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## Schools reopen today

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

Public and private schools will resume in-person learning today after the Ministry of Education and Higher Education confirmed that all preparations are in place to receive students safely, following a period of disruption caused by recent circumstances that forced a temporary shift away from classroom learning. The ministry said nearly 417,000 students across public and private institutions are expected to return to classrooms, with school buildings cleared for occupancy after comprehensive preventive maintenance checks, operational systems verified, and service providers confirmed as ready to function in line with approved standards. Maryam Abdullah al-Mohannadi, Director of the Public Relations and Communication Department, said the resumption was the result of integrated efforts across multiple ministry sectors and sustained coordination with relevant national authorities. She added that high-level monitoring would continue to ensure rapid response to any developments and to safeguard both students and staff.

On the safety front, the General Directorate of Civil Defence ran four days of emergency response workshops at the Officers Club last week, training around 1,200 school principals, deputies and designated safety officials on evacuation and shelter procedures linked to the national warning system. The sessions were aimed at standardising how schools respond when alerts are issued under exceptional circumstances. Separately, the ministry's Training and Development Centre brought together close to 9,700 teachers, school leaders, administrators and co-ordinators through its "Irtiqa 3" online forum, held via Microsoft Teams. The session focused on leadership integration, psychological resilience and operational organisation to sustain effective learning environments going forward.

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**417,000 students return to classrooms**  
Public and private schools have resumed full in-person learning following comprehensive maintenance and readiness checks.

**1,200 officials trained in emergency safety**  
School leaders completed intensive workshops on evacuation procedures and the national warning system.

**Prioritising student and staff mental well-being**  
The Ministry is focusing on psychological resilience to help students and staff readjust to school life.

## Amir, Zelensky mull regional tensions, Ukraine crisis

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky discussed the latest regional and international developments amid rising tensions in the region, including the ongoing Iranian aggression against Qatar and several regional countries, as well as updates on the Ukrainian crisis, during a meeting held yesterday at His Highness' office in Lusail Palace.

The Ukrainian president renewed his country's solidarity with Qatar, condemning the Iranian aggression and affirming Ukraine's support for measures taken by Qatar to protect its sovereignty, security, and the safety of its citizens. His Highness the Amir welcomed Zelensky and the accompanying delegation, expressing his appreciation for the president's sincere feelings and Ukraine's supportive stance.

Both sides emphasised the urgent need to immediately halt all military actions that could expand the scope of conflict in the Middle East and Ukraine, warning of the repercussions of continued escalation on regional and inter-



national security, and stressed the importance of intensifying regional and international efforts to de-escalate tensions and work through diplomatic channels to enhance international peace and security amid accelerating challenges in the international system.

The meeting also addressed co-operation and friendship between the two countries and ways to develop them, particularly in technology, security, defence, and energy, to strengthen the bi-

lateral partnership and open new avenues for co-operation.

The meeting was attended, from the Qatari side, by HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, HE Chief of Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi, and a number of senior officials.

Attending the meeting from the Ukrainian side were Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council Rustem Umerov,

First Deputy Head of the Office of the President Sergiy Kyslytsya, and members of the delegation accompanying the president.

Earlier in the day, Zelensky and the accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at Doha International Airport by HE the Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, and ambassador of Ukraine to Qatar Andrii Kuzmenko. To Page 2

## Iran has upended the global energy flows

By Santhosh V Perumal  
Business Reporter

With oil prices ruling high, especially in the Asian markets, in view of the Middle East conflict, the world might see migration of Atlantic basin crude into Asia, according to an economist with Baker Institute, a data-driven think-tank. Addressing a webinar, sponsored by Gulf Times, with Bilateral Chamber, Georgetown University in Qatar, Middle East Council on Global Affairs and Qatar Press Centre as partners, Kenneth B Medlock III, at the Baker Institute and the senior director of the Center for Energy Studies, highlighted the bifurcation between the Asian markets and Atlantic Basin. A lot of the Middle East crude oils that flow out end up being refined in the Asian markets, and those refiners are tuned specifically to utilise those crudes to generate

**Gulf's strategic shock has exposed limits of US security umbrella: experts**  
**Supply chain damage threatens food security for over a billion people**

the types of fuels, jet fuels, and distillates but are not available, he said at the webinar, introduced by Gulf Times Editor-in-Chief Faisal Abdulhameed al-Mudahka. "Anytime you have a constraint, you'll see price climb. The Pacific Basin in general, so Asian markets are way undersupplied, and those refiners are actually seeing cut runs. In some instances, countries mandating that exports be suspended from their refiners," he said in specific reference to China. In the physical market in Asia, there is a lack of liquidity and has a massively constrained marketplace that is leading to a "disconnect", he said,

adding that it is the reason why Asian barrels traded most recently in north of \$150 with Kuwaiti blend yesterday trading at \$163 in the spot market. However, the Atlantic Basin has a very different picture because the barrels that are in the basin are still finding homes and there is not a lack of liquidity, he said. Terming it as an "incredibly" high price, he said it was because of the lack of substitution capability. There has been dramatic implications for the Asian economies that rely on those crudes, but one would not see the same impact in the Atlantic Basin, so in the US and European markets. To Page 2



A screenshot of the webinar, sponsored by Gulf Times, with Bilateral Chamber, Georgetown University in Qatar, Middle East Council on Global Affairs and Qatar Press Centre as partners.

## Pakistan to host Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, Egypt for talks today

AFP  
Islamabad

Pakistan's prime minister said he had a "detailed" call with Iran's president yesterday, as foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkiye prepared to meet in Islamabad for talks on the war in the Middle East. Shehbaz Sharif's government has emerged as a key facilitator between Iran and the United States as their war drags on, serving as an intermediary for messages between the two sides. Top diplomats from Riyadh, Cairo and Ankara are due in the Pakistani capital today and tomorrow for "in-depth discussions on a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region", the Pakistan foreign ministry said. They will be hosted by their Pakistani counterpart, Ishaq Dar,

and a meeting with Sharif is also planned, a statement read. Egypt also confirmed the talks. As part of preparations, Sharif said he had a "detailed telephone conversation with my brother President Masoud Pezeshkian of Iran earlier today (Saturday), lasting over one hour". "I reiterated Pakistan's strong condemnation of the continued Israeli attacks on Iran, including recent strikes on civilian infrastructure, and conveyed Pakistan's solidarity with the brave people of Iran," he wrote on X. Sharif said he also expressed his condolences "on the tragic loss of precious lives and prayed for the swift recovery of the injured and displaced". "I apprised him of Pakistan's ongoing diplomatic outreach — engaging the United States and brotherly Gulf and Islamic countries — to facilitate dialogue and de-escalation." To Page 2

### Qatar intercepts all Iran drones

The Ministry of Defence announced yesterday that Qatar was targeted yesterday by a number of drones launched from Iran. In a statement, the ministry said that the Qatar Armed Forces successfully intercepted all the drones. (QNA)

### Houthis enter war

Yemen's Houthi rebels announced their entry into the Middle East war yesterday by launching a ballistic missile towards Israel, as the world struggled to contain the economic damage of a conflict now entering its second month. The intervention of Iran's Yemeni allies in Tehran's conflict with Israel and the United States will spark concern about disruptions to Red Sea shipping, with trade from the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz already choked off. — AFP

## 'Resilient, multi-path systems key to future energy security'

**Experts point to fundamental shift from traditional models**

Escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East are reinforcing energy security as a cornerstone of global economic stability, prompting a fundamental shift away from traditional supply models towards more flexible and resilient systems, experts have told Qatar News Agency (QNA).

Energy security, once defined primarily by resource availability and production capacity, is increasingly shaped by the ability of systems to adapt to disruptions, maintain continuity of supply, and respond swiftly to crises. The central challenge facing energy-producing countries, experts stress, is no longer limited to production alone, but extends to ensuring the safe, uninterrupted delivery of energy to global markets.

Engineer Nasser Jaham al-Kuwari, an oil and gas expert, said Qatar is well positioned at the centre of this transformation — not only as a major supplier but as a reliable partner in stabilising global energy markets. Recent crises, he noted, have underscored



the importance of reliability alongside scale, with markets increasingly favouring suppliers capable of maintaining flows under adverse conditions.

Qatar currently produces around 77m tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) per year, with output expected to rise to 142m tonnes in the coming years, significantly expanding its share of global LNG trade. Its strong track record in supply reliability and long-term contractual commitments has made it a preferred partner for major economies across Asia and Europe. To Page 2



## Amir, Zelensky mull regional tensions, Ukraine crisis

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His Highness the Amir and Zelensky also held a meeting, exchanging views on current

developments in the region and the world, and affirmed continuing co-ordination and consultation between the two countries, particularly in light of ongoing events and their

impact on regional security and stability.

Following the meeting, His Highness the Amir hosted a luncheon banquet in honour of the president and his delegation. - QNA

## PM receives telephone calls from Pakistan, Thailand, Armenia



HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received phone calls from Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Thailand's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sihasak Phuanketkeow, and Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan yesterday.

The military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions for regional and international security and stability, as well as ways to resolve all disputes by peaceful means, were discussed during the calls. - QNA

## PM meets Egyptian foreign minister

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday with Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates Dr Badr Abdelatty.

Their meeting addressed the military escalation in the region and ways to resolve all disputes peacefully. - QNA

## Schools reopen today

From Page 1

Psychological and social specialists were also briefed on mechanisms for receiving students and helping them readjust to classroom life following recent events, with the ministry placing particular emphasis on mental well-being and creating a motivating environment for learning.

Private schools received a separate package of regulatory and awareness measures, covering compliance with safety requirements, continuity of teaching staff, and flexible operational responses in line with approved regulations.

The ministry urged parents to act as active partners in the process, asking them to reinforce attendance, support adherence to safety guidelines and promote a culture of awareness - particularly on school buses and within school premises - as the country works to restore full educational stability in line with the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030.

## Deputy prime minister meets top Ukraine officials

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani met with Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) Secretary Rustem Umerov and armed forces chief Andrii Hnatov during their visit to Qatar.

During the meeting, which was also attended by HE the Chief of Staff of the Qatari Armed Forces Lieutenant-General (Pilot) Jassim bin Mohammed al-Mannai, they discussed the latest security developments in the region and the defence co-operation and joint co-ordination.

A defence co-operation agreement was signed between the defence ministries of Qatar and Ukraine, covering technological co-operation, development of joint projects, defence investments, and exchange of expertise in countering missiles and drones.

The agreement was signed by HE Lt-Gen al-Mannai and Hnatov, in the presence of HE Sheikh Saud and Umerov. - QNA



## 'Resilient, multi-path systems key to future energy security'

From Page 1

Yet challenges remain.

A significant share of regional exports depends on critical maritime chokepoints, particularly the Strait of Hormuz, leaving supply chains exposed to geopolitical risk.

Rising domestic energy demand, driven by urbanisation and industrial growth, is adding further pressure to national energy systems.

Al-Kuwari stressed that strengthening infrastructure is critical to enhancing supply resilience - expanding storage capacity, modernising power grids, and deploying smart technologies to improve demand management.

He also underscored the importance of diversifying export routes and upgrading port and logistics capabilities, alongside flexible contractual structures that balance long-term

agreements with access to spot markets.

At the regional level, he highlighted the value of deeper co-operation among Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries, particularly through electricity interconnection projects and emergency power-sharing mechanisms.

Prof Omar Khlaif Gharaibeh, professor of finance at Al al-Bayt University, argued that energy security risks now extend across the entire value chain - encompassing transportation, export infrastructure, and crisis response.

He advocated for alternative export routes through expanded pipeline networks bypassing the Strait of Hormuz, redirecting flows towards ports on the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea.

Prof Gharaibeh also called for greater operational decentralisation, including the geographic distribution of processing and stor-

age facilities, and the use of modular, mobile energy infrastructure to maintain continuity during disruptions.

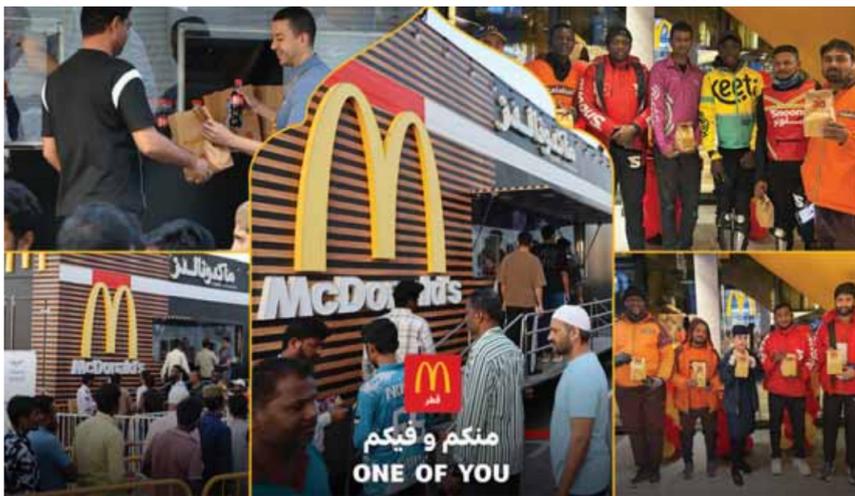
Protecting energy assets, he added, now requires an integrated security architecture combining air defence, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence (AI) to anticipate threats and co-ordinate rapid responses.

External storage strategies - maintaining reserves near key consumer markets and pursuing joint agreements with international partners - are also becoming essential tools for distributing risk more effectively, he said.

The experts concluded that Qatar is well placed not only to sustain its role as a leading energy supplier, but to evolve into a global energy hub combining production strengths with advanced technologies and sustainable solutions. - QNA

# McDonald's Qatar brought the spirit of Ramadan to more than 6,000 community members through its Ramadan initiatives

Throughout Ramadan, McDonald's Qatar distributed more than 2,000 iftar meals to workers in the Argentine Neighborhood in collaboration with Waseef, and more than 4,000 sandwiches to delivery riders and partners, as part of its CSR platform Rahlatuna 'Our Journey'



During Ramadan, McDonald's Qatar reaffirmed its commitment to the communities that keep Qatar moving, from workers breaking their fast in the Argentine Neighborhood to the delivery riders who worked across the city. More than 6,000 meals were distributed across two initiatives, where McDonald's Qatar brought the spirit of the holy month to those who often spend it far from home and family.

In collaboration with Waseef, McDonald's stationed a Food Truck inside the Argentine Neighborhood, a purpose-built workforce community in Al Wakra, serving freshly prepared iftar meals to workers each evening as the sun set. A total of 2,000 complimentary iftar meals were distributed during blessed evenings. For many observing Ramadan away from home, it was a moment to pause, gather, and share a meal with those around them.

In another initiative during Ramadan, McDonald's Qatar honored the delivery heroes who worked tirelessly throughout the holy month across its delivery partners Talabat, Snoonu, Keeta, and Rafeeq, providing more than 4,000 complimentary sandwiches as a heartfelt gesture of appreciation and recognition of their dedication and continued efforts during challenging times.

Both activations form part of Rahlatuna, 'Our Journey', McDonald's Qatar's CSR platform, which this Ramadan, extended even farther. Selected branches offered complimentary soup and dates with in-store purchases throughout the holy month, while weekly Hakawati storytelling sessions brought children and families together for an evening of traditional storytelling. Each gesture, small or large, reflected the generosity that Ramadan inspires.

Commenting on the initiative, Abdulwahab Hafez, Managing Director of McDonald's Qatar, said, "Ramadan reminds us that the strongest communities are built on kindness, gratitude, and shared moments. This was an opportunity for us to honor the workers who shape Qatar every day and to show our appreciation through initiatives that bring people together. Through Rahlatuna, we strive to stand close to the communities we serve, creating moments that reflect the generosity and unity that define the holy month."

As a 100% locally owned and operated company by Al Mana Restaurants & Food Company, McDonald's Qatar continues to stand close to the communities it serves. Through Rahlatuna 'Our Journey', the brand strives to create moments that bring people together, sharing gratitude, warmth, and a sense of belonging with the workers and families who help shape Qatar every day.

## Iran war has upended global energy flows

From Page 1

Stressing that crude flows will ultimately shift as long as these basis differentials persist, Medlock said that "if the prices in Asia continue to be as escalated as they are, we will begin to see a migration of Atlantic Basin crudes into the region, but there's a logistics problem that has to ultimately be solved to handle that, and it's not clear whether it will be crude or the products themselves, so refined products."

He said that the effect of these kinds of "extreme" price spikes would weigh on the economies and will have massive implications for industrial activity, for consumer activity, particularly for countries that are importing countries.

Jim Krane, co-director of the Middle East Energy Roundtable at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, said that the Gulf countries need some kind of a formalised agreement with Iran on the Strait of Hormuz.

"Iran needs a different deterrent to deter strikes on it, other than blocking the Strait of Hormuz and damaging the Gulf economies and buildings and safety and security," he said. "For the Gulf, Iran needs to have some sort of deterrence and, until it can get that in some way, it probably isn't in its (best) interests to agree to a ceasefire."

With regard to the Gulf states' leverage, Krane noted: "The Gulf countries are severely lacking in leverage... that's why this war is playing out on their territories... turns out yet again their leverage is not as strong as they expected and not as strong as some other countries."

Rory Miller, professor of International Politics, director of the Energy Studies Programme and director of the Small States Research Programme at Georgetown University in Qatar, said that the impact of the present Middle East imbroglio on domestic consumers

in the US and many allies and partners of the US would have its "toll on the foreign policy level".

On the humanitarian risk of fertiliser disruption, he pointed out: "Some of the most dependent on fertiliser through the Strait of Hormuz are the most food insecure countries in the world, Sudan, Somalia. So you're going to have potentially cataclysmic and famine like conditions in some parts of the Global South."

Miller however, wasn't too pleased with the American role in all of this.

"A leader has to be able to provide security, stability and order for its followers, and the United States has been providing instability, insecurity and disorder for its followers for many a year now," he quipped.

### 'Qatar has been very transparent in talking about the damage.'

Rashid al-Mohannadi, a non-resident fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs, said that Turkiye and Pakistan should step into mediation with China's outside support at this stage to de-escalate the Middle East conflict involving Iran and the US/Israel, and Qatar is the only country in the region to be transparent on the pecuniary damage to the hydrocarbons sector.

"Most of the mediation efforts will be left on regional actors like Turkiye and Pakistan at this stage, and the Chinese might support them in the background," he said.

Expecting the situation to be resolved quicker rather than later, al-Mohannadi said what he sees is some level of "very cautious optimism" with the current mediation activities, and that the Gulf countries would have to adapt and change in response to how this conflict ends with or without the current dispensation in Iran.

He said that the Gulf states

showed a high level of resilience, but are still in a state of strategic shock since the assumption was that if the US or the Israelis launch a strike, it would be limited towards the US-affiliated bases.

Finding structural damage to the (hydrocarbon) facilities in the Gulf, including in Ras Laffan, where he had worked before, al-Mohannadi said: "I think Qatar has been very transparent in talking about the damage. It is the only state that actually went out and said this is (the cause of) the reduction in production. These are the units that were attacked and these are the effects."

HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi, who is also the managing director and chief executive of QatarEnergy, had revealed that Iranian attacks disrupted 17% of Qatar's liquefied natural gas (LNG) export capacity, causing losses estimated at approximately \$20bn in annual revenue and threatening supplies to Europe and Asia.

"I think post-conflict, many other Gulf states will come out with actual battle damage assessments, and we'll see structural effects on global supply," al-Mohannadi said.

He said that the damage would have far reaching consequences to the fertiliser market as Gulf fertiliser and Gulf feed into fertiliser production has exposure to 1.1-1.7bn people, mostly in Africa or South Asia.

Highlighting that Qatar produces between 30% and 40% of global helium, depending on the time of year, al-Mohannadi said that helium goes into MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) machines, rocketry and semiconductors.

People working in the semiconductor industry, and specifically memory chips, he added, are anticipating force majeure to their buyers maybe in a month's time, because they don't have enough helium.

## Pakistan hosting Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, Egypt for talks

From Page 1

Sharif's office said separately that Pezeshkian "stressed upon the need to build trust in order to facilitate talks and mediation".

The pair have spoken previously in recent weeks about the conflict and Pakistan's commitment to bringing it to an end.

Islamabad has longstanding links with Tehran and close contacts in the Gulf, while Sharif and army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir have struck up a personal rapport with US President Donald Trump.

Late on Friday, Ankara's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan told the private A Haber broadcaster that the meeting was initially planned to be held in Turkiye.

Germany's Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl said earlier on Friday that he expected a direct US-Iran meeting in Pakistan "very soon", without revealing his source.

While Tehran has refused to admit to holding official talks with Washington, Iran has passed a response to Trump's 15-point plan to end the war via Islamabad, according to an anonymous source cited by the Iranian Tasnim news agency.

# UNHRC adopts Palestine human rights resolution

**QNA**  
Geneva

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted a resolution concerning the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, regarding the obligation to ensure accountability and justice.

Commenting on the resolution, which was adopted by 24 votes in favour, four against, and 19 abstentions, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed the resolution, considering it a confirmation of the necessity to ensure accountability for perpetrators of violations and crimes against the

Palestinian people, to guarantee that there is no impunity, and to achieve justice. It emphasised that this resolution is of particular importance given the current circumstances, as the Israeli occupation continues to perpetrate grave and systematic violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, alongside escalating settler attacks in the absence of accountability and with continued impunity.

It explained that the adoption of this resolution embodies the responsibility of the international community, particularly member states, to respect their legal obligations under international law, including the duty to ensure respect for the Geneva Conventions, to refrain from

recognising the illegal situation arising from the occupation, and to refrain from providing any form of support that contributes to its continuation, as stated in the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice.

It also considered the resolution as a reaffirmation of the responsibility of states not to recognise the illegal situation arising from the occupation and not to provide assistance or support for its continuation, including refraining from supplying the occupying power with any weapons or equipment that could be used to commit further crimes and violations against Palestinians in contravention of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

## Shakira concert in Doha rescheduled for Nov 18

Visit Qatar has announced that the Shakira Live in Doha concert, originally scheduled to take place on April 1 at Stadium 974, has been rescheduled to November 18, 2026.

All previously purchased tickets will remain valid for the new concert date. Ticket holders are advised to retain their tickets and refer to the official ticketing platform for further updates.



## Houthis strike Israel in first such attack amid Iran conflict

**Reuters**  
Cairo/Dubai

Yemen's Houthis launched missiles at Israel yesterday, their first such attack since the start of the Iran war, heightening the risk that a conflict now in its fifth week could expand further across the region.

Speaking before the strike, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US expected to conclude military operations within weeks. The Houthis said they would continue their operations until the "aggression" on all fronts ended.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian spoke to Pakistan's prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, whose government hosts a meeting with the Turkish and Saudi foreign ministers today to seek to ease regional tensions.

But there was no sign of an immediate diplomatic breakthrough in a war that has spread across the Middle East, killing thousands and hitting the world economy with the biggest-ever disruption to global energy supplies.

Israel said it had struck more than 100 targets in Iran since Friday, including ballistic missile production and storage facilities and government infrastructure sites in Tehran.

Iranian state media reported nine people killed in the western city of Borujerd and five killed in Zanjan in the northwest, saying both attacks were on residential areas.

Iran kept up attacks on Israel and several Gulf states after hitting an air base in Saudi Arabia on Friday and wounding 12 US military personnel, two of them seriously, in one of the most serious breaches of US air defences so far.

Drones damaged the radar system at Kuwait's International Airport, and fires were reported near the Khalifa container port in the United Arab Emirates' capital Abu Dhabi after a missile was intercepted. In Israel, seven people were hospitalised after an Iranian



First responders assess the damage after a house was hit by a projectile strike in Eshtaol, near Beit Shemesh in central Israel, yesterday. (AFP)

missile hit the village of Eshtaol, near Jerusalem.

### NEW THREAT TO GLOBAL SHIPPING

Israel, which regularly faced missile attacks from the Houthis before the war, confirmed a missile had been fired at it from Yemen. There were no reports of casualties or damage.

The attack pointed to a potential new threat to global shipping, already hit by the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the conduit for about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies.

The Houthis have shown an ability to strike targets far beyond Yemen and disrupt shipping lanes around the Arabian Peninsula and the Red Sea, as they did in support of Hamas in the Gaza war.

If the Houthis open a new front in the conflict, one target could be the Bab al-Mandab Strait off the coast of Yemen, a chokepoint for sea traffic towards the Suez Canal.

With midterm elections due in November, the increasingly unpopular conflict, launched with US and Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28, has weighed on President Donald Trump's Republican Party. He has appeared eager to end it soon, while also threatening escalation.

Demonstrators took to city streets across the US yesterday in the third set of "No Kings" rallies, described by organisers as a call to

action against the war.

Rubio said on Friday that military operations were expected to be concluded in "weeks, not months" and echoed Trump's calls on European and Asian countries to help secure free passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

US allies have been reluctant to be drawn into a war which could escalate if Trump decides to deploy ground troops to try to open the strait.

Rubio said the US could achieve its aims without ground troops but acknowledged it was deploying some to the region "to give the president maximum optionality and maximum opportunity to adjust the contingencies, should they emerge".

Washington has dispatched two contingents of thousands of Marines to the region, the first of which arrived on Friday on a huge amphibious assault ship, the US military said in a social media post yesterday. The Pentagon is also expected to deploy thousands of elite airborne soldiers. Financial markets have reacted with alarm at signs the war may drag on.

The Brent crude oil benchmark is up more than 50% since the war began and in the US, where Trump is politically vulnerable to rising fuel prices, diesel in California hit a record average high, the American Automobile Association said.



The initiative involves constructing 67 wells across N'Djamena and its surrounding areas.

## Qatar Charity water project to benefit 1mn people in Chad

Qatar Charity marked World Water Day with the launch of a large-scale water project in Chad, supported by generous donors in Qatar.

The initiative involves constructing 67 wells across N'Djamena and its surrounding areas, expected to benefit more than 1mn people. The first artisan well was inaugurated on the outskirts of the Chadian capital in the presence of government officials, with the remaining wells scheduled for completion within six months.

The project highlights Qatar Charity's strong developmental role in Chad. The wells were designed and implemented through a participatory approach, in close co-ordination with the Ministry of Water and Energy in Chad, ensuring long term impact for beneficiaries and helping bridge a critical gap in access to safe drinking water.

The newly inaugurated well on the outskirts of the Chadian capital includes a 5 cubic metre elevated water tank, two solar-powered distribution networks, and a guard facility to support sustainability.

During the opening ceremony, Nour Saleh Hagggar, secretary general of the Ministry of Water and Energy, stated: "What we see today is a successful model of genuine partnership. Qatar Charity is turning its commitments into concrete projects that enhance water security and meet national priorities."

Ngueru Danta Dongi, a school director, said: "This well has transformed the life of an entire community. Our children now drink clean water and go to school in better health and with peace of mind. What Qatar Charity has provided will leave a lasting impact."

The efforts come amid significant challenges, as UN estimates

show that many communities in Chad continue to struggle with access to safe water, especially under climate pressures and rapid population growth.

Qatar Charity's water interventions go beyond immediate relief, representing a strategic investment in public health, education, and community stability. These interventions help reduce water-borne diseases, support women and children, strengthen the learning environment, and foster community resilience. The use of solar-powered systems reflect a shift towards sustainable, low-cost solutions.

The 2026 UN World Water Development Report, "Water for All People: Equal Rights and Opportunities", emphasises the critical link between water access and gender equality, highlighting that equitable access to safe water improves health, education, and overall quality of life for everyone.

## Israel hits Iran naval research site, fresh blasts rattle Tehran

**AFP**  
Tehran

The Israeli military said it had struck an Iranian research facility for naval weapons, while a series of loud explosions rattled Tehran as night fell yesterday.

The fresh attacks on the capital came after Yemen's Houthi fighters announced their entry into the Middle East war by launching a missile towards Israel.

The intervention of Iran's Yemeni allies is sure to spark concern about disruptions to Red Sea shipping, which would only compound the widening economic fallout from the effective closure of the vital Strait of Hormuz off Iran.

Israel's military said yesterday that it hit the headquarters of Iran's Marine Industries Organisation during a wave of overnight attacks across Tehran, saying the facility developed "a wide range of naval weaponry, including surface and sub-surface vessels, (and) manned and unmanned equipment".

An AFP journalist in Tehran reported intense explosions and a plume of black smoke overnight.

An Israeli military spokesman said yesterday attacks on Iranian military industry had intensified, and "within a few days, we will complete attacks on all critical components".

Last evening, another wave of blasts rang out in the capital for several minutes, though it was not clear what was targeted.

"I miss a peaceful night's sleep," an artist in Tehran told AFP, add-

ing that the previous night's strikes were "so intense it felt like all of Tehran was shaking".

"We are powerless to change a government that kills, and we don't want this war either. We just want a normal, simple life."

The conflict began when the US and Israel launched airstrikes across Iran that killed supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, engulfing the region in conflict, sending oil and gas prices soaring and prompting diplomatic efforts to halt the fighting. US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff said Friday he believed Iran would hold talks with Washington within a week. "It could solve it all," he said.

With no end to the conflict in sight despite Trump's optimism that US forces have obliterated Iran's military, a spokesman for the Houthis released a video declaring that the group had fired ballistic missiles towards Israeli bases. The Israeli military had said earlier it had "identified the launch of a missile from Yemen", which was reportedly intercepted. Saudi Arabia has

rerouted much of its oil exports via the Red Sea port of Yanbu to avoid the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran says it has closed to shipping from hostile powers.

With Hormuz all but impassable, many shipments to and from the Gulf have gone through the Omani port of Salalah, on the Arabian Sea, but Danish shipping giant Maersk said operations had been temporarily suspended there after a drone attack injured one worker and damaged a crane.

Iran's military said yesterday that it had targeted a US logistics vessel near Salalah. Oman said a drone attack on the port wounded a foreign worker. Air travel has also been disrupted. Yesterday, authorities in Kuwait and in the city of Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan said airport facilities had been damaged in strikes.

Fire also broke out after Iranian missiles and drones hit the Khalifa Economic Zone Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, injuring six people. The firm Emirates Global Aluminium (EGA) reported significant damage from the attack.



A journalist walks past the wreckage of vehicles at car service centre in eastern Tehran that was hit by a missile strike, yesterday. (AFP)

## Foreign media association slams Israeli forces' 'violent assault' on CNN crew

**AFP**  
Jerusalem

An international media association yesterday condemned what it described as a "violent assault" by Israeli soldiers who detained a CNN crew in the occupied West Bank this week.

A CNN team was reporting on the aftermath of an assault by Israeli settlers and the establishment of an illegal outpost near the Palestinian village of Tayasir on

Thursday when it was detained by Israeli soldiers, the Foreign Press Association said.

"The soldiers aggressively targeted the crew and Palestinian civilians present, pointing their rifles at them," the FPA said, even after the journalists identified themselves. "The soldiers repeatedly tried to infringe the CNN crew's right to film, ordering the crew to stop filming and threatening to confiscate the camera."

"Later, an IDF soldier approached CNN's photojournalist from behind, placed him in a

**"This was not a misunderstanding... It was a violent assault on clearly identified journalists and a direct attack on press freedom"**

chokehold, slammed him to the ground, and damaged his camera," said the association, which represents hundreds of journalists in Israel and Palestinian territories.

CNN confirmed the details in its own report on the incident, identifying the photojournalist as Cyril Theophilos.

"This was not a misunderstanding... It was a violent assault on clearly identified journalists and a direct attack on press freedom," the FPA said.

"The use of force was excessive and dangerous. Pointing rifles at journalists and civilians, physically assaulting a cameraman, and detaining a crew are actions that cross every line."

"Such behaviour reflects a deeply alarming pattern of hostility toward the media and cannot be tolerated under any circumstances," the FPA said, demanding

an investigation into the incident.

The military said the incident will be probed. "The soldiers' conduct and statements in this incident do not represent the IDF, go against what is expected of IDF soldiers and will be investigated," military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani wrote on X. "I apologised privately, and I will say it again - this shouldn't have happened. Our job is to maintain law and order, among that is allowing for freedom of the press." The incident is the second such event involving CNN this

month. Days ago, during the fast-ing month of Ramadan, a CNN producer was left with a fractured wrist following an "unprovoked assault" by Israeli police officers.

That incident happened when journalists were documenting worshippers praying outside the walls of the Old City in east Jerusalem. Violence in the West Bank has continued unabated even after the October 2025 ceasefire in Gaza, and since the outbreak of the current war in the Middle East, there has been a fresh spate of deadly attacks by Israeli settlers.



People take part in a demonstration following the killing of Lebanese journalists, Al Manar reporter Ali Shaib, Al Mayadeen reporter Fatima Ftouni and cameraman Mohammed Ftouni by a targeted Israeli strike, amid escalating hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, as the US-Israeli conflict with Iran continues, in Beirut, Lebanon, yesterday. **Right:** The destroyed car of Lebanese journalists, who were killed by a targeted Israeli strike, in Jezzine, in southern Lebanon, yesterday. (Reuters)



# Israeli strike kills three Lebanese journalists

Reuters  
Beirut

Israeli forces killed three Lebanese journalists in southern Lebanon yesterday in an airstrike that Israel's military said had targeted one of the reporters, with a follow-up strike on the rescue workers sent to assist them also causing fatalities.

Lebanon's health ministry said medics were directly targeted en route to the scene of an earlier strike on journalists.

More than 50 medical workers have been killed in Lebanon, including nine in the last day alone, in what the ministry described as an "escalating pace" of Israeli attacks on healthcare workers and facilities.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. It has accused Hezbollah of using medical facilities for military purposes and warned it would attack hospitals if the group does not change course.

## WHO CONDEMNS ATTACKS ON HEALTH WORKERS

World Health Organisation Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X in response to the killings that health workers were protected under international humanitarian law and "should never be targeted", without mentioning Israel.

Israeli strikes killed two soldier in the Lebanese army in the south yesterday, the Lebanese military said in separate statements on X.

The Israeli military said yesterday that the Air Force had struck more than 100 targets in Lebanon since Friday.

Yesterday's strike is the first



Smoke rises after an Israeli strike, amid escalating hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, as the US-Israeli conflict with Iran continues, in southern Lebanon, yesterday. (Reuters)

time Israel has acknowledged killing a journalist in Lebanon.

Lebanese television news channel Al Manar said its reporter Ali Shaib and reporter Fatima Ftouni, from Lebanese pan-Arab broadcaster Al Mayadeen, were killed when their vehicle was hit. Lebanon's information minister, Paul Morcos, later said Ftouni's brother, Mohammed, a cameraman, had also been killed.

Israel's military said in a statement it had killed Shaib, whom it called a "fighter", in a targeted strike, accusing him of being part of a Hezbollah intelligence unit, and said he had reported on locations of Israeli soldiers in Lebanon.

Hezbollah, which controls Al Manar, denied Shaib was part of one of its intelligence units.

"The enemy's false claims are nothing but an expression of its weakness and fragility, and a desperate attempt to evade re-

sponsibility for this crime," it said in a statement. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun described the journalists as "civilians doing their professional duty."

"It is a brazen crime that violates all treaties and norms through which journalists enjoy international protection in war," he said in a statement on X.

More than 1,180 people have been killed in Lebanon since US and Israel attacked Iran, according to the country's authorities, who do not otherwise distinguish between civilians and fighters. Al Manar described Shaib as an "icon of resistance reporting." Al Mayadeen, which is widely perceived as editorially aligned with Hezbollah, and Iran's allies and supporters in the region, said Fatima Ftouni had been distinguished by her brave and objective reporting.

In response to the killings, Reporters Without Borders said



Hassan Badran, a local, looks at a house destroyed by an Israeli strike, amid escalating hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, in Saksakiyeh, southern Lebanon, yesterday. (Reuters)

it had been raising the alarm for weeks about the growing risks facing media professionals.

The killings followed the death of Hussain Hamood, a Lebanese freelance journalist working for Al Manar who the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said on X was killed in an Israeli airstrike on Wednesday. At least three other reporters in Lebanon, Iran and Gaza have been killed in Israeli or joint US-Israeli airstrikes since the Iran war began on February 28, CPJ said on Thursday. The US military did not immediately respond to a request for comment, nor did the Israeli military.

An Israeli strike in October 2024 hit a collection of guest-houses housing only reporters in the southern Lebanese town of Hasbaya, killing two journalists from Al Mayadeen and one from Al Manar, prompting global condemnation.



Workers and volunteers at the World Central Kitchen and GIZ NGO's, Souk el Tayeb's Emergency Kitchen initiative prepare meals for displaced people at their kitchen in Sin el Fil, east of Beirut, yesterday. (AFP)



## QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY

INVITATION TO TENDER

### QAFCO ANNOUNCES THE FOLLOWING TENDER

TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER FEE RECEIPT SUBMISSION DATES	TENDER CLOSING DATE (estimated)
RFQ-6000005056	aMDEA Solution Reclamation and Treatment services in Ammonia-5 Plant	500/- (Non-refundable)	60,000 Sixty Thousand Qatari Riyals Only	29.03.2026 30.03.2026 31.03.2026 01.04.2026 02.04.2025	16.04.2026

**GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

- During the period this tender is offered, the interested bidders shall first deposit appropriate Tender Fee amount in cash (Cheque will not be accepted) into Company's following Account at any QNB branch:
  - Account Name : QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY P.S.C. (QAFCO)
  - Account Number : 0013-025828-058
  - IBAN : QA51QNBAA00000000013025828058
  - Bank Name : QATAR NATIONAL BANK
  - RFQ number : 6000005074 and Company Name
- The interested Bidders shall mention their company's name and Tender Number on the payment receipt provided by the bank and submit it as Tender Fee receipt.
- Besides the Tender fee receipt (which should have the Tender Number and bidder's name clearly mentioned on it), interested bidders shall also submit a copy of the valid Commercial Registration, an authorization letter from their company with the name, telephone, fax and e-mail ID of the focal point for this tender (**Very Important**) during the submission of Tender Fee Receipt for ensuring electronic receipt of the Tender Document.
- Tender Fee Receipt along with the specified documents shall be submitted to [purchase@qafco.com.qa](mailto:purchase@qafco.com.qa) on the dates indicated above, after payment of Tender Fee (non refundable).
- After submission of the above documents to the above email, Tender Document will be provided through an electronic platform separately.
- For any queries related to non-receipt of the tender documents after the submission Tender Fee receipt at the QAFCO Supply Chain, you may contact at 'jhafeq@qafco.com.qa' or on 44227740
- Technical & Commercial details and Submission Procedures will be specified in the Tender Documents.
- The Company will not consider any offer without the enclosure of the Tender Bond
- Bids shall be submitted at QAFCO Tender Office, between 0930 – 1100 hours during the Holy month of Ramadan and 0930 – 1130 hours and 1230 – 0000 hours, of any working day of the Company, on/before the "Tender Closing Date".

## West Bank Palestinians bury teenager shot dead by troops

**AFP**  
Dheishah Refugee Camp

Palestinians lined a narrow lane in the occupied West Bank's Dheishah refugee camp yesterday as they laid to rest a teenager shot dead by Israeli forces, with the military saying its troops had fired in response to a threat.



Hanan (second left), the mother of Adham, a 15-year-old Palestinian who was killed by Israeli security forces during a military raid the previous night in the Al-Dheishah refugee camp near the occupied West Bank city of Bethlehem, mourns during his funeral, yesterday. (AFP)

The Ramallah-based Palestinian health ministry identified the 15-year-old as Adham Sayed Saleh Dahman, who died a day earlier from "serious wounds caused by Israeli forces' gunfire", according to the Palestinian news agency Wafa.

Wafa reported that he was killed during a military operation on Friday evening in the camp south of Bethlehem. Dahman was shot in the abdomen, the report said, noting that another Palestinian was also wounded in the incident. "He wanted to work to help me buy a house," said his mother, Hanan Shaalan. "He was in the ninth grade," she said, adding that shortly before he was killed he had told her he wanted to be a chef. Hundreds of men, women and children gathered for Dahman's funeral, with his mother and a group of local men carrying his body through the camp wrapped in Palestinian flag, an AFP correspondent reported.

Raghad Shamroukh, a resident of the camp, said Israeli forces had been entering the area regularly in recent days. "They walk around the camp gate, harassing people for no reason," Shamroukh said. "They fire tear gas, suffocating people. The children run away from them... This time they fired live ammunition." The military said troops were operating overnight in the Bethlehem area when a "violent riot developed," involving stone-throwing at its soldiers.

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## Strike kills three fighters in northern Iraq

A strike in northern Iraq yesterday killed three fighters from the former paramilitary coalition Hashed al-Shaabi, the alliance said, blaming the US and Israel for the attack, AFP reported from Baghdad. Two police officers were also killed and five wounded in a strike on a Mosul police station that the interior ministry also attributed to a US-Israeli attack. Since the Middle East war began on February 28 with US-Israeli strikes on Iran, Iraq has been increasingly drawn into a conflict it had sought to avoid at all costs.

Iraqi armed groups have carried out drone and rocket attacks against multiple US targets, including the embassy in Baghdad. Strikes have also targeted bases of Hashed al-Shaabi, also known as the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), integrated into the regular army but containing some pro-Iran factions that have acted independently in the past. The PMF has previously blamed these attacks on the US. Three PMF fighters were killed and four wounded, according to the group, in the "treacherous Zionist-US attack" near Kirkuk city's international airport.

# Nigeria's ruling party gets prepared for 2027 national elections

AFP  
Abuja

Nigeria's ruling party rallied around its leadership early yesterday at its first major get-together ahead of next year's national elections as the country battles a resurgence of militant violence.

More than 8,000 All Progressives Congress (APC) leaders and delegates endorsed the return of the party chairman and other office-holders by consensus in an overnight election in the capital, Abuja, ahead of primaries later this year.

Africa's most populous country is due to hold national elections on January 16, 2027, in which President Bola Tinubu, 73, is expected to seek a second term.

The APC national convention — held under tight security in Abuja until the early hours of yesterday — took place in the wake of a rise in militant assaults on military bases and civilian targets since last year, which has caused international alarm and prompted the United States of President Donald Trump to wade in.

In some of the latest major attacks, 11 soldiers were killed in an ambush this week in the north-western Kebbi state, while the previous week, triple suicide bomb attacks killed 23 and wounded more than 100 in the northeastern city of Maiduguri.

Deteriorating security in the Sahel, the vast region bordering the southern Sahara desert, has enabled militant groups to expand their activities in northwestern Nigeria, which has already battled an insurgency for 17 years.

The northwest region is also buckling under a wave of attacks and kidnappings by criminal gangs.

Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq, whose central Kwara



Nigeria's President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Vice President Kashim Shettima sit inside a designated state house box, during the All Progressives Congress (APC) party's national convention at Eagle Square in Abuja. (Reuters)

state is one of the hardest hit by recent terror attacks, called for a moment of silence in honour of the "victims of insecurity".

**'BRIGHT FUTURE'**  
In a late-night address to the convention, Tinubu did not mention the security crisis the country is facing, but expressed optimism about the "bright future for our nation despite the challenges we face". "We will overcome all difficulties," he added.

When he came into office in 2023, Tinubu introduced reforms that included an end to fuel subsidies and currency controls, leading to the worst economic crisis in a generation.

"We knew the road to reform would be tough," he said.

Formed in an alliance of several parties in 2013, the APC managed to win all elections from 2015 through to 2023 over the

previously long-ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which is struggling with internal splits.

Despite the security woes — which have led Trump to claim that Nigeria's Christians face persecution, drawing a sharp rebuttal from Abuja — Tinubu is still expected to sweep to victory given the mass defections from the PDP in recent months.

**SENSUS VOTE**  
The State-run News Agency of Nigeria said all members of the party's national working committee, whose tenures were "dissolved" at the convention, were returned by consensus, a process long favoured by the party.

They will lead the party for the next four years. Party chair Nentawe Yilwatda from north-central Plateau state, long troubled by intercommunal clashes, vowed to "build a Pan-African



Supporters of Nigeria's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) wave flags during the party's national convention at Eagle Square in Abuja, Nigeria. (Reuters)



Delegates and supporters of the ruling All Progressives Congress party arrive at Eagle Square, during the party's national convention, in Abuja. (Reuters)

and Pan-Nigerian party".

The ruling party now controls 31 of Nigeria's 36 states, up from 21 in 2023. The party's ranks were buoyed by a wave of defections,

particularly by governors from the southeast and oil-rich Niger delta, regions where it had struggled to gain ground.

The APC first came to power

in 2015 when former president Muhammadu Buhari, backed by Tinubu, defeated incumbent Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP, which holds its convention today.

# Death toll from Kenyan floods rises to 108

Reuters  
Nairobi

Weeks of heavy rains and flooding have now killed 108 people in Kenya, the National Police Service said yesterday in an updated death toll.

Flash floods, which began on the evening of March 6, have caused widespread destruction in the East African nation, sweeping away dozens of vehicles, disrupting air travel, and damaging power infrastructure.

Over 2,700 families have been displaced across the country, authorities said on Friday.

While the intensity of rainfall has eased in some areas, police cautioned that the risk of flooding persists due to overflowing drainage systems and waterlogged ground.



File photo shows people stand near the wreckage of a vehicle destroyed following heavy rainfall in the Grogan area, popular for automotive workshops and secondhand spare parts, in downtown Nairobi, Kenya. (Reuters)

# Eswatini govt repatriates Cambodian deported from US

AFP  
Mbabane

A Cambodian man, deported by the United States to Eswatini under a programme to transfer illegal migrants to a third country, was repatriated this week, the southern African kingdom said yesterday.

Since the middle of last year, Eswatini has received and incarcerated 15 men deported by Washington, under an agreement in which it commits to eventually take in 160 people deemed undesirable by US President Donald Trump's administration in exchange for \$5.1mn.

The Cambodian is the second of

the 15 men to be repatriated to his country, after a Jamaican in 2025.

A government statement spoke of the "successful repatriation of Mr Pheap Rom, one of the third country nationals received from the United States of America, to his country of origin, the Kingdom of Cambodia, this week".

In September, Human Rights Watch said the US expulsions carried out under "opaque agreements" breached international law and should be rejected.

Lawyers in Eswatini have repeatedly warned that they have been systematically denied access to people expelled by the United States and that these individuals were detained without any charges.

# South Africa's cattle farmers struggle amid foot-and-mouth crisis

AFP  
Humansdorp

Pointing at a calf lying motionless in a green field in South Africa's Eastern Cape province, farmer Igsahn Felix let out a heavy sigh.

"That one is not going to make it," he said.

Home to more than two head of cattle per person, the province is the beating heart of South Africa's livestock industry.

But its endless expanses have been swept by panic since an outbreak of highly contagious foot-and-mouth disease, which was declared a national disaster in February. The government in January rolled out a 10-year drive to vaccinate nearly 20mn cattle against the highly contagious and sometimes deadly viral infection.

But farmers like Felix, who is based near the town of Humansdorp, accused the government of allowing the crisis to escalate until it had gone too far.

Nearly 1,000 outbreaks have been reported in South Africa, affecting all of nine provinces. The disease has also been reported in neighbouring Botswana, Eswatini and Zimbabwe in recent months.

On the side of a dirt road near Felix's farm, a large signpost warned ominously: "Foot-and-



Cattle gather ahead of their milking at the Grass Ridge Dairy in Oyster Bay, South Africa. Right: File photo shows Igsahn Felix (right) prying open the mouth of one of his cows infected with the foot-and-mouth disease at his farm in Humansdorp, as one of his farm hands looks on. (AFP)

mouth disease control area".

Every passing vehicle had to be sprayed with a chemical solution to stop the spread of the virus, which can remain up to six months in cow dung. Of the 245 animals belonging to the farmers' co-operative of which Felix is a member, 128 have fallen ill and 14 did not survive.

Foot-and-mouth causes fever and blisters near the hoof and in the mouth that prevent animals from feeding, as seen in the emaciated survivors.

For several weeks the area, about 100 kilometres from the town of Gqeberha, formerly called

Port Elizabeth, has been under a quarantine prohibiting any sale or slaughter of meat.

**HIGH COSTS**  
Felix's group of 22 subsistence farmers earn about 540,000 rands (over \$32,000) in a normal year. Their losses from foot-and-mouth have already cost them 180,000 rands.

"If we were vaccinated early enough, the disease wouldn't have been here and we would have not lost that much money," Felix said.

Adding to the costs was the expensive fodder that farmers had to buy while their herds were

unable to graze in the open fields.

Except for the state-sponsored vaccinations, farmers have to carry the financial burden of the outbreak themselves, said cattle breeder Doane Kaizer, who has about 60 cows.

"Sanitisation has a cost too," he said. "I am sure the government can do more. Things need to step up a bit."

The outbreak has led South African beef to be banned in Zambia and China, a key importer.

It was also the reason given by agriculture minister John Steenhuisen in February when

he announced he would not seek re-election as leader of the second-largest party, the centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA).

"My next chapter must be to eradicate this devastating disease from our shores once and for all," said Steenhuisen, whose handling of the crisis has been sharply criticised. The outbreak put Steenhuisen — and his party, which draws significant support from farmers — in "a weak position", said political analyst Susan Booysens, with local government elections later this year.

"He might even lose his cabinet status," she said.

## VACCINATION DRIVE

South Africa lost its status as a foot-and-mouth-free country in 2019, with outbreaks from 2021 spreading across the country.

It finally received 2.5mn imported vaccine doses in late February for the virus strains currently spreading. "This is going to be our test because this vaccine has never been used in this country before," said veterinarian Anthony Davis, a member of a dedicated government vaccination task force.

Humansdorp already suffered heavy losses during the previous foot-and-mouth crisis in 2024, which cost between five and 7mn rands (around \$300,000 to \$420,000) for every 1,000 dairy cows, said Rufus Dreyer, one of the farmers severely affected.

The blow comes as farmers in the Eastern Cape recover from months of severe drought.

There are fears the virus will spread to the country's third-largest dairy, Woodlands Dairy, also located in Humansdorp.

The dairy employs more than 1,000 people and the economic impact of an outbreak would be "huge", warned deputy mayor Timothy Jantjes.

With the easily spread virus even carried by the wind, the Eastern Cape — which has over 4mn head of cattle, more than any other province — was holding its breath.



# US House passes DHS funding bill after Republicans reject Senate deal

AFP/Reuters  
Washington

US House Republicans rejected a bipartisan Senate deal to temporarily fund the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and instead passed their own funding measure late on Friday, extending a weeks-long budget standoff that has disrupted travel.

The stopgap bill, which proposes funding the DHS in full for eight weeks, passed by 213 to 203 votes after Republicans in the lower chamber refused to take up a Senate-passed deal that excluded money for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol.

It essentially prolongs a standoff that has forced thousands of airport security staff to work without pay, even as the White House said President Donald Trump ordered that the personnel finally be compensated.

A funding measure "that locks in the status quo is dead on arrival in the Senate, and Republicans know it," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said in a

statement. "Democrats will fund critical Homeland Security functions - but we will not give a blank cheque to Trump's lawless and deadly immigration militia without reforms."

The late-night vote came after House Speaker Mike Johnson called the earlier bipartisan Senate bill a "joke" for withholding money for the agencies responsible for carrying out Trump's controversial deportation crackdown.

House Republicans instead introduced competing legislation that would fully fund Transportation Security Administration (TSA) staff, as well as immigration agents and Border Patrol personnel.

Both chambers must pass the same version of a bill before it can go to the president's desk.

With the lapse in federal funding - and weeks of chaos at American airports - expected to be extended, the White House said Trump signed a memorandum on Friday ordering his administration to resolve the "unprecedented emergency situation" and find the funds necessary to pay TSA salaries.

Before the House approved the funding

bill, the DHS - which oversees multiple agencies including the TSA - posted on X that "TSA officers should begin seeing paycheques as early as Monday, March 30".

A partial government shutdown has left TSA staff - who screen passengers, baggage and cargo - without pay since mid-February.

The stalemate has led to crushing delays.

At Houston's international airport, security lines stretched far into the distance and airport staff handed out bottles of water, an AFP reporter saw on Friday.

The funding dispute centres on demands by Democrats for reforms to the ICE, an agency facing nationwide criticism for its aggressive tactics.

Senators had voted early on Friday to fund the DHS, except for the ICE and US Border Patrol, for 2026.

That bill would have provided funding for the TSA, the US Coast Guard and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Fema), among other operations.

It did not include Democrats' proposed reforms.

The lack of ICE or Border Patrol funding

would not have barred those agencies from conducting their operations because the Republican-controlled Congress directed substantial extra funding to both agencies in 2025.

Johnson said that Republicans would not go along with the Senate's effort, criticising it for being too close to the Democrat position.

"This gambit that was done last night is a joke," Johnson told reporters, complaining that the Senate bill, which passed unanimously, left US borders unsecured.

The top Republican and Trump ally said he spoke to the president who "understands exactly what we're doing and why, and he supports it".

The passing of the bill comes before the Senate embarks on a two-week break, with the House beginning its own from Friday, potentially meaning more dragged-out pain for air travelers and TSA workers.

Trump previously said he would not sign a funding deal unless Congress also passes a contentious bill to overhaul how citizens register to vote in US elections.

Republicans hold a majority in both congressional chambers, but due to Senate rules,

a certain number of Democratic votes would be required to pass budget bills.

Top House Democrat Hakeem Jeffries said his party was seeking to force a House vote on the Senate's bipartisan measure.

The political fight has strained TSA services.

Nearly 500 transportation security officers have quit, according to the White House, and unscheduled absences have surged since the partial shutdown began.

Airline officials had told Reuters that the problem could worsen this weekend if there were no concrete details on how TSA officers would be paid.

The agency's acting chief, Ha McNeill, said this week that some agents have been sleeping in their cars at airports to save gas money and selling blood and taking on second jobs to make ends meet.

Locked out of power in Washington, Democrats have forced two government shutdowns in the past six months.

Neither delivered the results they sought, as they failed to secure expiring health subsidies last November and came out of the latest standoff without a deal on immigration enforcement.

# Protests launch on 'No Kings' day

Reuters/AFP  
Washington

Massive protests against President Donald Trump kicked off yesterday across the United States and beyond, as millions of people vented their fury over what they see as his authoritarian bent and law-trampling governance.

More than 3,200 events are planned in all 50 states.

It is the third time in less than a year that Americans have taken to the streets as part of a grassroots movement called "No Kings", the most vocal and visual conduit for opposition to Trump since he began his second term in January 2025.

Now they have something new to fume over - the war against Iran that Trump launched alongside Israel, with ever-shifting goals and timelines for completion.

US protests began in several cities including Washington, Boston and Atlanta, where thousands of people gathered in a park to decry authoritarianism.

Morgan Taylor, 45, attended the Washington protest with her 12-year-old son, and said she was enraged by Trump's military action in Iran, which she called a "stupid war".

"Nobody's attacking us," she said. "We don't need to be there."

"No country can govern without the consent of the people," 36-year-old military veteran Marc McCaughey told AFP in Atlanta. "We're out here because we feel that the Constitution is under threat in a multitude of different ways. Things aren't normal. They aren't okay."

In the Michigan town of West Bloomfield, near Detroit, people braved below-freezing temperatures to protest.

In northern Virginia just outside Washington, DC, as several hundred people began gathering close to Arlington National Cemetery before a planned march across the Potomac River to the capital city's National Mall, some passing drivers honked their horns in support while others slowed down to berate the protesters.

"You're all idiots," one man shouted from his car.

John Ale, 57, a retired air-conditioning and heating contractor, said that he drove 20 minutes from his home in Virginia to join the march.

"What's happening in this country is unsustainable," he said. "The middle class, the little people, can't afford to live anymore. And he (Trump) is breaking the norms, the things that made us function as a country."

The anti-Trump mood has spilled beyond US borders, with rallies yesterday in European cities including Amsterdam, Madrid and Rome, where 20,000 people marched under a heavy police presence.

"We don't want a world governed by kings... who make decisions from on high," said 29-year-old researcher Andrea Nossa.

The first "No Kings" nationwide protest day came last June on Trump's 79th birthday and coincided with a military parade he organised in Washington.

Several million people turned out, from New York to San Francisco.

The second such protest, in October, drew an estimated 7mn protesters, according to organisers.

The goal now is to bring out even more people this weekend, as Trump's approval rating sinks below 40% and midterm elections



Demonstrators hold signs and cheer by the roadside as part of the 'No Kings' protest in Shelbyville, Kentucky. - AFP



Left: Protesters take part in the 'No Kings Day' rally in Madrid. - AFP



Left: People participate in the 'No Kings' protest in central Athens. - AFP



Right: Protesters attend the 'No Kings' rally near the Washington Monument in Washington, DC. - Reuters



Demonstrators march along the National Mall during the 'No Kings' protest in Washington, DC. - AFP

loom in November, when Trump's Republicans could lose control of both chambers of Congress.

Just as Trump is worshipped by many in his "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) movement, he is disliked with equal passion on the other side of America's wide political chasm.

Foes bemoan his penchant for ruling by executive decree, his use of the Justice Department to prosecute opponents, his apparent obsession with fossil fuels and climate change denial.

They also dislike his gutting of racial and gender diversity programmes, and his taste for flexing US military power after campaigning as a man of peace.

"Since the last time we marched, this administration has dragged us deeper into war," said Naveed Shah of Common Defence, a veterans association connected to the "No Kings" movement.

"At home, we've watched citizens killed in the streets by militarised forces. We've seen families torn apart and immigrant communities targeted," he said. "All of it done in the name of one man trying to rule like a king."

Organisers say more than 3,000 rallies are planned, in major cities, suburbs and rural areas - even in the Alaskan town of Kotzebue, above the Arctic circle.

Minnesota is a key focal point, months after becoming ground



Left: A person carries several US flags upside down during the 'No Kings' protest in Boston, Massachusetts. - Reuters

Right: A protester with the words 'Uncle Scam' on their costume at the protest in New York City. - Reuters



Protesters hold placards styled as playing cards during the 'No Kings' demonstration in Rome. - Reuters

zero for the national debate over Trump's violent immigration crackdown.

Legendary rocker Bruce Springsteen, a fierce critic of the president, was scheduled to perform his song *Streets of Minneapolis* in the twin city of St Paul, the capital of the northern state.

Springsteen wrote and recorded the protest ballad in just 24 hours in memory of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, two US citizens shot dead by federal agents during January protests against Trump's immigration offensive.

What began in 2025 as a simple day of defiance has mushroomed into a "No Kings" movement of national resistance to Trump.

Organisers say two-thirds of those who planned to rally yesterday do not live in big cities, which in America are often Democratic strongholds - a data point that is up sharply since the last protest.

"The defining story of this (weekend's) mobilisation is not just how many people are protesting, but where they are protesting," said Leah Greenberg, co-founder of Indivisible, the group that started the "No Kings" movement last year and led planning of yesterday's events.

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson has dismissed the rallies as "Trump Derangement Therapy Sessions" of interest only to journalists.

## Vance says he's obsessed with UFOs

US Vice-President JD Vance has vowed to plumb US government information about unidentified flying objects (UFOs), adding that in his view, aliens are in fact demons.

"I have not been able to spend enough time on this to really understand it, but I am going to, trust me. I'm obsessed with this," a laughing Vance told the conservative podcaster Benny Johnson. "I've still got three more years as vice-president. I will get to the bottom of the UFO files."

Johnson had asked about President Donald Trump's order to federal agencies in February to begin "identifying and releasing" government files related to UFOs and aliens.

Trump said he was taking the step "based on the tremendous interest shown", the same month that former president Barack Obama said publicly that aliens were "real", though he had not seen them.

Regarding those statements, Trump told reporters that Obama "gave classified information, he is not supposed to be doing that".

Vance for his part told Johnson on Friday: "I don't think they're aliens. I think they're demons", describing this as a Christian understanding of "celestial beings who fly around who do weird things to people".

No evidence has been produced of intelligent life beyond Earth.

Interest in UFOs and related phenomena has been renewed in recent years as the US government investigated numerous reports of seemingly supernatural aircraft, amid worries that adversaries could be testing highly advanced technologies.

In March 2024, the Pentagon released a report saying it had no proof that unidentified aerial phenomena were alien technology, with many suspicious sightings turning out to be merely weather balloons, spy planes, satellites and other normal activity. - AFP

## Meta's longtime content policy chief leaving

Meta's long-time content policy chief Monika Bickert, who oversaw the writing and enforcement of Facebook's content policies and had a role in the company's approach to user safety issues, is leaving the company for a job at Harvard Law School.

Bickert will stay at Meta until August and work on a transition plan with Kevin Martin, who oversees Meta's global policy team, she wrote in an internal post viewed by Reuters on Friday, which said she had long been interested in teaching.

As head of content policy, Bickert has regularly served as Meta's public face amid controversies over its handling of political content and teen mental health.

A former federal prosecutor, she joined Facebook in 2012.

The company later changed its name to Meta.

"Yes, we're a business and we make profit, but the idea that we do so at the expense of people's safety or well-being misunderstands where our own commercial interests lie," she wrote in 2021 after the leak of documents by former Meta employee Frances Haugen.

In a statement, Meta chief global affairs officer Joel Kaplan praised Bickert's work at the company. - Reuters

## Secret Service agent assigned to Jill Biden shoots himself in the leg

A US Secret Service agent assigned to former first lady Jill Biden accidentally shot himself in the leg early on Friday near Philadelphia International Airport, according to a source familiar with the incident.

In a statement that did not mention Biden, the Secret Service said the incident occurred at 8.30am EST and the agent suffered a non-life-threatening injury.

"There was no impact to the protectee's movement and they were not present at the time of the incident," the statement said.

The agent "accidentally discharged his firearm" while traveling in an unmarked SUV near the airport, Philadelphia Police Department Corporal Jasmine Colón-Reilly said in a statement.

Emergency medical personnel responded to the scene and the agent was transported to Penn Presbyterian Medical Centre in stable condition.

"The Secret Service's Office of Professional Responsibility will be reviewing the facts and circumstances of this incident," the Secret Service said.

The Secret Service is responsible for providing security to current and former presidents, vice-presidents and their families and foreign leaders and is also an investigative agency. - Reuters

# Trump says 'Cuba is next' while touting US military successes

AFP/Reuters  
Washington/Miami

US President Donald Trump said on Friday that "Cuba is next" in his latest threat against the Caribbean island, as he dismissed concerns that recent American military actions would cost him political support.

Cuba's communist government has faced mounting pressure from Trump, who imposed a de facto oil blockade in January and mused about "taking" the country.

Speaking at the Saudi-backed FII Priority investment forum in Miami, Trump said that his Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement wanted "strength" and "victory", citing the January raid where US forces seized Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro.

"I built this great military. I said, 'You'll never have to use it,' but sometimes you have to use it," Trump said.

"And Cuba is next, by the way," he added. "But pretend I didn't say that."

Trump did not specify what he planned to do with Cuba, telling the media to "disregard that statement" before repeating "Cuba's next" to laughter from the audience.

In his Friday speech, the Republican president also made a teasing comment dubbing the Strait of Hormuz the "Strait of Trump".

Cuba's leader Miguel Diaz-Canel said last week that any external aggressor would face "unbreakable resistance", even as the country was hit with two nationwide blackouts in a week.

Cuba has been under a US trade embargo since shortly after Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution.

Relations thawed in recent years but have plunged again since Trump took office for his second term, with the US president seeking to tighten Washington's grip on Latin America.

A top Cuban diplomat earlier said Havana was willing to continue talking with Washington, but discussing changes to its political system was out of the question.

Prior to the US operation to capture now-deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro in January, Venezuela had provided much of Cuba's oil needs, but Caracas' new government, under pressure from Washington, has ended those shipments.

Earlier in March, Trump had



A woman and a man aim rifles during military training in Havana. - AFP

said Cuba may be subject to a "friendly takeover", before adding: "It may not be a friendly takeover."

## Mexico locates missing boats transporting aid to Cuba

Two sailboats that went missing while carrying humanitarian aid from Mexico to Cuba have been located by the Mexican navy and their crews are safe, officials and organisers said on yesterday.

The navy said yesterday that one of its aircraft spotted the sailboats - Tiger Moth and Friend Ship - 80 nautical miles northwest of Havana.

The crews reported that they were in good health but had been slowed by unfavourable weather conditions, particularly adverse winds.

A Mexican naval ship is now escorting the vessels to ensure their safe arrival in Havana, the navy added.

Naval authorities did not specify the identities or nationalities of the boats' crew members, but said they were maintaining communication with rescue agencies in Poland, France, Cuba and the United States.

The two boats are part of a convoy seeking to deliver food, medicine, baby formula and other supplies to the Caribbean's largest island, amid a US blockade on shipments of oil and other supplies that has worsened power outages and led the state to ration services.

"The vessels are continuing their journey to Havana," a spokesman for the Nuestra America Convoy told Reuters. "The Convoy remains on track to complete its mission - delivering urgently needed humanitarian aid to the Cuban people."

"We are relieved to confirm that the two sailboats have been located by the Mexican Navy, the crews are safe, and the vessels are continuing their journey to Havana," the spokesperson told AFP.

The sailboats went missing after leaving Mexico's Isla Mujeres on March 21 and had been expected to arrive in the Cuban capital on March 24 or 25.

On Friday Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel voiced concern about their disappearance and said his country was doing everything to find them.

The US Coast Guard initially told French press agency AFP on Friday that the boats had been found but later recanted its statement, saying that a search was still underway, prompting confusion.

The Nuestra America - "Our America" in Spanish - coalition includes nearly 300 organisations from more than 30 countries, among them non-governmental groups, unions, political parties and lawmakers.

The group has already delivered approximately 20 tonnes of aid by air and by sea to Cuba, including food, medicine, solar panels and bicycles. - Reuters/AFP

## ICAO limits use of power banks to two per passenger on flights

The United Nations aviation agency has said that the use of power banks, or portable, rechargeable battery packs, would be limited to two per passenger on flights effective on Friday as part of new rules for using the devices while in the air.

Passengers will also be prohibited from recharging the power banks during flights,

the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) said in a statement.

Airlines such as the Lufthansa Group and countries like South Korea had already been introducing restrictions on the use of power banks on flights, following incidents like a fire on an Air Busan plane in 2025.

The US Federal Aviation Administration

(FAA) was not immediately available for comment.

Montreal-based ICAO normally sets global standards for aviation that are mostly approved by its 193-member states; however, the new specifications regarding power banks are effective immediately. - Reuters

## Artemis astronauts enter final preparations for Moon mission

Reuters/AFP  
Washington

The four astronauts selected for Nasa's Artemis II mission arrived in Florida on Friday, entering the final phase of preparations for the first crewed journey toward the Moon in more than five decades.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch, and Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen hopped out of Northrop T-38 jets that they flew from Houston, Texas, to Nasa's Kennedy Space Centre, where they could launch to space as soon as April 1 aboard Nasa's towering Space Launch System (SLS) rocket.

They will ride inside an Orion crew capsule built to carry humans into deep space. The roughly 10-day mission will send the crew on a high-speed loop around the Moon and back.

"Let's go to the Moon!" exclaimed mission commander Wiseman as the crew arrived.

"The nation and the world have been waiting a long time to do this again," he told reporters after landing at Kennedy Space Centre, adding that he and his crewmates "are really pumped to go do this".

"It has been a lot of work. It's been a great journey, it's great to be down here in the Florida warm air," he added.

Artemis II will be the first crewed mission of Nasa's multi-billion-dollar Artemis programme.

While it will not attempt a Moon landing, it will send astronauts farther from Earth than any previous human spaceflight, testing the Orion spacecraft's life-support systems, navigation, communications and heat shield performance.



Left: Nasa's next-generation moon rocket, the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket with the Orion crew capsule, sits on Pad 39B ahead of a second launch attempt at the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida. - Reuters



Right: Nasa astronaut and Artemis II commander Reid Wiseman (left) with Nasa astronaut and Artemis II mission specialist Christina Koch, Canadian Space Agency astronaut and Artemis II mission specialist Jeremy Hansen, and Nasa astronaut and Artemis II pilot Victor Glover (right) are seen during a welcome ceremony ahead of the Artemis II launch at Kennedy Space Centre in Florida. - AFP

Boeing is the prime contractor for the SLS core stage, Northrop Grumman builds the rocket's solid-fuel boosters, and Lockheed Martin produces the Orion spacecraft.

The crew has spent more than two years training for the mission since being named in 2023.

They have been in standard preflight quarantine at Nasa's Johnson Space Centre in Houston since March 18 and are scheduled to move into Nasa's Astronaut Crew Quarters in Florida ahead of launch.

Glover, the mission's pilot, will become the first black astronaut to travel to the Moon's vicinity.

Koch will be the first woman to do so, while Hansen will be the first non-American astronaut to go beyond low Earth orbit.

All of the crew members except Hansen have previously been in space.

Wiseman, the mission commander, told reporters last year that the crew were prepared for all eventualities.

"When we get off the planet, we might come right back home, we might spend

three or four days around Earth, we might go to the Moon - that's where we want to go," Wiseman said. "But it is a test mission, and we're ready for every scenario."

Nasa's SLS, a mammoth orange-and-white rocket, is designed to allow the United States to repeatedly return to the Moon in years to come, with the goal of establishing a permanent base that will offer a stepping stone for further exploration.

"The rocket is ready. We are ready. Nasa is ready. This vehicle is definitely ready to go," Wiseman said.



People attend the press preview of the exhibition 'Raphael: Sublime Poetry' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. - AFP

## Raphael honoured at New York's Met museum

Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and now Raphael: New York's prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art is dedicating a retrospective to the third of the great masters of the Italian Renaissance.

The exhibition opening today traces Raffaello di Giovanni Santi's journey, from his training in his native city of Urbino, in central Italy, to the papal court in Rome before his death in 1520 at age 37.

Highlights include the first painting he completed entirely on his own, as well as tapestries designed for the Sistina Chapel.

Carmen Bambach, a specialist in the Italian Renaissance, curated 175 works by Raphael for the first major exhibition devoted to the painter in the United States.

"If we only look at his paint-

ings, we see this supreme, sublime beauty and perfection," she told AFP.

By placing them side by side with his preparatory drawings, visitors can better understand Raphael's creative process.

"They're very intimate. We really seem to be right there looking over his shoulder and seeing him try out things," Bambach said.

She noted that the human figures depicted by Raphael served as "the model for 300 years" for generations of artists.

Italian-American actress Isabella Rossellini lends her voice to an audio guide for the exhibition, which brings together works from museums including France's Louvre.

"Raphael: Sublime Poetry" runs through June 28, 2026. - AFP

## Bank of America to pay \$72.5mn to settle Epstein accusers' lawsuit

The Bank of America (BoA) has agreed to pay \$72.5mn to settle a class action lawsuit alleging that the bank facilitated a trafficking ring orchestrated by Jeffrey Epstein.

Lawyers for the bank and the women had told Manhattan-based US District Judge Jed Rakoff this month that they had reached a "settlement in principle" but terms of the deal were not disclosed at the time.

In a joint court filing, David Boies and Bradley Edwards, attorneys for the plaintiffs, said the settlement represented the best option for their clients "given that many class (action) members suffered

harm many years ago and are in need of financial relief now".

The judge scheduled a court hearing for Thursday to consider approving the deal.

The suit, filed by an unidentified woman on behalf of herself and other alleged victims, claimed the bank's executives "ignored red flags" about Epstein's trafficking venture to provide him with banking and investment services.

The BoA was the latest bank to settle lawsuits from Epstein's alleged victims, after a \$75mn agreement by JP Morgan and a reported \$75mn payment by Deutsche Bank, both in 2023. - Reuters/AFP

## Arctic sea ice at its lowest level ever this winter

AFP  
Washington

Arctic sea ice reached its lowest level ever recorded, statistically tying last year's record, a leading US climate observatory for this geopolitically significant region said on Thursday.

The ice is formed by seawater that freezes through the winter. It partially melts through the summer.

However, the amount of reformation each winter is in decline, as rising temperatures due to climate change disproportionately affect the Arctic.

This year's maximum ice level was reached on March 15 - a week earlier than last year.

The ice clocked in just below last year's level at 14.29mn sq kilometres, a statistical tie with last year's all-time record low of 14.31mn sq

kilometres, according to the National Snow and Ice Data Centre (NSIDC) in Boulder, Colorado.

It is the lowest level observed in 48 years of satellite monitoring. Previous records were set in 2016, 2017, and 2018.

This year's weak ice formation "gives a head start to the spring and summer melt season", said NSIDC senior researcher Walt Meier.

Samantha Burgess of the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) had a similar analysis in a recent conversation with AFP, saying that it may trigger a "potentially faster and more extensive summer melt".

The weak ice growth was visible on satellite for weeks, as AFP reported earlier in March.

Unlike land-based ice - such as glaciers or ice sheets - melting sea ice does not directly raise sea levels.

However, it does cause wide-ranging climate impacts that threaten ecosystems.

Many species, including polar bears in the

Arctic and emperor penguins in Antarctica, rely on sea ice to breed and feed.

Some effects can cascade.

"There are areas, for example, in the Beaufort Sea, near Canada or the Siberian seas of the ocean, that had never been exposed to the atmosphere," says Gilles Garric, a polar oceanographer at Mercator Ocean Toulouse.

That exposure, in turn, could make these waters warmer in the summer.

The melt also has geopolitical consequences, as it opens new shipping routes and access to mineral resources.

Since returning to the White House, Donald Trump has said he wants Greenland.

"From a geopolitical perspective, the climate change-induced melting of sea ice is turning the Arctic into the new Mediterranean: a common shared maritime resource surrounded by competing states," Elizabeth Chalecki, an expert on climate change and security, told AFP.



## Indonesia says 'positive' talks with Iran to let tankers pass Hormuz

AFP  
Jakarta

Indonesia is in talks with Iran to secure safe passage for its tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, with Tehran responding favourably to Jakarta's diplomatic efforts, a foreign ministry spokesman said yesterday.

US-Israeli strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliatory response in the Gulf have sent global oil prices soaring, with Iran maintaining a hold on the vital waterway.

Indonesian tankers Pertamina Pride and Gamsunoro, owned by a subsidiary of state energy firm Pertamina, remain in the Gulf, a company spokesperson said.

The Indonesian government

and its embassy in Tehran have held talks with the Iranian embassy in Jakarta and relevant parties in Tehran, which has responded positively to allow the ships to safely pass through the strait, foreign ministry spokesman Vahd Nabyl Achmad Mulachela said.

"The Iran embassy (in Jakarta) has conveyed the Iran government's favourable consideration regarding the safe passage of Pertamina Group's vessels in the Strait of Hormuz," he told AFP.

Pertamina will carry out some preparations to follow up on Tehran's "positive" response, he said, including ensuring that the crews are prepared and being insured.

"The foreign ministry and the

Indonesian embassy in Tehran will continue to coordinate with all relevant parties in an effort to ensure the safe passage of Pertamina-owned vessels through the Strait of Hormuz," Vahd said.

Pertamina International Shipping is in talks with the foreign ministry to ensure its tankers can transit safely through the Strait of Hormuz, acting corporate secretary Vega Pita told AFP.

Pertamina Pride is carrying crude for domestic use, while Gamsunoro is carrying fuel oil to serve "external" consumers, Vega said, without disclosing further details.

Vega said the company's priority was to ensure the crews' safety and the security of the vessels and their cargo.

## Thai PM says reached deal with Iran for vessels to transit Hormuz Strait

AFP  
Bangkok

Thailand has reached an agreement with Iran to allow Thai oil vessels safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz, the southeast Asian nation's prime minister said yesterday.

Iranian forces have effectively slowed shipping through the strait to a trickle during the Middle East war, which began on February 28.

"An agreement has been reached to allow Thai oil tankers to transit safely through the Strait of Hormuz," Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told a news conference, adding that the development would alleviate con-

cerns over fuel imports.

"With this agreement in place, there is greater confidence that disruptions like those seen in early March will not recur," he added.

More than 80% of the crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) that passes through the Strait of Hormuz heads to Asia, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

Anutin apologised for the public disruption caused by fuel price management, adding that it was hoped "the conflict might be short-lived".

"The government will continue to adapt to evolving situations and adjust measures to minimise the impact on the public," Anutin said.

A Thai bulk carrier travelling in

the waterway was attacked this month and three of its crew members went missing.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow said at the news conference with Anutin that "Iran has very recently indicated that it reached the vessel, but cannot confirm the condition of the three crew members".

Commodities shipping through the Strait of Hormuz plunged 95% between March 1 and 26 after the start of the war, according to the maritime tracking platform Kpler.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said on Friday they had turned back three ships trying to transit the Strait of Hormuz, adding that the route was closed to vessels travelling to and from ports linked to its "enemies".



Children play online games against each other on smartphones and tablets along an alley in Jakarta on Thursday. (AFP)

## Indonesia begins social media ban for under-16s

AFP  
Jakarta

Indonesia began enforcing a social media ban for children under the age of 16 yesterday, after a minister warned digital platforms there was "no room for compromise".

The southeast Asian nation announced the ban this month citing threats from online pornography, cyberbullying and internet addiction, as concerns grow globally over the impact of social media on children's wellbeing.

Communications minister Meutya Hafid said at a press conference late Friday that digital platforms X and Bigo Live have fully complied with the new rules and adjusted their minimum user age in line with the regulation.

Other digital platforms operating in the country should "immediately align their products, features and services with applicable regulations," Meutya said.

"We reiterate that there is no

room for compromise regarding compliance, and that every business entity operating in Indonesia is required to adhere to the laws in force within the country."

TikTok said in a statement late Friday that it was committed to complying with the regulation including "taking appropriate measures related to under-16 accounts" in close consultation with the ministry.

Indonesia's ban follows a similar policy in Australia implemented in December — signs that the global reckoning over social media's potential harms to children is gathering steam.

A Los Angeles jury on Wednesday found Meta and YouTube liable for harming a young woman through the "addictive design" of their platforms, ordering the companies to pay \$6mn in damages.

Britain's upper house of parliament voted this week in favour of banning children from social media, adding pressure on the government to follow suit.

## Manila, Beijing resume talks on South China Sea

Reuters  
Manila/Hanoi

The Philippines and China have resumed high-level talks this week over the disputed South China Sea, exploring preliminary steps toward oil and gas co-operation while addressing energy and fertiliser supply issues amid the ongoing Middle East conflict, the Philippine foreign ministry said. The 11th round of talks under a bilateral consultation mechanism established in 2017 was the first such meeting since January 2025.

Manila "firmly reiterated its principled positions," raising concerns about incidents threatening Filipino personnel and fishermen, and underscoring the

importance of diplomacy, communication, and adherence to international law, the ministry said in a statement yesterday.

Both sides discussed initial exchanges on oil and gas co-operation and emphasised stable energy and fertiliser access. The talks come after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr declared a state of national energy emergency earlier this week, citing oil supply disruptions due to the Middle East conflict and announcing efforts to diversify fuel imports, including sourcing from China.

The talks also addressed renewable energy, agriculture, trade, and potential people-to-people initiatives, such as visa-free travel and direct air routes, the ministry said. The Philippines added both sides "continued to make progress" to shore up confidence at sea.

In a separate statement, Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Sun Weidong called for "concrete actions" from the Philippines to improve ties. Further consultations between the countries' foreign ministers are planned for later this year.

Beijing's expansive claims over the South China Sea overlap with the exclusive economic zones of multiple southeast Asian nations, including the Philippines.

Recent maritime confrontations have heightened tensions, with Manila accusing Beijing of "dangerous manoeuvres" and deploying water cannon to interfere with its resupply missions in contested areas.

The meeting also marked the first broader discussion on bilateral relations since March 2023, the Philippine ministry said.

## Thailand will have new government next week, says PM

Reuters  
Bangkok

Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said yesterday that he expected the country to have a new government next week, with a list of new cabinet members to be submitted for royal endorsement tomorrow.

The new government will move quickly to deliver a policy statement to parliament so it can begin its work, Anutin told a press conference.

The policy statement is expected to take place around April

**The policy statement is expected to take place around April 7-9, and will be mostly based on the election promises of Anutin's party, including the next phase of a consumer subsidy scheme**

7-9, and will be mostly based on the election promises of Anutin's Bhumjaithai Party, including the next phase of a consumer subsidy scheme, deputy party leader Siripong Angkasakulkiat told Reuters.

Anutin apologised to the public for the turmoil caused by the way oil prices have been managed in the first half of March.

The government initially held

prices steady for 15 days to try to ease the burden on the public, but as the war in the Middle East dragged on, it was necessary to adopt more appropriate measures to mitigate the impact, he said.

The government has stopped capping oil prices and is planning an oil tax cut, along with other support measures, to ease the impact of rising oil prices.

## South Korea to co-sponsor UN resolution on N Korea rights

AFP  
Seoul

South Korea will co-sponsor an annual UN resolution on North Korean human rights, its foreign ministry said late yesterday, despite some expectations Seoul might refrain from backing it to improve ties with Pyongyang.

North Korea has long been accused by the UN and other critics of widespread rights abuses, including running prison camps and severely restricting freedom of expression and access to information, while little is known about its criminal justice system.

Despite repeated overtures by South Korea's dovish President Lee Jae Myung, North Korea has

**North Korea has long been accused by the UN and other critics of widespread rights abuses and severely restricting freedom of expression and access to information**

recently and formally labelled Seoul its "most hostile entity" and warned it would respond "mercilessly" to any perceived provocations.

Seoul has decided to "take part as a co-sponsor of the North Korean human rights resolution", the foreign ministry said in a statement sent to AFP.

The decision was "based on the stance of cooperating with the international community to bring about substantive improvements in the human rights of the

North Korean people, and following consultations among relevant government agencies", it added.

The announcement came days after — and despite — comments by Seoul's unification minister Chung Dong-young, who suggested Seoul should withhold support for the resolution as Pyongyang sees it as a fundamentally hostile policy.

The nuclear-armed North has long criticised the UN resolution, and under the liberal administration of former president Moon

Jae-in, Seoul withheld support between 2019 and 2022 in a bid to improve inter-Korean ties.

South Korea resumed co-sponsorship in 2023 under hawkish ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol.

North Korea has consistently rejected allegations of abuses, accusing the UN of politicising human rights to undermine the regime.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in 2025 that the overall human rights situation in North Korea over the past decade had shown no improvement and in many cases had worsened.

The EU- and Australia-drafted resolution is expected to be adopted at a regular UN Human Rights Council session later this month, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

## Singapore seizes record Asian pangolin scales

AFP  
Singapore

Singapore has seized over 830kg of Asian pangolin scales hidden in a shipment bound for Cambodia, authorities said yesterday, calling it the largest haul of its kind discovered in the city-state.

Falsely declared as "dried fish skin", the scales — estimated to be from more than 2,200 pangolins — were found in 30 bags on December 29 after officials intercepted an inbound lorry carrying sea cargo, Singapore's National Parks Board said in a statement.

The announcement came as Singapore released a report Saturday on the nation's role in tack-



File photo: Pangolin scales being examined following their seizure in Singapore. (AFP)

ling illegal wildlife trade in the shipping sector. "Based on preliminary investigations, the cargo

was transiting through Singapore en route from Indonesia to Cambodia," the statement said.

"This marks the largest seizure of Asian pangolin scales in Singapore to date," it added, noting that investigations are ongoing.

The scales were identified as belonging to Sunda pangolins, a critically endangered species native to Southeast Asia, including Singapore. Pangolins are protected under the wildlife protection treaty CITES, to which Singapore is a signatory. "Singapore adopts a zero-tolerance stance on the illegal trade of endangered wildlife species, and their parts and derivatives," the statement read.

Pangolins are among the world's most endangered species, and their scales are prized in countries like China and Vietnam where they are used in traditional medicine as remedy for various ailments.

## 'Asean summit will focus on Mideast war'

AFP  
Manila

President Ferdinand Marcos said on Friday that an Asean summit the Philippines will host in May will be a streamlined affair, with a focus on how best to handle the economic shocks of the Mideast war.

The May 8-9 meeting of the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian nations will centre around the issues of oil, food and migration, Marcos told reporters after a graduation ceremony for the country's national police.

Marcos said he had consulted with other Asean members about the idea of postponing the summit in the face of an energy crisis that has struck the region hard before

**"What we really need at this time is for leaders to talk about... what do we do, how can we help each other"**

determining to press forward.

"It is a bare bones Asean Summit... We will be talking about three main subjects — about the supply of petroleum and petroleum products, about the supply... and the price of food, and migrant workers," Marcos said.

"What we really need at this time is for leaders to talk about... what do we do, how can we help each other, and what is the Asean position regarding all of these shocks that are coming our way," he said.

Marcos declared on Tuesday a state of "national energy emergency", citing risks to the Philippines' domestic fuel supply created by the war.

The import-dependent archipelago nation of 116mn has seen the price of fuel hit historic highs since the US-Israeli war with Iran forced the partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The war has also affected millions of guest workers from Asean states who are living in countries caught in the crossfire.

It was not immediately clear if other pressing priorities, including the civil war raging in Myanmar or a long-gestating code of conduct between the bloc and China over the South China Sea, would be completely off the table for discussion.



Thai PM Anutin Charnvirakul. (Reuters/File photo)

monitoring the prices of goods and services to prevent excessive hikes.

## 2 India-bound LPG tankers crossing Hormuz out of Gulf, data shows

Reuters  
New Delhi

Two liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tankers, BW Elm and BW Tyr, are crossing the Strait of Hormuz bound for India, according to ship tracking data from LSEG and Kpler.

The US-Israeli war against Iran has all but halted shipping through the strait, but Iran said this week that “non-hostile vessels” may transit the waterway if they coordinate with Iranian authorities.

The two India-flagged vessels have crossed the Gulf area and are in the eastern Strait of Hormuz, the data showed.

India is gradually moving its stranded LPG cargoes out from the strait, with four LPG tankers moved so far - Shivalik, Nanda Devi, Pine Gas, and Jag Vasant.

As of Friday, 20 Indian-flagged ships including five LPG carriers were stranded in the Gulf, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, special secretary in the federal shipping ministry, said.

LPG carriers Jag Vikram, Green Asha and Green Sanvi are still in the western Strait of Hormuz, LSEG data show.

India, the world's second-largest LPG importer, is battling its worst gas crisis in decades, with the government cutting supplies for industries to shield households from any shortage of cooking gas.

The country consumed 33.15mn metric tons of LPG, or cooking gas, last year, with imports accounting for about 60% of demand. About 90% of those imports came from the Middle East. India is also loading LPG onto its empty vessels stranded in the Gulf.

## India opens second international airport in capital

AFP  
New Delhi

India opened a second international airport in the capital New Delhi yesterday, as part of the country's rapid push to expand its air industry.

The Noida International Airport is 75km (45 miles) from the city, and will serve 12mn passengers a year in its initial phase, with the potential to grow to as many as 70mn.

It will also handle cargo, with the capacity to increase operations over time. India's rapidly growing economy, and its 1.4bn people, has opened the door for the country to become the world's fourth-largest air market, including domestic and international travel.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the airport, a greenfield project in Jewar in Uttar Pradesh,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi (front) riding an escalator after the inauguration of the Noida International Airport in Jewar, Uttar Pradesh state, yesterday. (AFP)

the country's most populous state with estimated 243mn people.

Modi said he hoped the airport would become a gateway to the

economic activity in western Uttar Pradesh, creating opportunities for farmers, small businesses and young people,” he said.

It will complement the existing Indira Gandhi International Airport, 15km (9 miles) from the centre. “Together, the two airports will function as an integrated aviation system, easing congestion, expanding passenger capacity, and positioning Delhi NCR (National Capital Region), among leading global aviation hubs,” Modi's office said.

The development of the air industry sector has been a priority for Modi since he came to power in 2014, and launched a drive to boost air links between small towns and megacities.

The number of airports has more than doubled in the past decade — from 74 in 2014 to 157 in 2024, according to aviation ministry figures.

## Protesters rally in London against UK far-right rise

AFP  
London

Tens of thousands of people marched through central London yesterday to protest the far-right, six months after Britain saw one of its largest-ever far-right demonstrations and weeks ahead of key local elections.

Organised by hundreds of groups, including trade unions and anti-racism campaigners the Together Alliance event was billed as the biggest march in UK history to counter the far-right.

London's Metropolitan Police said it was “hard to have an accurate estimate due to how far spread the crowds are” but provided a “rough estimate of around 50,000 people” in attendance.

Protesters carrying placards with slogans like “no to racism” and “you cannot divide us” marched from near Marble Arch to Whitehall near the UK parliament for a planned rally.

A separate pro-Palestinian march was set to converge with the main demonstration, which appeared to have attracted people of all ages from across Britain.

“There's a global toxic climate and the UK is not fighting it,” student Emily Roth, 23, told AFP as she walked the route.

“We're seeing racist incidents everyday and it's not being dealt with. The government is obsessed with immigration but that's not our biggest problem.”

The police said it was deploying a “significant” presence to ensure the protests passed off safely,

though no far-right counter-demonstration was advertised.

The Together Alliance march followed a rally organised last September by far-right activist Tommy Robinson that drew up to 150,000 people, many of whom draped themselves in English and British flags. Robinson is planning a follow-up rally in mid-May.

Yesterday's event also came less than six weeks before voters head to the polls for elections to Scotland's parliament, the devolved assembly in Wales and local councils in London as well as some other parts of England.

Anti-immigration figurehead

Nigel Farage's hard-right Reform UK party, which has been leading in national polls for over a year, is predicted to perform well across the contests.

Robert Gadwick, 48, who had travelled from Bath in western England for yesterday's march, said he was “worried” about Reform's rise. “We've been there with Brexit — it's all the same lies and yet some people decide to believe it,” he told AFP. “We need to speak the truth... voting for Reform is a vote for more chaos and more uncertainty and we certainly don't need more chaos.”

Retiree Rose Batterfield, of

Stratford-upon-Avon in central England, echoed the sentiment, saying the “current political climate” concerned her.

“I don't really recognise Labour anymore,” she said of the country's centre-left ruling party.

“I'm quite stunned really by their immigration proposals,” Batterfield added of Labour's increasingly hardening stance towards asylum-seekers and other immigrants as it tries counter Reform's appeal among its own traditional working class base.

“The idea that you can implement far-right ideas in order to stop the far-right is nonsense.”



Pro-Palestinian and anti-far right protesters holding placards and waving Palestinian and Iranian flags join a rally organised by the Together Alliance and the Palestine Coalition in central London yesterday. (AFP)



Supporters protest against the arrest of Nepal former prime minister K P Sharma Oli in Kathmandu yesterday. (AFP)

## Nepal's former PM arrested over alleged role in protest crackdown

AFP  
Kathmandu

Nepal's former prime minister K P Sharma Oli and ex-home minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested yesterday over their alleged involvement in a deadly crackdown on protesters in September, police said.

The detentions came a day after Prime Minister Balendra Shah and his cabinet were sworn in following the first elections since the 2025 uprising that toppled 74-year-old Oli's government.

“They were arrested this morning and the process will move forward according to the law,” Kathmandu Valley police spokesman Om Adhikari told AFP.

An inquiry commission into the violence found that at least 76 people were killed in the anti-corruption youth uprising on September 8 and 9.

At least 20 young people were killed in a crackdown on the first day of protests, which began over a brief social media ban but tapped into longstanding fury over economic hardship.

The unrest spread nationwide the following day as parliament and government offices were set ablaze, resulting in the collapse of Oli's government.

The government-backed inquiry commission recommended during a caretaker administration that Oli and other officials be prosecuted.

Its report said it was “not established that there was an order to shoot”; but added that “no effort was made to stop or control the firing and, due to their negligent conduct, even minors lost their lives”.

Oli has denied ordering security forces to open fire on protesters.

He told AFP during his failed bid for re-election in the March 5 poll that he blamed “infiltrators” for the violence.

Oli was arrested by police in the capital in the early hours of Saturday.

“They have been arrested for investigation on the protests of September 8 and 9,” Kathmandu district police spokesman Pawan Kumar Bhattarai said.

AFP reporters later saw Oli walk into hospital, dressed in white and surrounded by a heavy police guard.

“He has been admitted at the hospital on doctor's advice,” Bhattarai said. “They will oversee his treatment. He has issues with his heart and kidney.”

Oli's CPN-UML Marxist party called for supporters to stage a “nationwide protest”.

“This is a revengeful act, may the government immediately take this decision back,” senior party leader Mahesh Basset told reporters.

Protests broke out in several parts of the capital with demonstrators burning tyres and demanding Oli's release.

In the capital's Baneshwor area, police fired tear gas as they clashed with the protestors.

“There have been a few incidences, but it is under control,” Nepal police spokesman Abi Narayan Kafle said. Shah, a 35-year-old rapper-turned-politician, and his Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections this month on a platform of youth-driven political change.

Shah's first cabinet meeting on Friday decided to implement the recommendations made by the investigation commission.

“No one is above the law... This is not revenge against anyone, just the beginning of justice. I believe, now the country will take a new direction,” new Home Minister Sudan Gurung, a key figure in the protests, posted on Instagram.

## Narelle still disrupting Australia LNG as it weakens

### Port of Dampier reopens, but general cargo operations suspended

Reuters  
Sydney

Ex-Tropical Cyclone Narelle further disrupted production at two of Australia's biggest liquefied natural gas plants on Saturday as the storm system weakened in the country's northwest. Narelle, which has crossed Australia's Queensland state and Northern Territory since making landfall as a category four tropical cyclone on March 20, hit Western Australia on Thursday, affecting LNG plants run by Chevron and Woodside.

The storm's impact on the LNG plants has exacerbated a global supply crunch caused by the Iran war.

Chevron Australia was working to restore production at its Gorgon and Wheatstone gas facilities following production outages due to Narelle, a spokesperson said.

“Severe weather associated with the passing of Tropical Cyclone Narelle likely caused the interruptions to both Gorgon and Wheatstone operations,” the spokesperson said in a statement. “We will resume full production at both facilities once it is safe to do so.”

Gorgon is Australia's largest LNG export facility, producing 15.6 mn metric tons a year with three processing trains, while Wheatstone has two trains producing 8.9 mn tons.

Woodside said a “production

interruption due to the cyclone” continued at its Karratha gas plant, the onshore processing facility for the North West Shelf project, while production was uninterrupted at its Macedon and Pluto facilities.

“Production at the North West Shelf Project is expected to recommence after Woodside is able to mobilise its workforce to its offshore facilities,” a spokesperson said in a statement. The Port of Dampier, one of several key iron ore and LNG ports in Western Australia that closed on Thursday due to Narelle, reopened yesterday, but “general cargo import operations” remained suspended, the port operator said.

An “inspection has identified significant asset damage across Pilbara Ports general cargo precinct, caused by destructive winds, wave uplift forces, swell,

and storm surge”, with port access restricted to key personnel, it said.

The Port of Ashburton, about 100km (62 miles) north, would remain closed until inspections were completed, it added.

Earlier, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Narelle remained dangerous despite the downgrade as heavy winds and rainfall continued. The federal government was “ready to assist with the recovery,” he said in televised remarks.

The ex-cyclone was east of the town of Geraldton, about 375km (235 miles) north of Western Australia's state capital Perth, and weakening as it moved south-southeast, Australia's weather forecaster said on its website.

Global LNG flows out of the Middle East have also been upended by Iran's blockage of the Strait of Hormuz during the war launched a month ago by the US and Israel.

## Fuel-thirsty Asian countries line up for Russian oil

Reuters  
Moscow

Asian countries including Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka are lining up to buy Russian oil as the Iran war blocks supplies, raising the possibility that demand may exceed supply, several sources including Russia said.

Since the war in Ukraine prompted European customers — once the biggest buyers of Russian oil and gas — to shun Moscow, India and China have accounted for around 80% of Russian oil ex-

ports. Turkey has also been a significant buyer.

But in recent weeks, a host of Asian countries have been lining up, according to various sources including media and Russia.

“Demand is high, particularly for alternative destinations. As a result, a point may come when it becomes difficult to meet additional demand,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in response to a question about Russian oil demand.

A fifth of global oil production has effectively been blocked from reaching the market due to the US-Israeli war on Iran which has

halted traffic through the Strait of Hormuz.

Russia has benefited from high oil prices and a 30-day sanctions waiver from the US for purchases of Russian oil at sea.

Oil revenues and natural gas sales generate around a quarter of the country's state funds.

Russia's ability to boost oil exports is, however, constrained, in part by Ukrainian drone attacks which have effectively shut down at least 40% of the country's oil-exporting capacity.

The Philippines has purchased two of Russia's far-eastern ESPO Blend cargoes of some 1.5mn bar-

rels, resuming its Russian oil purchases for the first time in five years, according to LSEG data.

The Sara Sky and Tiger Wings tankers shipped oil to the country's Limay port, where the terminal for the Bataan refinery is located.

Thailand has also held discussions with Russia on potential crude purchases, according to its Deputy Premier Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn.

Several Sri Lankan media outlets reported on talks about Russian oil supplies to Sri Lanka too.

Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh visited Moscow this week, asking Russian oil and gas



Russia has benefited from high oil prices and a 30-day sanctions waiver from the US for purchases of Russian oil at sea. (AFP)

firm Zarubezhneft to boost its investment in Vietnam and to sup-

ply crude oil to the Southeast Asian country on a long-term basis.



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## Fishy trades before major news spark insider trading allegations

Unusual bursts of trading on the oil and stock markets last week, just minutes before social media posts on the Iran war by President Donald Trump, have added to suspicions of insider trading.

Democratic lawmakers, traders and industry watchdogs are raising alarms, saying such seemingly prescient bets are forming a pattern that suggests people are profiting from prior knowledge of White House decision-making. "This is the kind of thing that makes people wonder if their government is acting in their best interest or trying to enrich certain individuals," said Jordan Libowitz, vice president of the ethics watchdog Crew.

In the latest case, trading in oil and S&P 500 futures contracts, in which an investor promises to buy or sell an asset at a fixed price at a later date, saw an unusual spike in trading early Monday. Just 15 minutes later, Trump posted on his Truth Social network that talks with Iran were "very productive" – a dramatic shift in tone after Trump warned Saturday that he had given Tehran 48 hours to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face strikes on its energy grid.

The news sent oil prices plunging and stocks surging. People who placed the flurry of futures trades beforehand likely pocketed tens of millions of dollars, according to calculations by a market operator for AFP. "Seeing large transactions like these before an announcement is a little suspicious," said Michael Lynch, an oil analyst at Strategic Energy & Economic Research. "It's unusual. You don't see this at this level in the oil market."

### Industry watchdogs are raising alarms, saying such seemingly prescient bets are forming a pattern

Monday's incident came a few weeks after six accounts on the betting site Polymarket made \$1.2mn on bets that the United States would attack Iran on February 28, the day the war began. According to an analysis by the analytics firm Bubblemaps, the bets were placed just hours before the bombings were reported.

And in early January, an individual pocketed more than \$400,000 after betting on Polymarket that Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro would be ousted just hours before he was seized in a raid by US forces. So far, there is no evidence to suggest that Trump or White House officials are linked in any way to these transactions.

"Any insinuation, without evidence, that a member of the government engaged in these acts is baseless and irresponsible," a White House spokesperson told several media outlets. Still, critics of the administration see the trades as evidence of corruption. Democratic Senator Chris Murphy posted on X: "Who was it? Trump? A member of his family? Someone in the White House? This is unbelievable corruption."

The transactions have provided further ammunition for Democratic lawmakers and other critics who have accused Trump of conflicts of interest since the beginning of his second term last year.

The Chicago Mercantile Exchange, the world's largest market for trading derivative financial products, and the US Securities and Exchange Commission both declined to comment.

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission, which regulates derivatives markets, did not respond to several requests for comment. On Thursday, a group of congressional Democrats introduced a bill that that would ban bets on elections, government actions, war and sports, CNBC reported. Even some members of Trump's own party are seeking clarity on the trades.

"Someone needs to be publicly shamed for insider trading," said Republican Jeremy Munson, a candidate for the Minnesota Senate. Mark Neuman, chief investment officer at Hero Asset Management, said it should be possible to discover the identities of those who placed the trades in question, and suggested the problem resulted more from lax oversight.

"When you make a transaction, there are details you have to provide" to the exchanges, "so there's no secret," Neuman said. "If there were stricter regulators in this country, we would find out" their identities. "But it seems this administration favours less regulation," he said. "It's really sad, because the integrity of the markets is being torn to shreds." – AFP



## Trump officials tout US energy dominance as global oil execs warn of supply crisis

**US officials say Americans face only temporary price shock**

**Supply disruptions have already slowed the global economy**

**Asia fuel shortages force emergency steps, Europe braces for same**

By Jarrett Renshaw  
Reuters

US officials earlier this week said the historic spike in fuel prices during the war in Iran will be short-term and trumpeted record US production at an industry conference where oil executives and government officials from Asia, the Middle East and Europe bemoaned the worst oil and gas supply disruption in decades.

The contrasting messages relayed to industry leaders at the annual CERWeek conference in Houston reflected the different political realities in the US and the rest of the world. US cabinet members said American consumers could absorb a temporary price shock. Their effort to project calm reflected the political stakes for President Donald Trump, who has slid in the polls even as he repeatedly said the war is already won and promised the financial pain will be short-lived.

Still, Iran has continued hitting its neighbours with missile and drone strikes while keeping the Strait of Hormuz closed to shipping, halting a fifth of global oil and gas supplies. Global oil prices have spiked above \$100 a barrel. Supply disruptions have already slowed the global economy. Some countries in Asia dependent on Middle East oil face fuel shortages and are taking steps such as work-from-home directives. Europe is bracing for shortages to hit next month.

The impact of the war on

energy supplies would last much longer than the conflict itself, executives said, because of damage inflicted on oil and gas infrastructure by Iran in response to the US-Israeli attacks.

Trump's approval rating has slumped to its lowest point since he returned to the White House, a Reuters/Ipsos poll found, as many Americans have blanched at surging fuel prices and disapproved of the war on Iran. Trump's Republican Partyfaces a fight to retain slim majorities in the US Congress in November's midterm elections. The issue of affordability has emerged as a central theme.

"Markets do what markets do," US Energy Secretary Chris Wright said in the keynote address at the conference. "Prices went up to send signals to everyone that can produce more, please, produce more. The prices have not risen high enough yet to drive meaningful demand destruction."

Wright touted expanding US liquefied natural gas exports, efforts to keep coal power plants from retiring and plans to cut red tape for new nuclear projects. "Every day our mission remains clear: grow energy, improve American lives, strengthen American security and strengthen the world," Wright said.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum acknowledged the higher fuel prices were impacting Americans but said it would be short-term. "President Donald Trump is super empathetic, as we all are, about the fact that there's been a temporary increase in pricing," Burgum said at an event on the sidelines of the conference.

Executives and officials from other countries said the global energy system was in crisis and that high prices would not come down as quickly as Trump predicts even if the conflict ends.

Americans have not faced an immediate fuel shortage like those afflicting economies across Asia. Still, surging US petrol pump prices have exposed American consumers to price rises on the global oil market that have priced in shortages. Higher fuel prices are also pushing up the cost of food and consumer goods.

"This is raising the cost of living for those who can least afford it and slowing economic growth everywhere. From factories to farms to families around the world, the human cost is mounting by the day," Sultan al-Jaber, CEO of Abu Dhabi's state-run energy giant ADNOC, told attendees via videolink from the United Arab Emirates.

The UAE, like its Gulf neighbours, has been hit by Iranian missiles and drones and has had to cut oil production because it cannot export through the Strait of Hormuz. Asian countries dependent on Middle East energy imports already face shortages of fuel and gas. Officials of Asian governments are weighing work-from-home policies and stimulus measures last enforced during the Covid pandemic.

Emergency efforts were "not enough" to ease market strain, said Takehiko Matsuo, Japan's Vice Minister for International Affairs. Japan has asked the International Energy Agency for an additional release from

strategic petroleum reserves. Tokyo also is tapping cash reserves to subsidize soaring petrol prices and is considering intervening in oil futures markets to shore up the yen.

The Philippines declared a state of emergency. The country had just 45 days of oil supply as of March 20. South Korea has asked people to cut shower time, charge phones during the day and run vacuums on weekends. The fuel supply shortages would spread to Europe in April if the conflict continues, Shell CEO Wael Sawan said. "Countries cannot have national security without energy security," Sawan said at the conference.

Consultancy Rystad Energy estimates that war damage to refineries, LNG and other facilities could cost \$25bn to repair. Even undamaged infrastructure would take months to restart. Kuwait would take three to five months to get crude production back to pre-war levels, Kuwait Petroleum CEO Sheikh Nawaf Saud al-Sabah said.

"It will take time to come out of this," Chevron CEO Mike Wirth said Monday, noting that the energy market's tightness from the Strait of Hormuz closure has not yet been fully reflected in forward oil prices. The industry also warned that the US cannot quickly ramp up oil or gas output to offset the disruption. Shale producers said prices above \$100 a barrel would need to stay elevated for months before companies consider boosting drilling, as most operators have already locked in spending plans for the year.



A fisherman paddles before the Sierra Leone-flagged Sara Sky, which is carrying crude oil from Russia, anchored at Limay port, Bataan province in the Philippines. The country declared a state of emergency, it had just 45 days of oil supply as of March 20. (AFP)

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## Poland extends checks on borders with Germany, Lithuania

Poland will extend controls along its borders with fellow European Union members Germany and Lithuania by six months until October 1, its interior ministry said yesterday. Poland introduced temporary controls in July, echoing

several other EU governments in reimposing frontier checks to stem illegal migration. "This decision is due to the need to counteract illegal migration and ensure internal security," the ministry said in a post on X. **(Reuters)**

## Thieves steal 12 tonnes of KitKat chocolate bars in Europe

Twelve tonnes of KitKat chocolate bars went missing in Europe last week after thieves made off with the truck transporting them, Swiss food giant Nestle said yesterday.

KitKat, which is made by Nestle, said the truck carrying 413,793 bars of its new range set off from central Italy to distribute the chocolate throughout Europe, but never reached its scheduled final destination in Poland. The vehicle and the

merchandise remain unaccounted for. Nestle did not reveal where exactly the truck was lost. In a separate statement, KitKat said the missing bars are traceable via a unique batch code. Anyone scanning the batch numbers of the stolen chocolate would receive instructions on how to contact KitKat. "Whilst we appreciate the criminals' exceptional taste, the fact remains that cargo theft is an escalating issue for businesses of all sizes," KitKat said. **(Reuters)**

## Ukrainian drone attack on Russia's Yaroslavl region kills child

A Ukrainian drone attack in Russia's Yaroslavl region north-east of Moscow killed a child and injured three people, while causing damage to several residential buildings and "a retail object", the local governor said yesterday. "A child who was in one of the private houses in the suburban district of Yaroslavl region at the time of the attack has died," the governor, Mikhail Evraev, said on his Telegram channel. "His parents have been hospitalised in a serious

condition. A woman living in a neighbouring house was also injured. They are receiving all necessary medical care," he added. He said Russian air defence units had repelled more than 30 Ukrainian drones during the attack. The Russian Defence Ministry said yesterday that a total of 155 Ukrainian drones had been repelled and destroyed overnight over a number of Russian regions, including the Moscow region. **(Reuters)**

## Earth Hour in Islamabad



The Parliament House before the lights were turned off for Earth Hour in Islamabad, Pakistan, yesterday. **(Reuters)**



A destroyed room of a maternity hospital building damaged by a Russian air attack, in Odesa, yesterday. **(AFP)**

## Russian strikes kill 4 in Ukraine, damage port, maternity hospital

AFP  
Odesa, Ukraine

Russian air attacks across Ukraine early yesterday killed at least four people and damaged critical infrastructure, including a port and a maternity hospital, authorities said, as Russia pressed on with its war against Ukraine.

Moscow has been firing drones at Ukraine in nightly barrages during its four-year invasion launched in February 2022, with Kyiv accusing it of attacking residential areas and targeting civilians.

In the southern port city of Odesa, two people were killed and at least 13 wounded, said Sergiy Lysak, the head of the city's military administration, adding that one of the hits damaged a maternity hospital.

AFP images showed shattered windows, with rubble inside the building and shards of glass strewn across the floor and treatment chairs.

"There was no military purpose whatsoever — this was pure terror against ordinary civilian life," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on social media about the strikes on Odesa.

A port in the Odesa region was also damaged in the shelling, af-

ter several hits were recorded on its infrastructure, Ukraine's state ports authority said.

Russia launched 273 drones at Ukraine overnight, 252 of which were shot down, the Ukrainian air force said yesterday.

In Kryvyi Rig, a man was killed in a morning strike that hit an industrial enterprise, said Oleksandr Ganzha, head of the Dnipro regional administration. He said fires erupted at the site.

In the central Poltava region, one person was killed after Russian drones hit a residential building and industrial facilities, regional authorities said.

State oil firm Naftogaz said the victim was its employee who worked as a process plant operator.

"We have suffered a tragic loss. Our colleague, 55-year-old Roman Chmykhun, was killed during one of the attacks," Naftogaz said on Telegram, adding: "This is the second death of one of our colleagues this week."

It said its facilities in the region were targeted "for the third day running". In Russia's Yaroslavl region, a child was killed in a drone attack, regional governor Mikhail Evraev said on Telegram.

Moscow said that a total of 155 Ukrainian drones were intercepted and destroyed in Russia's airspace overnight.

## Russia declares emergency in Dagestan's capital as floods cut power

Authorities in the capital of the southern Russian region of Dagestan declared a state of emergency yesterday after heavy rainfall led to widespread flooding and power cuts in the region. "Emergency services have been placed on high alert, efforts are under way to deal with the aftermath, and assistance will be provided to affected residents," the Makhachkala city administration said on Telegram. More than 327,000 people remain without power in Dagestan due to bad weather, the regional ministry of emergency situations said. "As of 12:00 (Moscow time, 0900 GMT), 283 settlements with a population of 327,183 people, including 89,705 children, remain without electricity," the ministry said on its website. **(Reuters)**

# Pope denounces widening gap between the rich and poor on Monaco visit

AFP  
Monaco

Pope Leo XIV yesterday denounced the widening gap between the haves and have-nots as he visited Monaco, a millionaires' playground that is the surprise pick for the first western European trip of his papacy.

Arriving by helicopter from Rome as the first Pope to visit the principality in nearly half a millennium, Leo was greeted by Monaco's ruler Prince Albert II and his wife, Princess Charlene, at Monte Carlo's heliport under radiant sunshine.

Just after his arrival at the tiny principality on the French Riviera, the Pope condemned what

he termed the widening "chasms between the poor and the rich", ahead of an afternoon mass before an expected 15,000 people in the Louis II stadium.

In an address in French from the balcony of the Prince's Palace, the first US-born pontiff launched into an address which touched on the themes of social justice and inequality dear to his predecessor, Pope Francis.

He denounced "unjust configurations of power, structures of sin that dig chasms between poor and rich, between the privileged and the rejected, between friends and enemy".

And within walking distance of Monaco's casinos, Leo insisted that wealth should serve "law and justice, especially at a historical moment when displays



Albert II of Monaco (left) escorting Pope Leo XIV to his helicopter upon departure from Monaco Heliport in Monte Carlo, Monaco, yesterday. **(AFP)**

of force and the logic of omnipotence wound the world and jeopardise peace", in a clear reference

to the growing number of conflicts across the globe.

Bells pealed across the princi-

pality to mark Leo's arrival in the microstate nestled on the Mediterranean between France and Italy.

Some 5,000 locals gathered outside the palace to hear the Pope speak, many brandishing flags in the red and white of the principality and the yellow and white of the Vatican.

After his speech, more than 1,500 young people welcomed Leo to the square in front of the Church of Saint Devota, dedicated to the patron saint of Monaco.

But while cheers went up along the Popemobile's route, the full-scale jubilee hoped for by the authorities did not come to pass. In the tiny city state's streets billboards showing the pontiff in his church regalia offered a stark contrast to gleaming sports cars and jostling crowds of tourists.

# 22 migrants die off coast of Greece after six days at sea

AFP  
Athens

Twenty-two migrants hoping to reach Europe from North Africa have died off the coast of Greece after six days at sea in a rubber boat, survivors told the Greek coastguard yesterday.

The coastguard late Friday said 26 people, including a woman and a minor, were rescued by a European border agency vessel off the island of Crete.

The coastguard later told AFP that 21 Bangladeshis, four South Sudanese and a Chadian citizen had emerged from the ordeal alive.

Survivors said the bodies of those who had died were thrown into the Mediterranean sea on the orders of one of the people smugglers aboard the ship. Two survivors were taken to hospital in Heraklion on Crete, the coastguard said.

Based on survivor statements, the coastguard said the boat had left Tobruk, a port city in eastern Libya, on March 21, bound for Greece, the gateway for many migrants hoping for asylum in the European Union.

"During the journey, the passengers lost their bearings and remained at sea for six days without food or water," the coastguard stated. The bodies of those who died "were thrown into the sea on the orders of one of the smugglers", it added.

The Greek authorities have arrested two South Sudanese men, aged 19 and 22, believed to be the smugglers.

They are now under investigation for "illegal entry into the country" and "negligent homicide".

The vessel carrying the group was 53 nautical miles south of Ierapetra, a town on southern Crete. A coastguard spokesman told

AFP that the craft had endured "unfavourable meteorological conditions" during their odyssey.

That, coupled with a shortage of food and water, had "led to the deaths through exhaustion of 22 people," the spokesman said.

"The bodies of these dead people were thrown into the sea on the orders of the two traffickers, who have been arrested, according to testimony by survivors," he added.

The number of migrants who have died trying to reach EU soil more than doubled in the first two months of 2026, compared with last year, the EU border agency Frontex said earlier this month.

"These tragedies highlight once more the urgency to intensify the work with partner countries along the migratory routes and redouble efforts in the fight against migrant smugglers, who are the ones responsible for these tragedies," an EU commission

spokesperson said yesterday. According to data from the International Organisation for Migration, 559 people died in the Mediterranean during January and February, compared with 287 for the same period last year.

In December, 17 migrants were found dead inside their boat, which was taking on water and had partially deflated, to the southwest of Crete.

Greek authorities found only two survivors, stating that a further 15 people had drowned. Their bodies were never recovered.

In a bid to stem the crossings, the European Parliament on Thursday endorsed a major tightening of EU migration policy and approved the concept of "return hubs", designed to send migrants to non-EU third countries.

Those proposals have been criticised by rights groups as inhumane.

## French police foil Paris bomb attack outside US bank

AFP  
Paris

French police stopped an apparent bomb attack outside a US bank in Paris early yesterday when they arrested a person about to set off a homemade explosive device, officials and sources close to the case told AFP.

The incident occurred around 3:30am (0130 GMT) in front of a Bank of America building in the chic 8th arrondissement, a couple of streets from the Champs-Elysees.

Police grabbed the suspect just after he placed a device, made of five litres of liquid (1.3 US gallons), believed to be fuel, and an ignition system, one of the sources said.

After his arrest, the suspect claimed to both a minor and a Senegalese citizen, according to a police source, who cautioned that the authorities were still verifying his identity.

He was accompanied by a second person, who took flight when officers arrived to arrest the pair.

The ignition component had 650gm (23 ounces) of explosive

powder in it, according to an initial assessment. The whole device was taken to the Paris police's forensics lab for full analysis.

France's counter-terrorism prosecutor's office told AFP it had immediately taken over the investigation, and confirmed the suspect caught was in police custody.

It said the probe it has launched was into "attempted damage by fire or other dangerous means in connection with a terrorist undertaking" and a "terrorist criminal conspiracy".

Both the Paris judicial police and France's domestic intelligence service, the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI), were involved in the probe, the office told AFP.

According to a police source, the suspect said he had been recruited via the Snapchat app to carry out the bombing in exchange for the sum of 600 euros (\$692).

When the patrolling officers arrested him, he was about to ignite the device with a lighter.

A separate police source told AFP that while he was placing the charge, the accomplice stepped back, apparently to take a photo or video of the crime



Police officials stand alongside police and private security vehicles outside the Bank of America building in the 8th arrondissement of Paris yesterday. **(AFP)**

with his mobile phone.

A spokesperson for Bank of America, whose US headquarters is in Charlotte, North Carolina, told AFP that they were aware of the situation and were in communication with the French authorities.

France's interior minister, Laurent Nunez, on X hailed the speedy action by the police offic-

ers, given "the current international situation".

Since the outbreak of the war of the Middle East, European countries have been on high alert for potential attacks on Iranian dissidents, Jewish places of worship and US-Israeli assets.

Nunez said that, in France, "vigilance remains more than ever at a high level".

# Experts laud Qatar's institutional readiness amid Iranian attacks

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

The coordinated response of Qatar's government institutions in managing the ongoing crisis triggered by Iranian attacks, highlighted a high level of institutional readiness, seamless service continuity, and public reassurance across sectors, a number of Qatari experts and academics have pointed out.

Amid regional tensions, daily life in Qatar has remained largely unaffected, with essential services, from healthcare and education to the supply chains and public utilities, remain uninterrupted. Observers also describe this as a reflection of a mature governance model built on foresight, integration, and adaptability. Specialists stressed that the vis-

ible harmony between government entities is not coincidental, but the result of long-term strategic planning, continuous co-ordination, and a unified operational approach. The institutional alignment has ensured stability across society, preventing disruptions in the availability of goods or the delivery of essential services.

Dr Mohamed bin Saif al-Kuwari, vice-chairman of the National Human Rights Committee, described the government's performance as "organised and flowing," noting that the quality of services remained intact throughout the crisis.

"Remote work has ensured continuity and enhanced efficiency, as it has become a global standard shaping the future of public service delivery," said al-Kuwari, adding that Qatar's advanced digital infrastructure has been instru-

mental in maintaining uninterrupted services, underscoring the country's sustained investment in e-government systems.

Mubarak Abdullah al-Sulaiti, chairman of Qatar Lawyers Association, described the situation as a defining test of institutional strength, saying, "The true measure of a state lies in confronting crises and managing their repercussions without disrupting people's lives."

He highlighted the role of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) in safeguarding the supply chains and preventing market disruptions, alongside the healthcare sector's expansion of telemedicine and home delivery services. He also noted the judiciary's swift transition to electronic courts to ensure uninterrupted access to justice.

Dr Mohamed Hassan al-Jufairi

said transparency and timely information have been critical in strengthening public trust and ensuring smooth implementation of response measures, stressing that the balance between rapid decision-making and precise implementation has been key to maintaining institutional performance.

Dr Saif al-Hajri, environmentalist and educator, described Qatar's experience as a regional benchmark: "What distinguishes Qatar is its ability to maintain stability in critical areas such as food and water security, even under pressure."

He also credited the security entities in the country for reinforcing public confidence and highlighted the role of community awareness and solidarity in supporting national resilience.

Dr Yousef al-Kazem, president of the Arab Union for Voluntary

Work, said: "The essential services going on without any disruption demonstrates the strength of strategic planning and operational flexibility." He noted that coordination between public and private sectors has been vital in maintaining supply chains and ensuring food security.

Engineer Mohamed Ibrahim al-Mohammadi noted that expanding stockpiles of essential goods, water, and medical supplies ensures that the country is prepared for prolonged crises without compromising quality of life while simultaneously maintaining extended reserve capacities and strengthened environmental monitoring systems.

Dr Jassim al-Khayyat, professor at Qatar University, attributed the smooth handling of the crisis to a forward-looking approach informed by past experiences. "The

fact that residents have not felt the impact of the crisis reflects a high level of institutional preparedness and coordination," he said.

Dr Khalid al-Mohammadi noted the strength of Qatar's integrated emergency management system and the central role of the Civil Defence Council in coordinating efforts.

"A unified operational framework has ensured swift response and eliminated duplication, reinforcing overall efficiency," he noted, while stressing the importance of transparency and reliance on official information channels to counter misinformation.

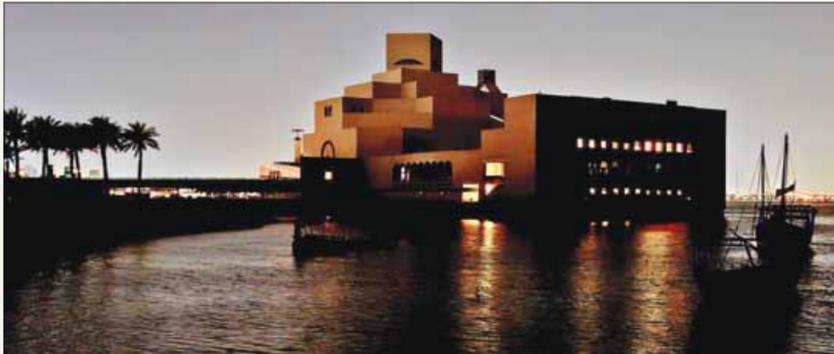
Dr Saleh al-Ibrahim stressed that Qatar's model stands out regionally, as sustained investment in infrastructure and human capital has enabled Qatar to maintain service continuity and adapt rapidly to evolving challenges.

## Earth Hour observed in Doha

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) participated in Earth Hour by switching off the lights in its main building, Al-Adeed Tower, and all its affiliated buildings from 8.30pm to 9.30pm. Its participation reflects the ministry's commitment to supporting global environmental initiatives and raising public awareness about the importance of conserving energy.

It also underscores the ministry's leading role in establishing the principles of environmental sustainability and promoting climate responsibility through the adoption of high-quality practices with a sustainable impact that contribute to reducing emissions. The ministry also called on individuals and institutions across the country to participate in Earth Hour.

In a statement posted on its official account on the X



The Museum of Islamic Art switched off non-essential lighting as part of a national call by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change. The MoECC underscores that simple actions by individuals and organisations are key to preserving our natural resources. By switching off for one hour, the community supports international efforts to address climate change and highlights the importance of sustainable living. **PICTURE:** Thajudheen.



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's Al-Adeed Tower during Earth Hour yesterday. The ministry also switched off the lights of all its affiliated buildings for one hour.

environmental practices and conserving energy are key to mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change. The ministry further highlighted Qatar's continued participation in the annual initiative, reflecting its commitment to supporting international efforts to address climate change and

to strengthening environmental awareness across society. Earth Hour is an annual global event held at 8.30pm local time on the last Saturday of March, during which lights and electrical appliances are switched off for one hour, with the aim of raising awareness about climate change issues and conserving energy.

## LuLu Qatar joins Earth Hour

LuLu Hypermarket in Qatar reaffirmed its commitment to environmental sustainability by participating in the global Earth Hour 2026 initiative yesterday. Following the directive of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, encouraging individuals and institutions nationwide to observe Earth Hour by switching off lights and non-essential electrical appliances from 8.30pm to 9.30pm, LuLu outlets across Qatar turned off their external lights, including the prominent D-Ring Road location. The symbolic gesture underscores LuLu Hypermarket's strong alignment with national sustainability goals and highlights its ongoing dedication to energy conservation and environmental responsibility. By participating in Earth Hour, the company continues to demonstrate leadership in promoting responsible and sustainable business practices. LuLu Hypermarket remains committed to supporting government-led environmental initiatives and advocating for eco-friendly practices, while inspiring communities to take meaningful steps toward a greener and more sustainable future.



LuLu outlets across Qatar turned off their external lights, including the prominent D-Ring Road location.

## QCS general assembly endorses Dr Khalid bin Jabr as chairman

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

The General Assembly of Qatar Cancer Society (QCS) has endorsed Dr Khalid bin Jabr al-Thani as chairman of QCS at its Ordinary General Assembly Meeting held recently. The Ordinary General Assembly Meeting, chaired by Dr Khalid bin Jabr al-Thani, reviewed the institutional and programmatic achievements of QCS in 2025.



Dr Khalid bin Jabr al-Thani.

It highlighted QCS' tangible impact in supporting patients, raising community awareness, advancing professional development, and promoting scientific research. The meeting also underscored efforts to strengthen national and international partnerships, reinforcing the position of QCS as a key national pillar in Qatar's cancer control ecosystem.

In accordance with QCS' bylaws, the chair announced that the candidates for board membership for the 2026-2029 term were elected by acclamation. The general assembly approved the election of the following: Dr Khalid bin Jabr al-Thani (chairman), Dr Abdulazim Abdulwahab Hussein (vice-chairman), and board members Dr Khalid Abdullah al-Ali, Mohammed Juma al-Kuwari and Mohammed Issa al-Fadala.

QCS affirmed that 2025 marked a significant milestone in its journey, as it continued to translate its vision into tangible achievements through a comprehensive package of initiatives and services targeting patients, survivors, and the wider community.

Founded in 1997 as a charitable organisation operating under the supervision of the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities, QCS is a key national pillar in Qatar's cancer control system. QCS is guided by a clear vision of "a cancer-aware community and a better life for those affected," and a humanitarian mission that relies on donations and community partnerships to provide awareness services, as well as financial, psychological, and social support for patients, survivors, and their families, in addition to contributing to professional development and scientific research in the field of cancer.



## Experts urge financial calm, rational spending amid regional tensions

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

As regional crises can impact macroeconomic stability and directly influence household behaviour—shaping spending patterns, savings decisions, and daily financial choices—economists, scholars, and specialists have affirmed that individuals must plan their daily spending and avoid panic stockpiling of unnecessary items.

They noted that the decisive factor in confronting such challenges lies mainly in individual awareness and the ability to manage anxiety with balance and rationality. According to experts, periods of uncertainty often prompt individuals to adopt uncalculated consumption habits, such as panic buying or excessive stockpiling, which creates unnecessary pressure on local markets and household budgets.

They explained that such behaviours are frequently driven by psychological factors rather than economic realities, underscoring that financial awareness and moderation remain the first line of defence against the repercussions of crises. The experts further highlighted the role of social and religious values in guiding behaviour, promoting moderation, discouraging waste, and strengthening community solidarity.

Simultaneously, they stressed the importance of responsible media in delivering balanced messaging that helps individuals make informed decisions and reduces the spread of anxiety.

Sheikh Dr Ayesha al-Qahtani, a Muslim scholar, underscored that Islam views financial management dur-



ing crises as part of responsible stewardship, calling for moderation and caution against both extravagance and excessive frugality.

"Crises reveal a person's awareness and ability to strike a balance between needs and resources," he said, adding that "decisions driven by fear, such as panic buying or excessive stockpiling, contradict the Islamic values rooted in balance and consideration for others."

Dr Hatmi Khalifa al-Hatmi, assistant professor at Qatar University's College of Business and Economics, explained that crises often begin with shifts in individual behaviour before appearing in economic data.

"How people respond to anxiety ultimately shapes market dynamics," he said. He further noted that regional tensions tend to trigger what behavioural economics describes as loss aversion, leading individuals to increase precautionary consumption, hold onto liquidity, and postpone major financial decisions.

"Herd behaviour and impulsive financial decisions, such as withdrawing investments during downturns, can produce counterproductive outcomes," he noted, warning that repeated individual actions can evolve into broader market trends, including

temporary price increases or artificial shortages.

Mubarak Salem al-Nuaimi said current conditions have prompted families to reassess priorities, focusing on essential needs, such as food, education, and healthcare, while reducing spending on non-essentials. "Maintaining calm is the most important factor in making sound financial decisions," he said, noting that families have become more attentive to tracking expenses and building savings.

He acknowledged that while negative behaviours like fear-driven purchasing may emerge, they remain limited due to public awareness and trust in official institutions. Media professional Iman al-Kaabi noted that the role of media during crises extends beyond reporting news to providing guidance that helps families manage financial affairs effectively. "Audiences need to understand how to act in their daily lives," she said, noting that sensationalism can drive individuals toward hasty decisions.

She stressed that responsible media should promote balanced messaging that encourages rational consumption, praising recent efforts to provide practical advice on prioritising essential needs.