mining damages

AFP
Bangkok

A Thai court ordered a mining firm yesterday to compensate nearly 400 villagers for health and environmental damages linked to its decades-long operations, awarding up to just over \$6,000 per person.

The case stems from long-running complaints against Akara Resources' gold mine in Thailand's central province of Phichit, where residents have alleged contamination of water sources and adverse health effects.

Owned by Australian gold and silver producer Kingsgate Consolidated and operated by its Thai subsidiary Akara, the Chatrie mine began operations in 2001 but faced legal challenges and was closed in 2016, before reopening three years ago.

A Bangkok civil court ruled yesterday that the company must pay affected villagers up to 200,000 baht (\$6,100) for the impacts caused by its operations.

"The defendant's operations

have affected both the plaintiffs and the environment, which is a key source of their livelihood," one of the judges said in court.

"The defendant's actions therefore constitute a violation of the plaintiff's rights."

The court said 382 people had undergone health assessments as part of the class-action lawsuit, and ordered Akara to make payments within one month or face possible asset seizures.

It also ordered the company to stop using one of its mining tailings ponds due to risks posed to the local community.

Around 40 villagers attended the verdict announcement, wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the message: "The gold around your neck is made of our tears."

Manushya Foundation, an organisation advocating for the affected villagers, called the ruling a "win". "We are very happy for the villagers, but the fight is not over," its founder, Emilie Palamy Pradichit, told reporters outside the court, adding the group would continue pushing for the closure of a second tailings pond.



Gas shortages push India's poor back to wood and coal

AFP
New Delhi

Soaring black-market prices of cooking gas in India's capital are pushing poorer families back to wood and coal, raising health risks and worsening air quality in the highly polluted megacity.

India is the world's second-largest buyer of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), which is used for cooking and predominantly sourced from the Middle East — and supplies have been strained by the ongoing war.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged states to curb black marketing and avoid panic, stressing that India's energy supplies remain stable.

In the low-income Madanpur Khadar neighbourhood, 36-year-old domestic helper Sheela Kumari says she has been forced to abandon LPG cooking gas cylinders for cooking after prices more than doubled. "We used to buy cylinders for 1,800-2,000 rupees (\$19-\$21), but now on the black market it has gone up to 5,000 (\$53)," she told AFP, nearly as much as she entire monthly salary of 6,000 rupees.

"It is unimaginable for us," she said. "The next best option for us was going back to wood and coal."

Kumari said a 14 kilogramme cylinder lasts only 15-20 days for her family of six, even when they stretch its use out.

But she says a 10 kilogramme bundle of firewood, lasting several days, costs 30 rupees (\$0.30).



A delivery man transports liquid petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders in Amritsar yesterday. (AFP)

"There are health repercussions, and my children cough," she said. "But tell me a way out?"

Her neighbour, 45-year-old Munni Bai, who has asthma, had switched to using an electric cooker as well as biogas from cow dung, to help her breathing.

But now she said she was being forced to resume use of alternative fuels. "Gas is too expensive," she said. "We cannot depend on it — we moved from coal and wood, due to my health issue, but now it is difficult to sustain."

But activists say the problem is more about access.

Many migrant workers lack documentation needed for subsidised LPG and rely on informal markets, where hoarding has pushed up prices.

"There is no major shortage yet, but hoarding has increased," said Deepak, who uses only one name, from the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR). "Many migrants depend on black-market cylinders, and prices have gone up two to three times."

New Delhi, and its wider sprawling metropolitan region of 30mn residents, is regularly ranked among the world's most

polluted capitals, due to a deadly mix of emissions from power plants, heavy traffic, as well as the burning of rubbish and crops.

For the past decades, India's government has pushed its "Ujjwala" or "light" clean-energy scheme, to provide over 100mn LPG connections to poor households.

Burning wood, coal and biomass indoors exposes families to high levels of smoke and toxic particles, increasing the risk of respiratory illnesses.

Women and children, who spend more time near cooking areas, are especially vulnerable.

Modi, Trump discuss importance of keeping Strait of Hormuz open

Reuters
New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump spoke by phone yesterday and discussed the situation in the Middle East, including the importance of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open, US envoy to India Sergio Gor and Modi said in separate posts on X.

This was the first call between the two leaders since the US and Israel launched coordinated attacks against Iran on February 28.

"India supports de-escalation and restoration of peace at the earliest. Ensuring that the Strait of Hormuz remains open, secure and accessible is

essential for the whole world," Modi said in his post.

The conflict has disrupted sectors from air travel to shipping and gas supplies, including by the near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which serves as a conduit for 40% of India's crude oil imports.

Modi told parliament on Monday that the crisis had triggered unprecedented challenges for India and added that the fundamentals of the Indian economy were strong and the country had adequate availability of petroleum, fertilisers and coal to weather trade and energy disruptions.

A White House official confirmed the call between President Trump and PM Modi but did not comment on what was discussed.

India warns of misuse risk from low-cost weight-loss jobs

AFP
New Delhi

India's health ministry warned yesterday of the risks of unregulated use of weight-loss drugs, as low-cost generic versions hit the market, stepping up inspections and enforcement across the pharmaceutical supply chain.

The warning comes after patents on semaglutide — the active ingredient in drugs such as Ozempic and Wegovy — expired on March 20 in India, the world's largest supplier of generic medicines.

Generic versions of the GLP-1 drugs — referring to the hormone that regulates blood glucose levels and appetite — will slash costs and transform the global fight against obesity.

But the Ministry of Health stressed that the drugs can only be used with a doctor's prescription.

"With the recent introduction of multiple generic variants of GLP-1... concerns have emerged regarding their on-demand availability through retail pharmacies, online platforms, wholesalers, and wellness clinics," the Ministry of Health said in a statement.

"These drugs, when used without proper medical supervision, may lead to serious adverse effects and related health risks."

It said the Drugs Controller of India had "intensified its regulatory surveillance", including barring manufacturers from any "indirect promotion that could mislead consumers or encourage off-label use".

Simon Barquera, president of the World Obesity Federation, told AFP that the "medication alone will not reverse the global rise in obesity."

"Obesity is a complex, chronic disease," he said, noting the importance of prevention efforts and healthier habits.

India's weight-loss drug sales have grown tenfold in five years to \$153mn as of 2026, and are projected to soar to over half a bn by 2030.

While the country still accounts for a third of the world's undernutrition according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), rising incomes and urban lifestyles have pushed obesity rates sharply upward.

Government data released March last year shows 24% of women and 23% of men are overweight or obese in India.

Still, high prices — often 15,000 to 22,000 rupees (\$161-\$236) a month — have limited greater adoption. Since the expiry of the patent, several Indian drug makers have rolled out generic semaglutide products, with monthly injections costing anywhere between 1,300 rupees to 4,200 rupees (\$15-\$45).

Britain, EU on course for deal on SAFE defence fund

Reuters
Paris

EU Council President Antonio Costa said yesterday he was confident Britain and the European Union would reach a deal on UK participation in the bloc's multi-billion-euro SAFE defence fund, despite talks over the issue breaking down in November.

A British plan to join the original 150 billion euro (\$174 billion) SAFE fund fell through after the government of Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer refused to pay a financial contribution to join.

However, Costa pointed to warmer ties between Britain and the EU, with Starmer consistently pushing for a post-Brexit "reset" with the bloc as grounds for hope of a deal.

He also highlighted how Britain and France were jointly leading Ukraine's "Coalition of the Willing" as a reason why he believed a deal would be reached.

"The new Labour government has started the reset, and the reset is going well," Costa said in a speech at Paris' Sciences Po university.

"It could take some weeks, months, but for sure, we will achieve an agreement with the UK on the SAFE issue," he said.

Last month, Starmer said his government would consider applying to join a second possible EU SAFE fund. Under the initiative, the EU jointly borrowed money on financial markets to lend to countries in the bloc for defence.

Asked about Costa's remarks, a British government source said the UK would only sign agreements that were in its national interest, and noted that British firms remained a vital part of defence supply chains across Europe.

The source said the UK's defence industry continued to have access to SAFE under standard third-country terms, which allow British companies to participate in SAFE-funded arrangements for up to 35% of a project's value.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer shakes hands with European Council President Antonio Costa at Downing Street, London. (Reuters/File Photo)

Britain seeks 'value for money' to renew France migrant deal

AFP
London

Britain's Labour government said yesterday it wants a "long-term value for money" as it seeks to renew a migration deal with France that is set to expire next week.

In March 2023, London agreed to pay Paris £476mn (around \$570mn) over three years to crack down on migrants crossing the English Channel in small boats.

The then-Conservative government said the money would fund a new detention centre in France and hundreds of extra law enforcement officers on French shores.

Discussions to renew the deal "continue", Prime Minister Keir Starmer's official spokesman said yesterday, refusing to put a timeline on when they might conclude.

"We're building flexibility and innovation into any new deal with the French to ensure there's long-term value for money and a real impact on small boat crossings," he told reporters.

The spokesman said that the neighbours were "united in wanting to stop" the crossings, which have risen in recent years.

Almost 42,000 migrants landed on England's southern coast in 2025 — the second-highest annual number since records were started in 2018.

Starmer, in power since July 2024, and his interior minister Shabana Mahmood are under pressure to reduce numbers, as the anti-immigrant Reform UK party leads national opinion polls.

The government recently reduced protections for refugees and is withdrawing certain support from asylum seekers, angering charities and some Labour MPs who worry the party is shedding left-wing voters.

Late last year, Britain and France launched a separate "one-in, one-out" returns deal. As of early last month, 305 people had been returned to France and 367 people have arrived in the UK under the pilot scheme, according to UK officials.

Ireland to cut fuel duty in 250mn euro package

Ireland will cut excise duty on fuels until the end of May as part of a 250 million euro (\$290 million) package to cushion the economic impact of the Middle East conflict.

The surging price of crude oil has led to prices at some Irish service stations rising above 2 euros per litre of unleaded fuel, a level last reached in 2022 at the start of the Ukraine conflict. A cut to excise duty of 15 euro cents per litre on petrol and 20 cents on diesel will take effect from midnight yesterday, the government said.

Prime Minister Micheal Martin (pictured) told a news conference yesterday that the measures are "targeted and temporary" and will be reviewed

subject to market developments. The government will also pause the National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) levy for two months, which will reduce the price of motoring fuel and home heating oil by an additional two cents per litre, but this will require the passing of additional legislation. The agency is responsible for the maintenance of Ireland's strategic supplies of oil and is funded through the levy. Heating payments to social welfare recipients will be extended

for four weeks and there will be enhancements to a rebate programme for hauliers. Finance Minister Simon Harris on Sunday said the government would limit the initial package to leave room for further help if the energy shock persists.

The European Commission suggested cuts to national taxes on fuel as one way member states could curb surging energy prices. Italy has also temporarily cut excise duties, while Spain on Friday proposed wider measures worth 5 billion euros, including reductions in fuel prices and electricity bills. (Reuters)



UN looks to boost food security for Rohingya in Bangladesh

Reuters
Dhaka

The UN food agency is revamping its programme for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh from April to ensure a minimum threshold of food security for each household, a spokesperson said yesterday.

Funding pressure on humanitarian groups is growing in the ninth year of a crisis over more than 1 million Rohingya, most of whom fled violent military crackdowns in Myanmar in 2017 and live in over-

crowded camps with slim access to jobs or education.

The World Food Programme said its new needs-based, tiered approach aimed to ensure the minimum food needs of all refugees were met while directing greater support to those facing the greatest challenges.

Rather than reducing overall aid, the new system will allocate monthly food assistance according to household food insecurity levels assigned through a 2025 survey, a WFP spokesperson in Bangladesh said.

"Differentiated ration size is in line with global best practice for (a)

About 33% of households are considered to be highly vulnerable, with 50% seen as moderately vulnerable, while 17% are vulnerable

protracted crisis and will ensure an equitable distribution of food assistance to those who need it most," added Kun Li, the spokesperson.

The sole provider of monthly

food assistance to Rohingya refugees, the WFP supports nearly 1.2mn people in Bangladesh, including about 150,000 new arrivals since 2024, it said.

About 33% of households are considered to be highly vulnerable, with 50% seen as moderately vulnerable, while 17% are vulnerable, said Mohammed Mizanur Rahman, Bangladesh's top official overseeing the refugee camps.

"Our rations keep shrinking because of the global funding crunch," said Mohammed Jashim, 37, a Rohingya refugee and the father of three children aged

between four and 11. "I urge the international community not to forget us. We have no way to return home right now. Please don't abandon us."

The WFP's new scheme categorises households as "extremely insecure", "highly insecure" and "food insecure" in terms of food supply.

Monthly sums of \$12, \$10 and \$7 respectively will go to homes in the three categories in the southern coastal town of Cox's Bazar, it said.

Those on Bhasan Char, an island in the Bay of Bengal home to 31,000 Rohingya, will receive bigger cor-

responding payments of \$13, \$11 and \$8 to reflect higher commodity prices and logistics costs there, it added.

To boost the diversity of their diets, households judged the most vulnerable, such as those headed by children, the elderly or women, and those of disabled persons, qualify for \$3 more in monthly fresh food vouchers for each person.

Continued international support remains essential to sustain life-saving food assistance and other basic services for Rohingya refugees and vulnerable host communities in Bangladesh, the WFP added.

Two suspected of spying for Russia arrested: Germany

AFP
Berlin

A man and woman accused of spying for Moscow on a drone supplier in Germany have been arrested, officials said yesterday, the latest case of alleged Russian espionage amid the Ukraine war.

Berlin, one of Kyiv's key military backers, has faced a flood of suspected espionage, sabotage and disinformation plots directed by Russia since the full-scale invasion began in 2022.

In the latest case, the man, a Ukrainian national partially identified as Sergey N, was arrested in Alicante, Spain on February 17 by local police under a European arrest warrant, German federal prosecutors said.

tional identified as Alla S, was arrested on Monday in Germany, they said.

"Starting in December 2025, Sergey N, acting on behalf of a Russian intelligence service, surveilled a person in Germany who was shipping drones and related components from here to Ukraine," prosecutors said in a statement.

The suspect gathered information and made video recordings of the individual's workplace, it said.

When he moved to Spain, Alla S took over the assignment, going to the target's address and filming it with her phone.

"The surveillance activities were presumably intended to prepare further intelligence operations against the target," prosecutors said.

Der Spiegel news outlet re-

ported that investigators believe these operations could have included physical attacks or an assassination attempt.

The businessman's company had in the past supplied small attack drones to Ukraine and in recent times had specialised in individual components, it said.

Alla S will appear in court today. Sergey N will appear in court after his transfer from Spain.

German authorities have increasingly warned that Russia is trying to recruit "disposable agents", in particular via social media, to carry out espionage and sabotage.

Such agents have no formal training and carry out acts, ranging from arson to property damage and drone overflights of sensitive sites, in exchange for small sums, officials say.

German police launch raids in probe into 2025 Berlin blackout

AFP
Berlin

Police staged raids across Germany yesterday as part of a probe into an arson attack last year that knocked out high-voltage power lines and caused a partial blackout in Berlin.

An unnamed "group of anarchists" claimed responsibility for the outage in a post on the far-left Indymedia online platform, saying they intended to "turn off the energy for the military industrial complex" at a nearby technology park.

The fire took down two high-voltage cables and knocked out electricity to nearly 50,000 customers in Berlin's southeastern Treptow-Koepenick district, according to local grid operator Stromnetz Berlin.

A separate arson attack in southwestern Berlin in early

January destroyed a key electricity transmission line and caused a major blackout that lasted for days at a time of freezing temperatures.

A left-wing militant group, Vulkangruppe (Volcano Group), claimed responsibility for that outage, which affected Berlin's Steglitz-Zehlendorf district.

Berlin's mayor, Kai Wegner, said that Tuesday's raids showed that "the investigative pressure on the far-left perpetrators" of both attacks "has been significantly stepped up".

German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said that authorities "have been monitoring the far-left extremist scene very closely" since both the Berlin blackouts and "are taking consistent action against far-left extremist activities at all levels".

Yesterday morning's raids focused on the September 2025 blackout and four named sus-

pects — aged 28, 31, 35 and 36 — in a joint statement from Berlin's police and prosecutors.

A total of 18 locations were searched in Berlin, Hamburg, Duesseldorf and the eastern town of Kyritz, the statement said.

Mobile phones and laptops were among the items seized by police.

Although both Berlin blackouts have been blamed on far-left activists, German authorities have in the past also pointed to Russia as being behind surveillance and sabotage activities targeting its infrastructure.

German authorities launched a "terrorism" investigation into the January attack.

They have yet to identify any members of the Vulkangruppe, which has also claimed responsibility for a number of other arson attacks in recent years, or determine conclusively that the group actually exists.

Denmark votes in close election, outgoing PM favourite to win

AFP
Copenhagen

Danes voted yesterday in a general election, where Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen is seen as the favourite after standing up to US President Donald Trump over Greenland.

Frederiksen, a Social Democrat who has been in office since 2019, has been praised for her leadership after fending off Trump's repeated demands to annex Greenland, a Danish autonomous territory he claims the US needs for national security reasons.

"We stand firm when the winds blow. And it has been blowing around our kingdom," she wrote on Instagram, as she spent part of the day in Aalborg, her electoral stronghold in the country's northwest, with Greenlanders living in Denmark.

The latest polls give the left-wing bloc, for which Frederiksen is the self-proclaimed candidate, a nine-seat lead over the right-wing bloc, but neither side is projected to win a majority of the 179 seats in Denmark's parliament, the Folketing.

"People may not really like her, but they see her as the right leader," Elisabet Svane, political analyst at Danish newspaper Politiken, told AFP.

Frederiksen, who had "a prime minister you can count on" as one of her campaign slogans, "is a unifying figure in a world full of insecurity, and Danes are quite anxious — there's Greenland, Ukraine, (and mystery) drones" that flew over the Scandinavian country last year, Svane said.

The four overseas seats held by Denmark's two autonomous territories — two for Greenland and two for the Faroe Islands — could tip the balance if the election result is very close.

More than 3,000km away, in Greenland's capital Nuuk, voters were lining up to cast their ballots as soon as polling stations opened.

The campaign has generated more interest than usual in the vast Arctic territory, with more than 20 candidates in the running for the two seats.

"I think it's the most important election for the Danish parliament in Greenland in history," Greenlandic Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen told AFP in Nuuk.

"We are in a time where we have a superpower trying to acquire us, take us, control us," he added, stressing that the territory still found itself in a "serious situation".

"I think the most important thing that all the parties in Greenland have agreed on is that we need to work together, whoever



The leader of the Social Democrats, Mette Frederiksen, meets voters and signs an election poster at Nytorv in Aalborg, yesterday. (AFP)



People line up to vote in polling stations, in Nuuk, Greenland, yesterday, during the parliamentary election in Denmark. (AFP)

gets elected for the parliament," he said.

But Greenlandic voter Lars did not share the view that Greenland's parties stood more united, saying he kept seeing divisions play out on social media.

"Everybody is fighting. Greenlanders are fighting. It's terrible," the lawyer told AFP.

Greenland's main political parties all want independence from Denmark, but differ on the pace of the separation.

The centrist Moderate party, led by Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, a two-time former prime minister, could end up kingmaker.

In Denmark, the row over the vast Arctic island has however not been central in the campaign.

In the wealthy nation of 6mn people, the campaign has instead focused on domestic issues, including inflation, the welfare state and high nitrate levels in water from agriculture.

"I think that the centre government has not ensured clean water in Denmark. They have not ensured that we have invested in welfare instead of taxation reliefs," Pia Olsen Dyhr, leader of the socialist Green Left, told AFP after

casting her voting.

In a country where the far right has heavily influenced policy since the late 1990s, immigration has also been a hot topic, with the Social Democrats advocating even tighter regulations.

Frederiksen has also defended as "fair" a proposal to deny non-essential health care to people of foreign origin who threaten medical personnel.

Three populist parties are also in the running and opinion polls see them garnering around 19% of the vote.

The most established of those is the far-right Danish People's Party, which slumped in the 2022 election but has seen an upswing in opinion polls.

"I want a new beginning for Denmark, and that requires a strong Danish People's Party," party leader Morten Messerschmidt told AFP after voting in Copenhagen.

Elections in Denmark enjoy high participation rates and in 2022, 84.1% of eligible voters cast their ballot.

Polling stations in Denmark close at 8:00pm (1900 GMT), with exit polls expected to be published just after.

Sweden to deport migrants not showing 'honest living'

AFP
Stockholm

Sweden's government yesterday said it would put forward a bill introducing a requirement for migrants to adhere to an "honest living" or face deportation.

The country's right-wing government, which came into power in 2022 on vows to get tough on immigration, is trying to rapidly push through a slew of reforms in various areas ahead of legislative elections in September.

The new requirement would make it easier to withdraw residence permits for migrants.

"Following laws and rules is a given, but it must also be a given that we do our best to live responsibly and not harm our country," Migration Minister Johan Forssell told a press conference.

"If, for example, you ignore paying your debts, if you don't comply with decisions from Swedish authorities, if you cheat the benefits system, if you cheat your way to a Swedish residence permit... then you do not have the right to be here," Forssell said.

Other examples the government cited included working without paying taxes or not paying fines. "Statements — that is, things a person says or expresses — should not in themselves be regarded as evidence of lack of honest living, but they may be an indication of, for example, links to violent extremism, which can then be a sign of deficient char-

acter," Ludvig Aspling, migration policy spokesman for the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats which is propping up the government, told reporters.

According to rights group Civil Rights Defenders, which had also previously criticised the measure, said the new bill risked undermining the principle of equal treatment before the law as it was too vague in its definition.

"The fact that non-criminalised statement may also be taken into account, even if they cannot constitute an independent ground for a lack of honest living, raises particularly serious concerns," John Stauffer, the group's legal director said in a statement. "Such an arrangement may have a chilling effect on freedom of expression and lead to increased self-censorship," Stauffer added. He added that this would also create situation where a citizen would be free to express an opinion without any consequence that a migrant would not.

"In practice, this creates different rules depending on who you are, which runs counter to fundamental principles of equality before the law," Stauffer said.

The government was also proposing that residence permits could be revoked in more unrelated situations, such as in cases of migrants being considered a threat or if they were discovered to have lied on their applications. If passed by parliament, the changes would go into effect on July 13.

Lithuania says crashed drone was Ukrainian

AFP
Vilnius

Lithuania said yesterday that a drone that crashed on its territory, near the border with Belarus, was a Ukrainian one that had gone off-course during a strike mission against Russia.

The drone had caused alarm when it came down Monday with an explosion in a lake near Lithuania's southern city of Varėna, though it caused no casualties nor damage.

Lithuanian officials immediately launched a probe into the incident, fearing the drone had come from Belarus — an ally of Russia's in the war on Ukraine.

But Prime Minister Inga Ruginiene yesterday told journalists it turned out that "the drone that crossed our airspace and entered the Varena district was a Ukrainian drone".

She said "it was related to an operation that Ukrainians were carrying out that night targeting Russia, and we can already say that it was a stray drone".

European countries close to Russia and Ukraine have upped vigilance against drone incursions, fearing spillover from the war.

Two drones previously entered Lithuanian airspace in July 2025 — one of them armed — after apparently straying during Russian attacks on Ukraine.

Czech 'arks' help preserve Ukraine's cultural heritage

AFP
Prague

The National Museum in Prague yesterday unveiled a van containing a 3D scanning device that will soon travel to war-ravaged Ukraine to help preserve its cultural artifacts.

The Archa (Ark) III is a Volkswagen van comprising a studio equipped with a robot and three cameras to create precise models of endangered historic items in Ukraine, which has been battling a full-scale Russian invasion since 2022. "Archa III is a unique mobile digitisation device enabling

us to create high-quality 3D images of endangered artifacts and collection items out in the field," National Museum director Michal Lukes told reporters.

He added the scanners could handle both tiny objects and more sizeable items even inside museums.

"In this way, we can create precise digital copies of items that can then serve for documentation and research purposes, but also for restoration, potential reconstruction, or the production of copies," he added.

Museum staff will drive the van to Kyiv in early April and hand it over to Ukrainian partners under

the project carried out in cooperation with the foundation of Czech billionaire Karel Komarek.

It follows an Archa I container equipped to conserve and restore books and an Archa II van digitising two-dimensional items, which Prague sent to Ukraine earlier.

The foundation, which worked on the first two "Arks" with other institutions, said they have so far handled almost 40,000 pages of documents, such as historic newspapers retrieved from the Regional Scientific Library in Kherson.

"The van comprises an autonomous robotic system designed for photogrammetry and 3D output," said the museum's IT di-

rector Martin Soucek.

Speed is crucial, and the robot moving along three axes can generate thousands of high-quality photographs within minutes.

"It then uses the photographs to create a hyper-realistic model with high detail, a so-called digital twin," Soucek added.

The project also involves expert training and a website on which the scanned artifacts will be exhibited.

Vitalii Usatyi, the charge d'affaires at the Ukrainian embassy in Prague, hailed the van for being able to work across Ukraine, "including regions exposed to risks related to the Russian aggression".



A 3D scanner in The Archa III (Ark Project) truck yesterday in Prague, Czech Republic. (AFP)

"This is crucial for preserving cultural heritage," he added.

A recent Unesco report said that 523 cultural sites had been verified as damaged as of March 11, includ-

ing 153 religious sites, 273 buildings of historical or artistic interest, 39 museums, 33 monuments, 20 libraries, four archaeological sites and one archive.

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Deputy Managing Editor

Kamran Rehmat

- 📍 P.O.Box 2888, Doha, Qatar
- ✉ editor@gulf-times.com
- ☎ 44350478 (News),
- ☎ 44466404 (Sport),
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GULF TIMES

War and hunger: Iran conflict is disrupting global food supply chain

Nearing one month, the US-Israeli war with Iran has cut off important sources of energy and fertilisers that are key inputs in the production of grains, vegetables and meat.

The conflict is sending shockwaves through the global food industry – from growers to packaging firms and distributors – with major implications for food security and living standards.

Farmers whose crop yields were already squeezed by bouts of extreme weather now face having to pay more for those crucial inputs and are likely to pass on the cost to consumers through higher prices.

The Gulf region has become a significant producer of nitrogen fertilisers in recent decades, and the Strait of Hormuz was handling about a third of the global trade before the war broke out.

The conflict has severely disrupted exports from the region, sending prices soaring and farmers scrambling to secure enough of the products while they can.

The war is also disrupting production of nitrogen fertilisers in other parts of the world as the conflict has affected supplies of their key ingredient: natural gas.

This has led fertiliser manufacturers in countries such as India and Bangladesh to reduce output. There are signs that soaring gas prices are also putting European production under strain.

Nitrogen fertilisers underpin roughly half of global food production by supplying plants with nutrients that support their growth.

The conflict is sending shockwaves through the global food industry, with major implications for food security and living standards

The sudden loss of supply of both chemicals and fuel compounds the problem. India, for example, is heavily reliant on urea and LNG imported via the Strait. Australia, meanwhile, has plenty of LNG but gets more than a third of its fertiliser from the Middle East as well as much of the diesel needed to deliver and apply it.

Disruption of the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea shipping routes has raised freight costs and lengthened transit times for grains, oilseeds and fertilisers. Even short journeys face an impact as higher fuel prices make land transportation costlier.

Before the war broke out, food inflation around the world was generally expected to ease this year. Food commodity costs are still well below their peak of March 2022 following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but the impact of the war is starting to feed through official price gauges.

In Türkiye, consumers were reportedly paying about a third more for their vegetables, before the conflict started.

The full impact is likely to take some time to materialise.

Food prices tend to respond to prolonged energy shocks, not short spikes, and the effect on grocery prices is typically indirect and delayed, according to David Ortega, a professor of food economics at Michigan State University.

Modern agriculture is an energy-intensive industry, relying on large amounts of fuel to power machinery used for sowing, harvesting and tending to livestock in sprawling pastures.

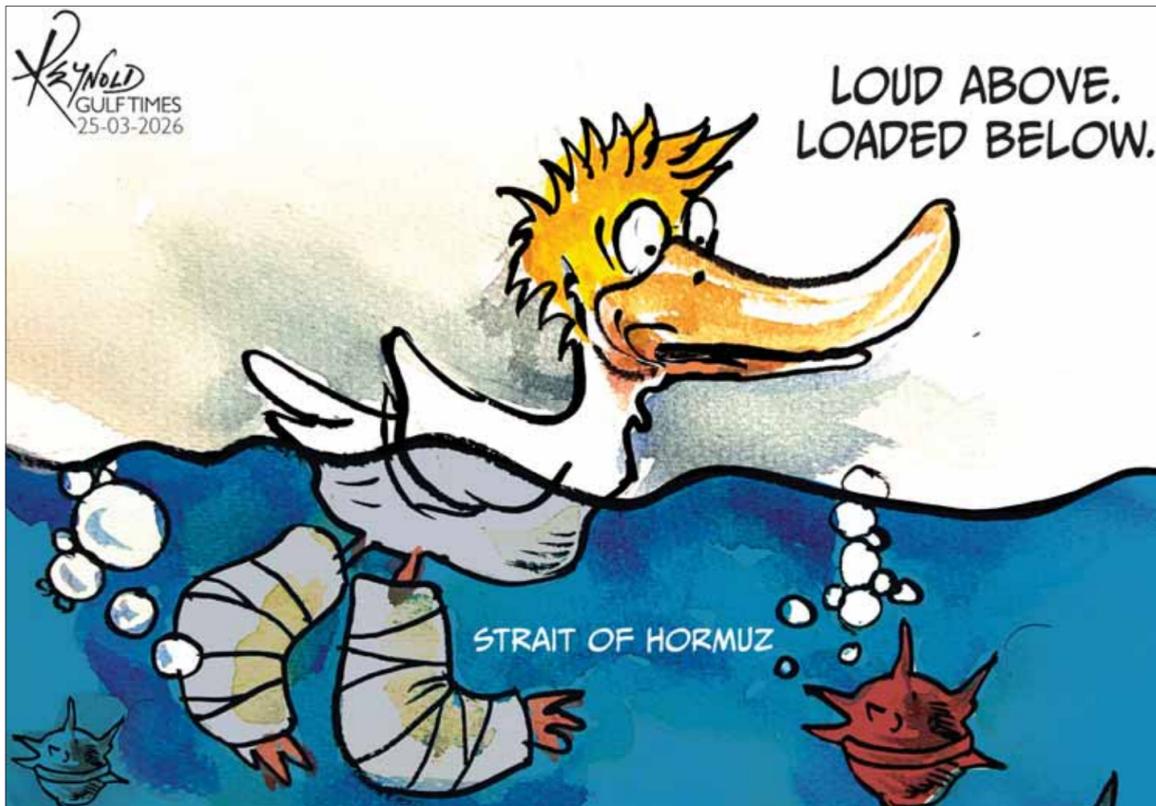
Without this supply, farming calendars honed over generations could easily be disrupted.

If farmers can't get enough diesel, sowing could be delayed or reduced. Mature crops left in the ground would deteriorate, while the cost of processing and transporting produce after harvest would also increase.

Import-dependent countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are particularly exposed to fertiliser shortages and rising input costs, the Food and Agriculture Organisation said on March 15. While farmers in rich nations can count on support from their governments, concerns are mounting over some of the poorest economies.

Higher food prices will complicate efforts by central banks to get a post-pandemic wave of inflation back under control. The situation also presents a challenge for politicians, especially in emerging-market economies where food eats up a greater proportion of household incomes than it does in more industrialised nations.

As many as 45mn more people could face acute hunger if the conflict in Iran doesn't ease by the middle of the year, taking the total number to a record high, the UN World Food Programme has warned.



The power of sport in a fractured world

- Sport endures where politics divides, fostering shared global connection
- The Middle East is building a lasting, world-class sporting ecosystem
- Investing in sport now shapes diplomacy, identity, and future growth



By Nicole Junkermann

At moments of geopolitical tension, sport can feel peripheral. When headlines are dominated by conflict and economic uncertainty, stadiums and competitions can seem far removed from the serious business of international affairs.

But sport has always operated on a different timeline from politics. Major tournaments, leagues and sporting infrastructure are planned years in advance. Decisions taken today will shape the sporting landscape long after the current moment of instability has passed.

That long horizon is precisely what makes sport valuable in turbulent times. Sport is one of the few global systems that continues to function even when politics fractures. It creates spaces where countries can still meet, compete and collaborate even when political relationships are strained. The playing field has often provided one of the rare arenas where rivalry can coexist

with shared rules and mutual respect.

Across the Middle East, that long-term perspective is becoming increasingly visible.

The region is steadily positioning itself as a centre for global sport, not only by hosting major events but by building the infrastructure and ecosystems that sustain them. Qatar's experience over the past decade illustrates how deliberate that approach can be. Investments in stadiums, training facilities and youth development ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2022 created not only a tournament but a lasting sporting platform that continues to attract international competitions and regional events.

The calendar for 2026 alone illustrates the scale of that ambition. In May, Doha will host the Gulf Co-operation Council Games, bringing together athletes from across the region. In January, Saudi Arabia staged the AFC Under-23 Asian Cup, which showcased the next generation of football talent from across the continent. Later in the year Riyadh will welcome competitors for the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, while Dubai's long-established Dubai World Cup will once again draw global attention to the emirate.

These events are not isolated moments. They form part of a broader strategic arc. Stadiums, training facilities, youth academies and broadcast partnerships are all part of an ecosystem designed to support sport not just as entertainment, but as an industry and a cultural platform.

In that sense, sport sits at the intersection of diplomacy, identity and economic development.

Investors working at the intersection of technology, infrastructure and sport are increasingly coming to see sport as one of the most underdeveloped sectors of the global economy. The real opportunity is not simply in events or media rights. It lies in the systems that support them: leagues, talent pathways, facilities, technology and new forms of fan engagement.

One of the most significant shifts in global sport over the past decade has been the rise of women's competitions. Audiences are expanding rapidly, commercial partners are paying closer attention and new leagues are emerging across multiple disciplines.

For investors and sporting institutions alike, this creates a rare opportunity to build a more balanced ecosystem from the outset. The infrastructure built today will determine how professional sport evolves over the coming decades.

The Middle East is well placed to play an important role in that evolution. Countries across the region have demonstrated their ability to host world-class sporting events and build the facilities required to sustain them. In places like Qatar, where sport has been integrated into broader national development strategies, the emphasis has increasingly shifted from hosting individual tournaments to building a durable

sporting ecosystem that supports athletes, fans and communities over the long term.

This is where the long cycles of sport matter most.

Even as the world moves through a period of political uncertainty, the sporting calendar continues to advance. Athletes are training, leagues are expanding and new generations of fans are emerging. The events planned for the coming years will shape how sport is experienced by millions.

In that sense, investing in sport during difficult times is not a distraction from global challenges. It is a way of preparing for what comes next.

When the current turbulence eventually passes, the arenas, competitions and institutions being built today will still be there. And in those spaces, nations that may disagree politically will still meet on the same field, governed by the same rules.

In a divided world, that may be one of sport's most enduring contributions.

(Nicole Junkermann is an international investor focused on technology, sports and media. She leads NJF Holdings, a global investment group, and its sports platform Gameday by NJF Holdings, which invests in sports leagues, media rights and technology-driven fan engagement. Her work in the sector focuses on building long-term sports infrastructure and expanding the commercial and global reach of professional leagues.)



The region is steadily positioning itself as a centre for global sport, not only by hosting major events but by building the infrastructure and ecosystems that sustain them.

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Moderate to heavy rains; weather to persist

From Page 1

Though it rained heavily, it was not a deterrent for the commuters and motorists as traffic was smooth all across the country and employees could resume their jobs well on time.

Officials also had sent out alerts and messages through social media channels to warn the residents about the weather and to keep themselves aware of the prevailing conditions. In addition, on the roads, precautionary messages were displayed on traffic sign boards such as 'Raining, Slow Down' urging the motorists to drive carefully and safely.

At the same time, Qatar Meteorology Department has forecast more rains in the coming days until Friday. The weather report warns that thundery rain associated with strong winds and poor horizontal view is expected today, tomorrow and on Friday. Similar conditional are also expected to prevail on off-shore too.

The forecast also said that



Signboards display safety messages. PICTURE: Thajudheen

it could be partially cloudy to cloudy with scattered rain become thundery at places on these days. Winds are mainly southeasterly-northeasterly moderate to fresh in speed gusting strong during thundery rain. However, there is no rain forecast for Saturday with a moder-

ate temperature during day time and a relatively cold night temperature.

Meanwhile, the weather department has emphasised the importance of obtaining weather information from official sources to ensure accuracy and public safety. It also

said that these conditions are part of the country's normal seasonal patterns and not an unusual or exceptional event. It also noted that the authorities are closely monitoring the situation and urge the public to avoid spreading rumours or exaggeration.

US prepares to send elite troops amid new strikes

From Page 1

Israel conducted a "large wave" of airstrikes across Iran, including the central city of Isfahan, while Iranian missile fire wounded four people in Tel Aviv, leaving one three-storey building in ruins. Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia all reported intercepting renewed Iranian drone and missile attacks. Against this backdrop, diplomatic efforts intensified. President Donald Trump said on Monday that his administration had held "productive" talks with an unidentified senior Iranian figure — a claim swiftly denied by Tehran. Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf insisted that "no negotiations" were under way, accusing Trump of seeking to manipulate oil markets. Iran's foreign ministry, however, acknowledged that messages had been relayed by "friendly countries" conveying a US request for negotiations. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif moved swiftly to position Islamabad as a peacemaker. After speaking with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Sharif announced

that Pakistan stood "ready and honoured to host meaningful and conclusive talks for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict," subject to agreement by both Washington and Tehran. Sharif's tweet was later reposted by Trump. A Pakistani government source said discussions on a meeting were at an advanced stage and if it did happen, "a big 'if'", it would take place within a week. Pakistan has long-standing ties to neighbouring Iran and has built a steady relationship with Trump. The US outlet Axios reported that American negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner could meet an Iranian delegation in Pakistan as early as this week, with Vice-President JD Vance potentially joining. Oil prices, which had dipped on Trump's initial diplomatic signals, rebounded with Brent crude back above \$100 a barrel. Analysts remain deeply cautious. "Trust has been completely destroyed and the positions of the warring parties are further apart than ever," said David Khalfa of the Jean-Jaurès Foundation in Paris. "The margin for manoeuvre on both sides is very limited." — AFP, Reuters

Afghanistan announces release of detained US citizen

AFP
Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban government announced the release of a US national yesterday who had been detained for more than a year, after a letter from his family requesting his freedom.

The foreign ministry said the family of linguist and researcher Dennis Coyle had written to the supreme leader of Afghanistan, asking that he be released and pardoned for Eid.

"The Supreme Court of the Islamic Emirate deemed his period of detention sufficient and decided on his release," a statement read.

The announcement came after a meeting of Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, US former special envoy to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, the UAE ambassador to Kabul Saif Mohammed al-Ketbi, and a member of Coyle's family.

The UAE facilitated the release, the ministry said, adding that the decision was made on humani-

tarian grounds and as a gesture of "goodwill".

Coyle, 64, appeared relieved at a short news conference at Kabul airport alongside Khalilzad before leaving on an Emirati private jet, an AFP team said.

Khalilzad told reporters that the release was a "very positive development and a good decision... by the authorities".

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also welcomed Coyle's release, and urged the Taliban authorities to release all other detainees.

"Dennis joins over 100 Americans who have been freed in the past 15 months," he said, adding that the United States was "still seeking the immediate return of Mahmood Habibi, Paul Overby, and all other unjustly detained Americans".

The family of the last Afghan held at the US high-security prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba meanwhile renewed their call for his release.

Ibrahim Rahim, 29, said he had sent a letter via Khalilzad to US

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also welcomed Coyle's release, and urged the Taliban to release all other detainees

President Donald Trump asking for his father, Muhammad Rahim, to be freed on medical grounds.

Muhammad Rahim arrived at Guantanamo in March 2008 and was accused by the CIA of being a close associate of the al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

"We have written in the letter that we released your detainee here, so you should release our detainee there as well," his son said.

The family last called for his release in November 2023.

Coyle, from Colorado, was arrested in January 2025, according to the Foley Foundation, which advocates for the release of Americans taken hostage or arbitrarily detained abroad. The foreign ministry said he was held "due to vio-

lations of Afghanistan's applicable laws", without elaborating.

But a website set up by his family, freedenniscoyle.com, said he had been "legally working to support Afghan communities as an academic researcher" when he was detained.

They said he had been held in "near-solitary conditions, requiring permission even to use the bathroom, and without access to adequate medical care".

Coyle first travelled to Afghanistan in the early 2000s "to survey Afghanistan's rich linguistic diversity and help Afghan communities develop resources in their own languages", they added.

"Throughout his years of service, Dennis maintained a home in Kabul and built deep, meaningful relationships with the Afghan people," the website read.

"His love for the Afghan people isn't just professional; it's personal and deeply felt."

Earlier this month, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the United States had formally placed Af-



US citizen Dennis Coyle (left) upon his release by the Taliban, addresses the media with US former special envoy to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad at the airport in Kabul yesterday. (AFP)

ghanistan on its list of countries engaged in "wrongful detentions".

The Afghan authorities called that "regrettable" and pointed to talks between the two sides and previous releases with mediators from Qatar. In 2025, five American citizens were released in what the Taliban authorities said was a "goodwill gesture".

Two Afghan former prison-

ers held in Guantanamo Bay until 2017 were welcomed home in February last year, more than 20 years after they were first arrested.

Mahmood Habibi, a telecoms consultant, was abducted in Kabul in August 2022, shortly after a US strike that killed al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. The Taliban authorities deny any part in his disappearance.

Russia's vast daytime drone attack kills three in Ukraine

Russia launches nearly 1,000 drones in 24 hours; Unesco world heritage site hit in Lviv; 5 killed in previous overnight strikes

Reuters
Lviv/Kyiv

A rare Russian daytime drone attack on Ukraine killed three people, wounded several dozen and set a building in the historic centre of the western city of Lviv aflame yesterday, officials said, following an overnight bombardment that killed five.

More than 550 drones were launched at Ukraine in the middle of the day, Ukraine's air force said, an abrupt change from Russia's usual tactic of launching similarly massive aerial attacks at night during its more than four-year-old war.

It followed an earlier attack overnight in which it fired hundreds of drones and dozens of missiles. Taken altogether, Russia had launched nearly 1,000 long-range drones at Ukraine since Monday evening, Kyiv said.

There was no immediate comment from Russia.

Video footage posted online showed a drone crashing into an old building next to a church in the historic centre of Lviv, some 60km (37 miles) from the Polish border, and Warsaw said it scrambled fighter jets.

Twenty-two people in the city

were wounded, officials said.

The attack stunned residents of Lviv, which lies closer to Vienna than to the nearest active front-line on the other side of Ukraine. Although it has seen some lethal bombardments during the war, they are far less frequent than in other major cities.

Tetiana Kachkovska, a local resident, saw the drone glide past the fifth floor window of her workplace.

"My hands were shaking, my legs were shaking," she recalled. "You can't get used to this."

Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadoviy said a residential building was hit by a second drone, while debris from a third drone fell in a street.

"Russia is attacking a crowded city centre in broad daylight," Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko wrote on X.

Lviv regional governor Maksym Kozzytskyi said part of the Bernardine monastery complex in the historic centre of Lviv, a Unesco World Heritage Site, had been damaged.

In another western Ukrainian city, Ivano-Frankivsk, a national guard soldier and his 15-year-old daughter were killed by a strike, according to regional Governor Svitlana Onyshchuk.

She said he had attended the birth of his baby daughter at a nearby maternity hospital several days ago.

City mayor Ruslan Martynuk said windows at that hospital had been blown out, but that nobody inside was harmed.

Vynnytsia Governor Natalia Zabolotna said on Telegram that



People stand next to a burning building following an air attack in Lviv, yesterday. (AFP)

one person had been killed and 13 wounded in her region, southwest of Kyiv.

Air defences also engaged drones throughout the day near Kyiv. Ukraine's air force posted warnings on social media of drones overhead in more than a dozen areas across the country.

Officials in the western region of Ternopil said two energy facilities were attacked.

Moscow denies targeting civilians, although its attacks have killed thousands since it invaded in February 2022. It says Ukraine's civil infrastructure is a legitimate target because striking it can reduce Kyiv's ability to wage war.

Ukraine has also targeted Russia's energy system, particularly oil refineries, depots and transport terminals.

The daytime strikes came after a wave of overnight strikes that

killed five people across Ukraine and caused disruption to power supplies in Moldova. Ukraine's air force said Russia had launched 34 missiles and 392 drones overnight and that 25 missiles and 365 drones had been downed or neutralised.

Two people were killed and 12 wounded, including a five-year-old child, in the attack near the eastern city of Poltava, a regional official said.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said damage had been reported in 11 regions and issued a new appeal for allies to supply Kyiv with air defence munitions.

He has repeatedly warned that Kyiv, whose main supplier of air defence systems against ballistic missiles is the United States, will face a deficit of missiles while Washington is focused on the US-Israeli war on Iran.

2 officials quit Italian justice ministry after referendum defeat

Reuters
Rome

Two officials quit Italy's justice ministry yesterday, a day after Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni suffered a resounding defeat in a referendum on a proposed reform of the country's judiciary.

Undersecretary Andrea Delmastro resigned after it emerged he had held a stake in a restaurant linked to the mafia, while the ministry's chief of staff, Giusi Bartolozzi, stepped down after making controversial comments while on the campaign trail.

Bartolozzi played no role in the Delmastro scandal but she also tendered her resignation yesterday, a source close to the matter told Reuters.

The twin departures add to a sense of turmoil at the justice ministry in the immediate aftermath of the referendum rout. Both Meloni and Justice Minister Carlo Nordio have rejected calls that they too should resign having failed to convince Italians of the need to revamp the country's fiercely independent judiciary.

Delmastro, who is a member of Meloni's Brothers of Italy party, came under scrutiny this month after daily Il Fatto Quotidiano reported that he had taken a stake in a Rome restaurant alongside

the 18-year-old daughter of a man convicted of ties to the Camorra, a mafia group based around Naples.

Delmastro said he had sold his stake once he learned that his business partner's father, Andrea Carocchia, had been convicted on mob-related charges.

But his position worsened after a 2023 photograph was uncovered showing him alongside Carocchia, suggesting the two men knew each other well.

It also emerged that Delmastro had not declared his business stake to parliament, as required.

In his resignation statement yesterday, Delmastro said he had made a mistake but had done nothing unlawful.

"I have always fought crime and achieved concrete, important results. Although I did nothing wrong, I made an error of judgment, which I corrected as soon as I became aware of it. I take responsibility for that," he said.

The scandal hung over the final days of campaigning for the referendum, giving the opposition an easy opportunity to criticise the government's handling of the justice ministry.

Bartolozzi also drew criticism during the campaign when she urged voters to back the reform so Italy could "get rid of" a judiciary she described as a "firing squad".

EU says Slovakia's diesel sales restrictions measures are illegal

Slovakia's decision to make foreign drivers pay more for diesel runs afoul of European Union (EU) laws, the European Commission said yesterday. Bratislava announced this and other measures last week to limit sales of the fuel, citing the suspension of oil supplies from a pipeline through Ukraine, as energy prices soared globally due to the war in the Middle East.

"We consider that this measure is highly discriminatory and against EU law," commission spokesman Ricardo Cardoso said of the diesel price for foreign motorists. "While we understand the need to support citizens, and at this time in particular, measures must not discriminate between nationality, nor should they undermine the integrity of our single market," he told a press conference. (AFP)

Ukraine, US still need to work through security guarantees: Zelensky

Ukraine and the US still need to develop the security guarantees agreement that Kyiv has long sought from Washington, President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday, having previously described the document as fully ready. Security guarantees were one of the topics discussed over the weekend between Kyiv and Washington's representatives at a meeting in Florida.

Kyiv wants iron-clad promises from the US and other allies to come to its aid should Russia attack again after the end of the war. "The most important task is to develop security guarantees in a way that brings us closer to ending the war," Zelensky wrote on social media after a debrief with his negotiating team. Zelensky had said in January that the security guarantees document between Ukraine and the

US was "100% ready" and waiting to be signed. "The geopolitical situation has become more complicated due to the war against Iran, and unfortunately, this is emboldening Russia," he said yesterday. Zelensky also called for a meeting of US, European and global leaders to discuss solutions to the war between Russia and Ukraine and the war in Iran. (Reuters)

Trust in leadership reinforces security in Qatar

By Shaima Sheriff
Doha

Trust in Qatar's leadership and the government's swift response has reinforced a strong sense of security among citizens, with daily life continuing normally despite regional developments, a United Nations Youth Delegate from Qatar has said.

According to Mubarak al-Naimi, while recent developments have created some level of stress, their impact on daily life has remained limited.

"As a Qatari citizen, honestly, it didn't affect my life that much, except being a little bit stressed and overwhelmed due to the news," al-Naimi said. "Once you follow the right news outlets, which are official from the government sector, you'll be fine."



Mubarak al-Naimi

He highlighted that clear communication from authorities has helped residents remain informed without unnecessary

concern. "Following official sources keeps things clear and manageable," he said.

Al-Naimi attributed the overall sense of reassurance among citizens to Qatar's leadership and the transparency demonstrated during the situation.

"I think because of the great leadership that we have here in Qatar, there is transparency about what is going on," he said. "If you follow the instructions that the government gives out, you'll be safe, inshallah."

He also emphasised the role of national institutions, particularly the Ministry of Interior, in maintaining public safety and normalcy.

"I'm thankful to the Ministry of Interior and all the ministries," he said. "They are taking quick actions, informing residents and visitors about what is happening and what steps to follow."

According to al-Naimi, these measures

reflect a robust crisis management system that ensures continuity across the country.

"Even through this situation, Qatar has shown high crisis management," he said. "All services in the country are going on, ministries, private companies, everything is functioning."

He noted that essential services such as pharmacies and grocery stores remain fully operational.

"You can find medicines, essential food and everything you need," he said. "This shows the strength of the system."

Al-Naimi also pointed out that the presence of travellers at airports during the period should be understood in context.

"If you see crowded airports, those are mostly transit passengers," he said. "Residents here are not leaving; they trust the leadership and feel at home."

Reflecting on the broader situation, he said his sense of pride as a Qatari remains unchanged.

"I'm a Qatari at the end of the day, and I feel proud of my country," he said. "The government has gone through each phase smoothly, ensuring safety for everyone."

He added that Qatar's role as a regional mediator further strengthens public confidence.

"Qatar has shown that it can be a great mediator on both regional and global levels," he said. "It's just a matter of time, and things will return to normal, inshallah."

Al-Naimi's message to residents and visitors is to remain calm, informed and confident.

"Follow official guidance, stay calm, and don't worry," he said. "Qatar has always kept people safe."

Convenience, quality drive Qatar's Eid spending surge

By Joey Aguilar
Doha

Retailers in Qatar reported strong Eid al-Fitr sales this year despite regional tensions, with dates, dried fruits, premium nuts and packaged sweets among the top-selling items during the holiday rush.

Shops in Doha specialising in traditional Eid treats saw brisk business in the days leading up to the holiday, as residents continued the long-standing custom of sharing food with family, friends and guests.

Displays of almonds, cashews, pistachios, raisins and dried mangoes filled store shelves, while neatly arranged trays of chocolates and individually wrapped sweets drew steady interest from shoppers.

"We were honestly expecting a slower season because of the situation in the region, but sales exceeded our expectations," said an employee at a popular sweets and nuts shop at Matar Qadeem.

"People still came in large numbers, especially in the final three days before Eid. Premium mixed nuts and gift boxes sold very fast," he added.

Retailers noted that convenience played an increasingly important role in consumer choices this year. Pre-packed assortments of nuts and ready-to-serve sweet platters were among the fastest-moving

items, reflecting a shift in buying behaviour.

"Customers are looking for quality and convenience. Instead of buying in bulk and preparing at home, many prefer ready-made options that they can serve to guests immediately or give as gifts. It saves time, especially for working families," the employee noted.

It is learnt that many shoppers appeared willing to spend more on higher-quality products, particularly for items associated with hospitality. Premium nuts such as pistachios and almonds, along with imported dried fruits, were in high demand, even as some consumers remained selective in their purchases.

"There is still price sensitivity, of course. But during Eid, people prioritise quality. It's part of the tradition to offer the best you can," the employee said.

Consumers echoed this sentiment, saying that Eid remains a time when spending is guided more by cultural values than economic caution.

"For Eid, you cannot compromise too much. We may cut back on other things, but sweets and nuts are essential because we receive guests. It's about generosity and making people feel welcome," said Mariam, a Doha resident shopping for her family.

Another shopper, Ahmed Khan, said he opted for pre-packed sweets this year to save time.



Shoppers browse neatly arranged shelves of packaged sweets and gift boxes at a store during the Eid holiday. PICTURES: Joey Aguilar

"Work has been busy, so I bought ready-made trays. They look good, and it's easier. Maybe it costs a bit more, but it's worth it for convenience."

Retailers also observed that visually appealing packaging played a significant role in attracting buyers, particularly for gift-giving. Elegant trays, decorative boxes and individually wrapped items were prominently displayed, catering to customers seeking both presentation and quality.

"The presentation matters a lot. People want something that looks festive and special when they visit relatives. That's why

packaged chocolates and assorted sweets are very popular," a salesperson at another sweets shop said.

Industry observers say the strong Eid performance highlights the resilience of Qatar's retail sector, even amid external uncertainties. Seasonal demand linked to religious and cultural occasions continues to drive consumer spending, providing a reliable boost for businesses.

As the holiday period concludes, retailers are now assessing sales trends to better prepare for future peak seasons. Many hope the demand for convenience-oriented



Displays of premium nuts fill a Doha shop as demand for high-quality Eid staples remained strong despite regional tensions.



Individually wrapped sweets arranged on decorative trays highlight the rising demand for convenient, ready-to-serve treats popular for Eid hospitality and gift-giving.

products and premium offerings will continue.

"Every year, we see small changes in how people shop. But one thing remains the same, Eid is always a busy and important time for us," the salesperson said.

While regional tensions may

have introduced an element of caution, observers noted that the steady flow of customers in stores suggested that the festive spirit remained largely intact, with traditions of sharing and hospitality continuing to shape spending habits across Qatar.

Qumra 2026 edition moves online, offers mentorship to 49 projects

In light of recent developments in the region, the Doha Film Institute (DFI) has moved the upcoming edition of Qumra online to ensure the safety and well-being of guests, projects, and teams.

The programme will continue to offer invaluable networking and mentorship support in a virtual format to 49 global projects, from March 27 to April 8. As the region's first and longest-running industry initiative of its kind, Qumra champions first and second-time filmmakers by providing bespoke mentorship, industry access and creative development across all stages of filmmaking.

The 2026 cohort reflects a dynamic range of storytelling, from intimate personal narratives to bold explorations of history, myth, and identity, affirming Qumra as a vital platform for new cinematic voices from Qatar, the region, and beyond.

From feature narratives to web series and shorts, the selected projects demonstrate cinema's power to bridge the personal and the political, the local and the universal, and the real and the imagined. 27 features, nine series and 13 shorts are included in the 49 projects with 47 of them supported by the Institute's Grants Programme and five through DFI's Qatari Film Fund. As many as 43 projects are from the Middle East and North Africa Region, and six are international. Nearly 15 projects by Qatar-based filmmakers, including 10 by Qatari nationals, and 17 projects were developed through DFI training programmes. In a press statement, DFI CEO Fatma Hassan Alremaihi said: "While we are deeply saddened by the current circumstances in the region, the decision



to present Qumra 2026 online reflects Qatar's resilience and its enduring commitment to continuity, even in the face of significant challenges. Our priority remains to ensure that filmmakers and their projects continue to benefit from meaningful exchange, mentorship and connection. This year's selection highlights the courage and ambition of today's filmmakers and the urgency of the stories they are compelled to tell. We are proud to see our nation strongly represented alongside powerful perspectives from across the world."



Qatar Charity delivers Eid clothing to orphans in multiple countries

Despite exceptional circumstances and with generous support from donors in Qatar, Qatar Charity (QC) brought joy to children in several countries worldwide through its Eid Clothing Project.

The project is part of QC's Ramadan campaign 'Good Starts With You' and aims to strengthen social solidarity and ensure that the joy of Eid reaches those who need it most, providing new Eid outfits to orphans and vulnerable children in many countries.

In Sudan, QC implemented the Eid Clothing Project for sponsored orphans, low-income families, and vulnerable groups in the Red Sea and River Nile states. In a festive atmosphere, Qatar Charity distributed Eid clothing to 600 sponsored orphans in Port Sudan.

In Yemen, QC provided Eid clothing to 250 sponsored orphans and persons with disabilities in Taiz. Families attended the event, and the smiles of the children showed the joy the initiative brought, as they received their new Eid outfits.

In Somalia, QC organised an Eid clothing distribution for 930 orphaned children across various districts of the Banadir region, as part of its ongoing efforts to promote social solidarity and to support vulnerable groups throughout the country.

In Morocco, QC's office brought joy to 250 sponsored orphans in Tetouan.



Beneficiaries received shopping vouchers, allowing them to choose their own Eid outfits, creating a warm, dignified environment filled with care and delight.

In Bangladesh, QC distributed shopping vouchers to 250 sponsored children, enabling them to visit stores with their families and select their own Eid clothes.

In Pakistan, QC provided Eid clothing to 300 sponsored orphans, who ex-

pressed great happiness as they selected their garments themselves, enjoying the festive spirit of the experience.

In Sri Lanka's Ampara district, QC spread joy among 225 sponsored orphans through the Eid Clothing Project. The initiative offered a direct shopping experience that allowed children to pick their own Eid outfits, adding a humane and meaningful dimension that enhanced their sense of dignity, belonging, and celebration.

Shakira show in Qatar postponed

Qatar Calendar announced yesterday that the Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran World Tour show by Shakira has been postponed due to the ongoing regional situation.

The show was originally scheduled for April 1 at 974 Stadium, and officials announced in a social media post that the new

dates will be announced later.

Qatar Calendar has also announced that ticket sales for the show are open, and all purchased tickets remain valid for the new date. "Once the new date is announced, a two-month window will be provided for those ticket holders who wish to request a refund," it added.

