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# Amir, Saudi crown prince review situation

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held talks with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud in Jeddah yesterday.

The two leaders discussed regional and international developments as well as efforts to de-escalate tensions and reinforce security and stability in the region.

Both sides addressed the ongoing efforts to contain the rising tensions amid rapidly evolving developments, including the incessant Iranian aggression and the challenges it imposes on regional and global security and stability as well as its potential impacts on global energy supplies and market stability.

His Highness the Amir and the Saudi crown prince shared perspectives on the foremost issues of shared concern and emphasised the importance of continued co-ordination and consultation, underscoring the close and strategic relations between the two countries.

Attending the meeting were HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, HE the Minister of Interior Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, and HE the Chief of the

## Amir, Saudi, Jordanian leaders in tripartite meeting

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, and Jordan's King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein held a tripartite meeting during which they discussed regional and international developments and the efforts made to reduce escalation and enhance security and stability in the region. During the meeting held in Jeddah yesterday, the leaders discussed efforts to contain tensions in light of the rapid developments in the region, the continued Iranian aggression, and the challenges

it poses to regional and international security and stability, including its repercussions on global energy supplies and the stability of its markets. His Highness the Amir, Saudi crown prince and Jordanian king also exchanged views on key issues of common interest, stressing the importance of continuing close co-ordination and consultation regarding various developments, in a way that reflects the depth of the fraternal and strategic relations that bind the sister countries, and that enhances common interests. **To Page 2**

Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi, alongside a number of Their Excellencies high-ranking officials.

On the Saudi side, the meeting was attended by Deputy Governor of Makkah Region Prince Saud bin Mishal bin Abdulaziz al-Saud and Minister of State, Member of the Cabinet, and National Security Adviser Musaed bin Mohammed al-Aiban, alongside a number of senior officials.

Earlier His Highness the Amir and

his accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at King Abdulaziz International Airport by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud.

Later, His Highness the Amir and his accompanying delegation were seen off upon departure from King Abdulaziz International Airport also by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. **(QNA)**



## Another spell of rain forecast

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

Close on the heels of the heavy rains that drenched most parts of the country last week, Qatar is expected to experience another spell of rain that could be heavy and thundery at times today and tomorrow, the Meteorology Department has forecast.

The weather department in a social media post said that the current spell of rain that starts from Monday late evening is likely to last until tomorrow. The forecast for today (Tuesday) notes that there could be scattered rain across the country which could become thundery at times and associated with strong wind. Offshore weather conditions are also expected to be thundery rain at times associated with strong wind and high sea with poor horizontal visibility.

The department has also cautioned about the possibility of downdraft. The weather conditions can be cloudy to partially cloudy and horizontal visibility can be poor at times. Similar conditions are expected tomorrow too.

The weather was partially cloudy in Doha and the areas around for some time yesterday with moderate temperature and scattered clouds. Southeasterly winds, light to moderate in speed. Winds were mainly southeasterly, light to moderate in speed gusting to strong at times especially in the evening.

The Meteorology Department has once again urged the public about the importance of obtaining weather information from official sources and not to rely on rumours.

## More drones intercepted

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

## Golden Pass LNG lights up, bringing Qatar's US energy vision to life

By Santhosh V Perumal  
Staff Reporter

Golden Pass LNG, a joint venture between QatarEnergy and ExxonMobil, has marked a major milestone towards full operations of its LNG production and export facilities by achieving first LNG production from the first of three trains comprising the 18mn tonnes per annum project.

First LNG sets the stage for Golden Pass LNG to deliver its first cargo from its facilities located in Sabine Pass, Texas, by achieving sustained liquefaction operations, and meeting its commercial and strategic objectives.

"First LNG is of a particular importance for one of the largest single investment decisions in the US LNG history. The operational phase and market entry of Golden Pass LNG will come at an important time when global energy security ranks very high on energy agendas worldwide. We look forward to the safe and successful start of export operations," said HE Saad bin Sherida



al-Kaabi, the Minister of State for Energy Affairs, the President and CEO of QatarEnergy.

Highlighting that Golden Pass LNG is part of a wider QatarEnergy strategy for international investments that it has been planning over the past decade, he said it also represents a significant part of the plans announced by QatarEnergy in 2018 to invest \$20bn in the US energy sector.

"We are now seeing the first fruits of this far-sighted strategy with the start of Golden Pass LNG, which will play an important role in supporting global energy security and a fair and bal-

anced access to cleaner energy," HE al-Kaabi said.

He added: "I would like to thank the US regulators for their effective co-operation, which has helped lead to this moment. I also would like to thank our strategic partner, ExxonMobil, with whom we continue to work closely to implement this and other projects around the world. Finally, I would like to voice gratitude to the management and all employees at Golden Pass LNG as well as the teams at QatarEnergy and ExxonMobil for their dedication and commitment, which are key to helping deliver on our energy commitment."

## Rainfall, conservation efforts restore life to meadows

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Seasonal rainfall across Qatar has played a significant role in revitalising natural vegetation, contributing to the regeneration of plant life in natural meadows (rawda) and open desert areas. This has expanded green cover and restored vitality to vast stretches of the country's deserts. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change said this environmental improvement is not solely the result of favourable weather conditions. It also reflects sustained efforts within an integrated framework that encompasses protection, rehabilitation, field monitoring,



plantation initiatives, and enforcement of regulations governing grazing and hunting. The ministry noted that meadows are among the most

sensitive ecosystems in Qatar due to their low-lying geography, which enables them to collect rainwater and act as natural seed reservoirs. **To Page 2**

## 'Qatar's food stocks intact, supply chains holding firm'

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

Qatar's food security situation is stable and its public services are running normally, the Minister of Municipality and Chairman of the Committee for Follow-Up on Food Security Policies, HE Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah, has said, crediting the country's preparedness to the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the close oversight of HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani.

Speaking to Qatar TV from the Unified Operation Center of the Ministry of Municipality, HE al-Attiyah said the ministry is operating through a comprehensive system of digital and field operations to guarantee continuous service delivery around the clock. Pre-prepared emergency plans have been activated, public cleanliness and inspection teams are maintaining their normal schedules, and readiness levels



HE Abdullah bin Hamad bin Abdullah al-Attiyah

are being continuously upgraded to handle any exceptional circumstances.

On food security, the minister was unequivocal. "The food security situation in the country is very stable and indeed excellent," he said, stressing that the Qatar National Food Security Strategy 2024-2030 had anticipated a full range of scenarios, including the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Critically, the country's strategic food stocks remain intact and untouched, and additional shipments of rice and wheat are already en route. **To Page 2**

## QCB's pre-emptive move to shield financial system

By A Staff Reporter  
Doha

The Qatar Central Bank (QCB) will offer unlimited amount of Qatari riyal repurchase (repo) facilities against eligible securities held by banks to ensure local currency liquidity, even as it found the country's financial system continues to operate from a "position of strength." In addition to the existing overnight repo facility offered by the QCB, the central bank will introduce a term repo facility with maturities of up to three months, enabling banks to manage cash flow with greater certainty during the current period. The QCB will reduce the reserve requirement on deposits from 4.5% to 3.5%, which

will release additional liquidity. Regarding the unlimited Qatari riyal repo, the central bank said it came as part of continued efforts to ensure "deep Qatari riyal liquidity" in the local market. The QCB will also permit banks to offer borrowers affected by the current circumstances the option to defer loan principal and interest payments for a period of up to three months. Any such payment deferrals will be applied in accordance with banks' internal policies and supervisory guidance. These measures were announced as pre-emptive support measures in view of the current geopolitical situation after the central bank reviewed the recent geopolitical developments and their implications for the domestic financial system.

## Amir, Saudi crown prince hold meeting

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held talks with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud in Jeddah yesterday. Their meeting dealt regional and international developments, as well as efforts to de-escalate tensions and reinforce security and stability in the region, with both sides addressing issues including incessant Iranian aggression and its potential impact on global energy supplies and market stability. - QNA



## Amir, Saudi crown prince, King Abdullah in tripartite meeting

From Page 1

The leaders stressed the need to unify efforts and co-ordinate stances to address current challenges facing the region.

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of For-

eign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, HE the Minister of Interior Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani, HE the Chief of the Amiri Diwan Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaifi, and senior officials attended the meeting.

On Saudi side, the meeting was attended by Makkah Region Deputy Governor Prince Saud bin Mishaal bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, Minister of State, Member of the Cabinet, and National Security Adviser Musaed bin Mohammed al-Aiban,

alongside a number of senior officials, while on Jordan's side, the meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman Safadi and a number of senior officials. - QNA



## Amir receives written message from Bangladesh's premier

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a written message from Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, pertaining to bilateral relations and ways to enhance and develop them, as well as Bangladesh's solidarity with Qatar in light of current regional developments. The message was received by HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi from the foreign affairs adviser to the Bangladesh prime minister and special envoy, Humayun Kabir. - QNA

## Transport minister holds virtual meeting with French counterpart



HE the Minister of Transport Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulla bin Mohammed al-Thani held a meeting yesterday with France's Minister for Transport Philippe Tabarot via videoconference.

They discussed bilateral co-operation in maritime and air transportation, and ways to further develop them.

They also addressed the current regional situation and its impact on transportation and supply chains. - QNA

## Minister convenes Attorney Admission Committee meeting

The Attorney Admission Committee, chaired by HE the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Ibrahim bin Ali al-Mohannadi, convened yesterday to discuss items on the agenda.

Upon rounding out their training period, five new attorneys were sworn in before the committee, which deliberated on the applications for registration of several practitioners on the roll of active attorneys who had completed their training.

In addition, the panel

weighed in on the requests to transfer the registration of two attorneys from the provisional list to the roll of practicing attorneys before the Court of Appeal.

It discussed an array of regulatory matters that pertain to the legal profession, including subcommittee minutes, as well as the Attorney Affairs Department's pitch on trial advocate regulations.

As such, the panel took the appropriate decisions accordingly.

HE al-Mohannadi congratulated the new attorneys, underscoring that the committee is committed to having a conducive legal environment in place to help them undertake their missions in serving society.

Adhering to the training programmes of the ministry's Centre for Legal and Judicial Studies matters most in this respect, the minister said, affirming that this would help hone legal skills and practitioners' competency, enhancing the justice system in Qatar. - QNA



## Qatar to chair GCC Interconnection Authority for next three years

The Gulf Co-operation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) has announced that Qatar will assume the chairmanship of its Board of Directors for the upcoming three-year term.

The chairmanship will be led by Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation (Kahramaa) president Eng. Abdullah bin Ali al-Theyab.

The announcement was made during the Authority's Ordinary General Assembly meeting, held in Doha yesterday.

The meeting reviewed the General Assembly's agenda, regional developments amid current circumstances, as well as the authority's strategic plans.

Participants also discussed the upcoming phase of expansion projects of

the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) electrical interconnection network aimed at enhancing reliability during outages, increasing opportunities for electricity exchange and trade among member states, and exploring potential expansion beyond GCC countries through linkage with neighbouring power grids, strengthening Gulf integration in the electricity sector. - QNA



## Amir sends cables of condolences to Algeria's president

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent cables of condolences to Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on the death of the former president Liamine Zeroual. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani sent a similar cable to Algeria's Prime Minister Sifi Ghrieb. - QNA

## PM receives call from UK minister

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani received a phone call yesterday UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper.

During the call, the two sides discussed developments in the ongoing military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions on regional and international security and stability, as well as ways to resolve all disputes through peaceful means.

HE Sheikh Mohammed stressed the need to stop the unjustified Iranian attacks on Qatar and the countries in the region, warning - in this context, of the consequences of irresponsible targeting of vital infrastructure, especially those related to water, food and energy facilities.

He further emphasised the need to strengthen co-ordination and intensify joint efforts, return to the negotiating table, and prioritise reason and wisdom, in a way that ensures global energy security, freedom of navigation and environmental safety, and preserves the stability of the region. - QNA

## 'Qatar's food stocks intact, supply chains holding firm'

From Page 1

The strategy rests on three pillars.

The first is self-sufficiency through local production - an area where Qatar has recorded notable success.

Seasonal vegetables now meet close to 100% of domestic demand, with surplus volumes being exported, while poultry and dairy products cover approximately 99% of local market needs.

The second pillar is the maintenance and continuous replenishment of strategic food stocks, managed through early warning systems that flag potential shortfalls and allow for immediate corrective action.

The third is the securing of international supply chains through strategic partnerships, an area where Hassad Food Company has made significant investments to guarantee uninterrupted supply under all conditions.

HE al-Attiyah said that he had personally conducted field visits to farms, private food companies, and border crossings to verify that supply chains were functioning and that production inputs were sufficient.

He closed with a direct message to the public: "Be confident and reassured - you are under a wise leadership that places your security and stability at the top of their priorities."

## Qatar boosts recycling efforts as zero-waste goal gains momentum

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

The Ministry of Municipality has reaffirmed its commitment to achieving zero waste, marking the International Day of Zero Waste yesterday (March 30) by scaling up source segregation, expanding recycling efforts, and promoting a circular economy nationwide.

The ministry pointed out that

the source segregation programme works towards a better future for the country, adding that waste sorting should start at the household level, making it a daily practice.

It explained that the programme entails issues as simple as sorting waste into plastic, paper, metal, general waste and organic waste in dedicated containers.

The ministry launched several awareness campaigns to promote such practices among the public,

in addition to supporting recycling initiatives, providing dedicated waste-sorting bins across key areas and locations, and improving waste management strategies.

The source segregation programme was first launched in 2019 as a pilot project, and was subsequently expanded across the country in several phases.

The programme uses a simple two-bin system distributed to households, with blue bins for

recyclable materials such as plastic, paper, glass, and metal, and grey bins for organic and general waste, such as food waste, cleaning materials, and other items.

These are collected later and sent to recycling facilities, reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills.

The programme has been very effective in Doha, achieving a success rate of more than 85% due to the strong public response, with more than 2,000 tonnes of recy-

clable waste collected through this system.

The programme was particularly popular and gained international praise during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Earlier this year, the waste sorting at source programme was expanded to municipalities such as Umm Salal, Al Daayen, Al Khor, and Al Shamal, which contributed to the programme's success in terms of the quality and quantities of recyclable waste collected.

## Rainfall and conservation efforts restore life to meadows

From Page 1

Accordingly, the authorities have implemented strict management measures to maximise the benefits of rainfall while protecting these areas from human activities that could hinder natural regeneration.

Field inspections have been intensified in these meadows, where clear signs of recovery have been observed following the rainy season.

Specialised teams reported a noticeable increase in vegetation density, along with the natural regrowth of seedlings across multiple sites.

The ministry has welcomed public visits

to these areas - now transformed into green oases - while urging strict adherence to environmental guidelines.

These include avoiding driving over vegetation, using designated paths, refraining from grazing in restricted zones, not cutting wood or lighting fires outside permitted areas, and maintaining cleanliness.

Dr Farhoud Hadi al-Hajri, the director of Public Relations and Communication at the ministry, said that awareness efforts were intensified during the winter season, targeting visitors to desert areas and emphasising compliance with environmental regulations.

He stressed that community awareness is a fundamental pillar of successful environ-

mental protection, noting that preserving the meadows is a shared responsibility to ensure the renewal of plant life.

Dr al-Hajri added that the ministry expanded its outreach through partnerships with national entities, institutions, companies, and banks to promote collective environmental action.

Campaigns targeted all age groups, including collaborations with educational institutions to deliver training programmes, workshops, and field activities such as planting and site clean-ups.

Wildlife Department director Hamad Salem al-Nuaimi said that rainfall is a key driver of environmental recovery, but its sustainability depends on protecting natu-

ral sites from harmful practices.

He emphasised that the improvement is the result of continuous, integrated efforts in protection, rehabilitation, and monitoring - not rainfall alone.

Al-Nuaimi stressed that protecting the meadows is not intended to restrict public access, but to regulate their use to ensure long-term environmental sustainability.

Additionally, Saleh Hassan al-Kuwari, the director of Natural Reserves, said the implemented management plans have helped protect vegetation cover within reserves, particularly after rainfall.

He noted that protected sites have shown a significantly higher capacity for recovery than areas previously damaged.

## Qatar, Arab Parliament and GCC condemn Iranian attacks in Kuwait

Qatar strongly condemned the heinous Iranian attacks that targeted a military camp and a power and water desalination plant in the sisterly State of Kuwait, which resulted in injuries to members of the armed forces, and considered it a blatant violation of Kuwait's sovereignty and the principles of international law.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed in a statement yesterday the need to stop the unjustified Iranian attacks on brotherly countries. It also affirmed Qatar's full solidarity with Kuwait and its support for all measures taken by Kuwait to preserve its sovereignty and security.

The ministry expressed Qatar's wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured, praying to Allah Almighty to protect Kuwait and its people from all harm. The Arab Parliament has deplored the Iranian-led attack on a camp in Kuwait, using missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles, which wounded 10 military personnel, as well as other assaults on power and water desalination plants, QNA reported from Cairo.

In a statement, President of the Arab Parliament, Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Yammahi,

stressed that targeting critical facilities amounts to a dangerous escalation that imperils the security of nations and their people. The Parliament stands in full solidarity with Kuwait and with Arab nations that have been coming under Iranian attacks and backs all measures they take to protect their security, stability, territories, and sovereignty, al-Yammahi said.

He added that Iran's incessant belligerence toward Arab nations constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and the UN Charter. Secretary-General of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Jassem Mohamed al-Budaiwi strongly condemned Iran's attack on a Kuwaiti Armed Forces camp, which resulted in injury to 10 personnel. He described the attack as "brutal" and a "blatant" indication of Iran's hostile intent towards Kuwait and the GCC member states. Al-Budaiwi said the assault on Kuwait's military facilities constitutes a grave violation of the country's sovereignty and represents a dangerous escalation that threatens the security and stability of the region. He also expressed the GCC's full solidarity with Kuwait and its support for all measures. (QNA)

## Shura Council pays tribute to martyrs, rejects Iranian attacks on Qatar

The Shura Council held its regular weekly session yesterday in Tamim bin Hamad Hall at the Council's headquarters, chaired by HE Speaker Hassan bin Abdullah al-Ghanim.

At the outset of the session, the Council extended its deepest condolences and sympathies to the families of the martyrs from the Qatari Armed Forces, the joint Qatari-Turkish forces, and the Turkish civilian collaborators who lost their lives in the crash of a Qatari Armed Forces helicopter in the country's territorial waters while performing their national duty.

In a related matter, the Council reiterated its categorical rejection of the Iranian attacks targeting Qatar and several brotherly countries, calling for their immediate cessation in accordance with international law, the Charter of the UN, and the principles of good neighborliness.

In this regard, the Council praised the measures taken by the country to safeguard its security and uphold its right to take whatever actions it deems necessary to protect its sovereignty and the safety of its citizens and residents, while continuing its diplomatic efforts, in co-ordination with its regional and international partners, to contain the escalation and maintain regional stability.

Thereafter, HE Secretary-General of the Shura Council Nayef bin Mohammed al-Mahmoud read out the agenda, with the council endorsing the minutes of the previous meeting.

As part of the session's agenda, the Council reviewed a draft law amending certain provisions of Law No 4 of 2008 regarding Property Leasing, submitted by the esteemed government. The Council decided to refer the draft to the Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee for study and to submit a report back to the Council.

The Council also approved, during the session, a draft law amending certain provisions of

### The Council has also criticised attacks on brotherly countries



Labour Law No 14 of 2004, in its revised form, and referred it to the esteemed government. This came after reviewing the report of the Social Affairs, Labour and Housing Committee and discussing the provisions of the draft law with the Council's esteemed members.

The Shura Council was also briefed on the results of the follow-up to its recommendations regarding its submitted proposal concerning agricultural support mechanisms provided to local farms and their contribution to enhancing food security.

In this context, the Council praised the government's co-operation and its demonstrated commitment through high levels of co-ordination and integration between the legislative and executive branches.

The Council affirmed that these efforts contribute to strengthening food security.

On the other hand, the Council reviewed reports of its participation in a number of parliamentary events, namely the participation of its delegation in the meeting of the Standing Committee on Budget and Planning of the Asian

### The Council praised the measures taken by the country to safeguard its security and uphold its right to take whatever actions it deems necessary to protect its sovereignty and the safety of its citizens and residents

Parliamentary Assembly (APA) held in Doha in December 2025, the participation of HE Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council Dr Hamda bint Hassan al-Sulaiti in the Inter-Parliamentary Union Consultative Session held virtually in January, as well as the participation of HE Ahmed bin Ibrahim al-Maliki, a member of the Council, in the parliamentary briefing session on the governance of artificial intelligence held virtually within the same month. (QNA)

## Ministry urges waste sorting for sustainability

The Ministry of Municipality affirmed its commitment to transforming waste into opportunities and building a more sustainable future, on the occasion of International Zero Waste Day, which falls on March 30 each year, by promoting source segregation, advancing the circular economy, and achieving the goal of Qatar Zero Waste. The ministry affirmed in a post on X platform yesterday

that source segregation is the separation of waste inside the home from the very beginning into plastic, paper, metals, organic waste, and general waste, noting that a small step makes a big impact. The ministry explained that waste separation contributes to reducing carbon dioxide emissions, limiting pollution, protecting the environment and natural resources, as well as reducing waste in landfills and

enhancing the quality of life. In the context of its efforts, the ministry pointed to supporting recycling projects, conducting ongoing awareness campaigns, providing dedicated waste sorting bins, and improving waste management. The Ministry of Municipality called for the sorting of waste to begin, stressing the importance of community participation to achieve a cleaner environment and a better future. (QNA)

## Qatar takes part in GCC-Jordan-Russia virtual ministerial meeting

Qatar took part in a joint ministerial meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), Jordan and the Russian Federation, held virtually yesterday. Qatar's delegation was led by HE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi. The meeting also included HE Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov. The talks focused on the impacts of the Iranian aggression against the GCC nations and Jordan, as well as the broader and potentially far-reaching developments in the region. (QNA)



# From Small Actions to Lasting Impact: Snoonu Turns Ramadan Into a Platform for Giving

During a month defined by generosity, Snoonu transformed everyday moments into meaningful acts of giving, leveraging its platform to connect technology, community, and purpose at scale.

Throughout Ramadan, the Qatari-founded super app enabled more than 185,000 acts of kindness, demonstrating how simple, daily interactions can drive real and lasting impact. In total, over QAR 1.4 million in donations and close to QAR 1 million in tips were facilitated through the platform, supporting initiatives that delivered 216,500 Iftar meals to families in need, provided medical assistance, and brought dignity and joy to communities during Eid.

One of the campaign's most visible moments took place across Doha, where Snoonu riders, in partnership with Qatar Charity, carried illuminated messages of hope, turning everyday delivery routes into moving symbols of solidarity.

At the core of the initiative was Delivering Kindness, in which the in-app mechanism enabled merchants to donate 1 QAR for every order placed via a dedicated banner, seamlessly integrating giving into the customer journey and enabling users and merchants to contribute with every transaction. These efforts extended to on-ground initiatives, including Iftar distribution programs, ensuring support reached those most in need throughout the month.

The campaign culminated on the 27th night of Ramadan through the "Warding off Calamity" initiative, contributing to a broader effort that raised over QAR 40 million to support critical medical programs across multiple countries.

Snoonu's impact also extended internationally through its partnership with Education Above All (EAA). Through the Kiswet Al Eid campaign,

**Small Actions + Big Impact**

A simple order.  
A small tip.  
A quick donation.  
Together, they became:

**QAR 1.4M+ donated**  
**QAR 939K+ in tips**  
**185K+ acts of kindness**  
**216,500 meals distributed**

the initiative reached 2,570 children in Gaza and supported the distribution of over 30,000 clothing items to Palestinian and Syrian refugee children in Jordan.

Additional collaborations with organizations, including Qatar Red Crescent, Qatar Cancer Society, and the Thani Bin Jassim Foundation, further expanded the scope of support, spanning healthcare, humanitarian aid, and community initiatives.

**Delivering Kindness with Lasting Impact**

It starts with something small...

Closer to home, Snoonu also placed a strong focus on its riders, the people who keep Qatar moving every day. Through nearly QAR 1 million in tips, alongside bonuses and surprise Iftar initiatives, including a dedicated collaboration with Tarahom, the company recognized the individuals who continue to serve communities, often under demanding and challenging conditions.

**This Ramadan, Snoonu played a key role in driving community impact across Qatar by turning everyday user actions into meaningful contributions**

**From enabling meal distributions to supporting charitable initiatives and community programs, Snoonu's platform connected people, partners, and purpose at scale.**

**The impact in numbers:**  
**QAR 1.4 M+ in donations**  
**QAR 939K+ in tips**  
**216,500 meals distributed**  
**185K+ acts of kindness.**

**Working alongside organizations such as Qatar Charity, Education Above All, Red Crescent, Qatar Cancer Society, and Thani Foundation, Snoonu helped extend support to those who needed it most.**

**The initiative underscores Snoonu's role as a technology-driven platform committed to creating tangible impact within the communities it serves**

**#Always delivering kindness**

Their role goes far beyond delivery, they are a vital part of daily life, ensuring continuity, access, and support when it matters most.

Alongside these efforts, Snoonu also launched a "Support Local" initiative, encouraging the community to discover and support homegrown businesses, reinforcing the importance of standing by local entrepreneurs during challenging times.

What this Ramadan ultimately revealed is something deeper.

Even in challenging times, Qatar once again demonstrated what truly defines it – a nation built on solidarity, generosity, and a shared sense of responsibility.

From individual contributions to collective efforts at scale, the community came together to create impact where it was needed most.

A powerful reminder that kindness does not pause in difficult moments, it rises.

**Powered by Strong Partnerships**

Together with our partners

Turning everyday moments into real impact

Partners: Qatar Charity, Education Above All, Red Crescent, Qatar Cancer Society, Thani Bin Jassim Foundation, etc.

**Together, We Made It Possible**

To our partners - thank you for your trust.  
To our community in Qatar - your kindness made the difference.

To everyone who gave - you changed lives.  
Always delivering kindness.

**The Impact**

Because of you:

- Meals delivered
- Children supported
- Communities uplifted

Including **QAR 1M+ in tips** supporting our riders



# Iran firmly rejects US peace proposal after Trump's warning

Reuters  
Tel Aviv/Washington/Islamabad

President Donald Trump warned yesterday that the US would obliterate Iran's energy plants and oil wells if Tehran does not open the Strait of Hormuz, after Tehran described US peace proposals as "unrealistic" and fired waves of missiles at Israel.

Israel's military said two drones from Yemen had also been intercepted yesterday, two days after the Houthis entered the war by firing missiles at Israel, and that Lebanon's Hezbollah had fired rockets at Israel.

Israeli forces carried out missile strikes on what they called military infrastructure in Tehran and infrastructure used by Hezbollah in Beirut, leaving black smoke hanging over the Lebanese capital. Turkey's defence ministry said a ballistic missile launched from Iran entered Turkish airspace before being shot down by Nato air and missile defences deployed in the eastern Mediterranean, the fourth such incident since the start of the war. Tehran remains defiant in the month-old war, which began with US-Israeli attacks on Iran on February 28 and has spread across the region, killing thousands, disrupting energy supplies and hitting the global economy.

The majority of those reported killed were in Iran and Lebanon, and many were civilians. Iran has effectively blocked the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway that



Women sit at a home damaged by a strike amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Tehran, yesterday. (Reuters)

normally carries about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies.

Thousands of soldiers from the US Army's elite 82nd Airborne Division have started arriving in the Middle East, two US officials told Reuters yesterday, part of a reinforcement that would expand Trump's options to include the deployment of forces inside Iranian territory, even as he pursues talks with Tehran.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt later said Trump wanted to reach a deal with Tehran before an April 6 deadline he set last week after extending an earlier deadline he had set for

Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz. Leavitt said talks with Iran were progressing, adding that what Tehran says publicly differs from what it tells US officials in private. Iran said earlier yesterday it had received US peace proposals via intermediaries, following talks on Sunday between the foreign ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said the proposals were "unrealistic, illogical and excessive".

"Our position is clear. We are under military aggression. Therefore, all our efforts and strength are focused on defending ourselves,"

he told a press conference.

Soon after Baghaei's remarks, Trump said in a social media post that the US was in talks with a "more reasonable regime" to end the war in Iran, but he also issued a new warning over the Strait of Hormuz.

"Great progress has been made but, if for any reason a deal is not shortly reached, which it probably will be, and if the Hormuz Strait is not immediately 'Open for Business', we will conclude our lovely 'stay' in Iran by blowing up and completely obliterating all of their Electric Generating Plants, Oil Wells and Kharg Island," Trump wrote.

# PA, Hamas say Israel death penalty law 'seeks to legitimise killing'

AFP/Reuters  
Ramallah

The Palestinian Authority condemned yesterday the adoption of a law by Israel's parliament that would allow the execution of Palestinians convicted of deadly attacks, calling it a "dangerous escalation".

In a post on X, the Ramallah-based Palestinian foreign ministry said that "Israel has no sovereignty over Palestinian land", adding that: "This law once again reveals the nature of the Israeli colonial system, which seeks to legitimise extrajudicial killing under legislative cover".

The Hamas group said the Israeli parliament's approval of the bill reflects what it described as Israel's policy of "killing and terrorism". The approval of the bill "reflects the bloody nature of the occupation and its policy based on killing and terrorism", Hamas said in a statement.

Earlier, Israel's parliament passed a law yesterday making the death penalty a default sentence for Palestinians convicted in military courts of deadly attacks, fulfilling a pledge by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right allies, Reuters reported.

The legislation has drawn international criticism of Israel, which is already under scrutiny for increasing violence by Jewish settlers against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

The measure includes provisions requiring an execution by

hanging within 90 days of sentencing, with some allowance for a delay but no right to clemency and the option of imposing a life imprisonment sentence instead of capital punishment.

Israel abolished the death penalty for murder in 1954. The only person ever executed in Israel after a civilian trial was Adolf Eichmann, an architect of the Nazi Holocaust, in 1962.

Military courts in the West Bank can already impose a death sentence on Palestinian convicts but have never done so.

The measure was promoted by Itamar Ben-Gvir, the far-right national security minister who has worn noose-shaped lapel pins in the run-up to the vote.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas condemned the legislation as a breach of international law and a doomed bid meant to intimidate Palestinians.

"Such laws and measures will not break the will of the Palestinian people or undermine their steadfastness," Abbas' office said in a statement. "Nor will they deter them from continuing their legitimate struggle for freedom, independence, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital."

Israel's leading rights groups decried the law as "an act of institutionalised discrimination and racist violence against Palestinians." The Association for Civil Rights in Israel said it filed an appeal against the law with Israel's Supreme Court.

# Gold mine attack in South Sudan kills 73

AFP  
Juba

An attack on a gold mine in South Sudan, one of the world's poorest and most volatile countries, killed at least 73 people and wounded 25, the vice president said.

The assault at the weekend targeted the mining area of Khor Kaitan, around 70 kilometres by road southwest of the capital Juba. "At least 73 local miners have been tragically killed and 25 others seriously injured," Vice President James Wani Igga said in a statement. "We must provide urgent medical care and evacuation for the 25 injured."

"We must establish formal inquiry to determine the identity and motive of these 'unidentified assailants'," Igga added.

A security source requesting anonymity confirmed the toll to AFP, while a diplomatic source put the figure at between 75 and 86 deaths. Since gaining independence from Sudan in 2011, the world's youngest country has suffered a series of deadly conflicts. It has seen an uptick in violence between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and fighters linked to First Vice President Riek Machar, mostly in the central-eastern Jonglei State.

The security source told AFP that "it's believed the attack was carried out" by Machar's opposition forces but conceded that reports were "mixed".

A spokesman for Machar, who has been confined to house arrest for a year, denied that his forces were behind the attack and pointed the finger at the South Sudanese army.

# Three UN peacekeepers killed in Lebanon

Reuters  
Beirut

Three UN peacekeepers from Indonesia were killed in two separate incidents in southern Lebanon after a bloody weekend in which Lebanese journalists and medics were killed in Israeli strikes.

Two peacekeepers were killed yesterday after an explosion from an unknown origin destroyed their vehicle near Bani Hayyan in south Lebanon, the UN peacekeeping force UNIFIL said in a statement. Two other soldiers were wounded in the blast.

Earlier, another Indonesian soldier was killed overnight Sunday into yesterday when a projectile exploded by one of the group's positions by the southern Lebanese village of Adchit al-Qusayr. Another peacekeeper was critically injured at the time.

The death on Sunday was the



First responders work on the rubble of a building targeted by an Israeli airstrike in the southern Lebanese village of Hanouiyeh, east of Tyre, yesterday. (AFP)

first among the UN's peacekeeping force in the new war between Israel and Lebanese armed group Hezbollah which erupted on March 2.

"These are two separate incidents and we are investigating them as two separate incidents," said UNIFIL's spokesperson Kandice Ardziel. In response to the first death, Indonesia's foreign ministry said the deceased peace-

keeper was one of its citizens and that three others were injured by "indirect artillery fire". Indonesia condemned the incident and said any harm to peacekeepers is unacceptable, while reiterating its condemnation "of Israel's attacks in southern Lebanon." The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the incidents.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said attacks on peace-

keepers are grave violations of international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes.

"We strongly condemn these unacceptable incidents - peacekeepers must never be a target," the UN peacekeeping chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix told reporters in a briefing yesterday.

UNIFIL is stationed in southern Lebanon to monitor hostilities along the demarcation line with Israel - an area that is at the heart of clashes between Israeli troops and Hezbollah fighters.

Lebanon was pulled into the war in the Middle East when Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel in solidarity with Tehran, two days after Iran was attacked by Israel and the US. Hezbollah's attack prompted a new Israeli ground and air offensive. More than 1,240 people have been killed in Israeli strikes on Lebanon, according to Lebanese authorities. They include more than 120 children, nearly 80 women and dozens of paramedics.

# Israeli attacks kill six in Gaza and the West Bank: medics

Reuters  
Cairo/Ramallah

Israeli airstrikes killed at least four people in the Gaza Strip yesterday, local health officials said, in the latest round of violence since a US-brokered ceasefire took effect more than five months ago.

Israeli forces also killed two people in the occupied West Bank in two separate incidents, Palestinian health officials said.

Medics said three people were killed and two others wounded when an Israeli plane fired a missile at a group of Palestinians near the Zeitoun neighbourhood in Gaza City.

The Israeli military said it had struck and killed members of a Hamas armed cell it had identified in the northern Gaza Strip to remove the threat to its troops operating in the area.

Later yesterday, another Israeli airstrike killed one person and wounded six others outside a local community kitchen in the Nuseirat camp in the central Gaza Strip, medics said. There was no immediate Israeli comment.

More than 72,000 Palestinians have been killed since the war in Gaza began in October 2023, local health officials say, following a storming of Israel by Hamas-led fighters.

Hamas and Israel have traded blame for violations of a ceasefire agreed last October. The Gaza health ministry said Israeli fire has killed at least 700 people since the ceasefire.

Health officials in Gaza say at least 50



People check damaged cars, which Palestinians say was burned by Israeli settlers, near Hebron in the occupied West Bank, yesterday. (Reuters)

Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces since the Iran conflict began a month ago.

## WEST BANK VIOLENCE

In the Israeli-occupied West Bank, health officials said Israeli forces had shot and killed a 22-year-old man near the city of Hebron yesterday. They said soldiers took the body away.

Palestinian security sources identified the dead man as Ramzi Awawada and accused Israeli soldiers of leaving him to bleed to death and preventing rescuers from reaching him.

The Israeli military said its forces had shot and killed a Palestinian who ran towards them holding a knife.

Separately, it said forces operating near the city of Tulkarm fired at a Palestinian who accelerated his vehicle toward them, posing a threat to their safety.

Later, the Palestinian health ministry confirmed the driver's death, adding that the army had taken away his body.

Rights groups and medics say Israeli settlers are taking advantage of curbs on movement imposed during the Iran war to attack Palestinians in the West Bank, with military roadblocks preventing ambulances from reaching victims quickly.

Settlers have killed at least five Palestinians in the West Bank since the conflict began on February 28, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.



## QatarEnergy LNG Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	SUP/C/EDU/7400/25 Provision of Climate Survey for Al Khor International School	30/03/2026 to 13/04/2026	0	0	13/04/2026

### Scope of Work:

Al Khor International School (AKIS) requires for providing a comprehensive, independent climate survey service for AKIS to be conducted annually over a five-year period. The service will measure stakeholder perceptions across multiple themes and provide comparative analysis, benchmarking, and actionable insights to support school improvement planning

**Bid Validity:** Bid Offer should be valid for 180 calendar days from the Tender Closing Date.

### Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

ITT document for this tender will be available in QatarEnergy LNG website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the QatarEnergy LNG online platform (SMART by GEP).

**Note:** Local Companies (established under the Laws of State of Qatar with local Commercial Registration) are advised to refer to the tender documentation and In-Country Value (ICV) Digital Portal: - <https://icv.qa/en-US/> for details of ICV compliance that may be applicable.

# Gunmen open fire in Nigeria university neighbourhood

AFP  
Jos

Gunmen opened fire on a bar in Jos, the capital of Nigeria's restive Plateau state, sparking retaliation from a mob and killing nearly three dozen people in all, local sources said yesterday.

Plateau state, in central Nigeria's Middle Belt region, experiences recurring violence in the countryside, mostly linked to land disputes between farmers and herders.

Jos, a religiously mixed city, has seen sectarian violence but deadly, mass casualty attacks in the crowded capital have been rare in recent years.

It was unclear how many people were killed in the Sunday evening shooting in a Jos neighbourhood popular with local university students and staff and how many were killed in the ensuing mob retaliation.

At least 12 people were killed when unidentified attackers opened fire at a bar-cum-restaurant in the Angwan Rukuba neighbourhood, in the Jos North district, said Plateau state Red Cross secretary Nurudeen Hus-saini Magaji.

He later updated the death toll



Nigerian Red Cross officials look on as they arrive at the scene of an attack, the morning after gunmen killed multiple people in an overnight attack in Angwan Rukuba, Jos North, Plateau State, Nigeria, yesterday. (Reuters)

from the shooting and the mob retaliation to 33, without breaking down how many were killed in each incident.

"The attackers shot people at a joint," said Mangalle Idris, a local youth leader.

Then a mob formed, Idris said, and "attacked people that were either passing or doing business and they killed them."

After initially listing the death

toll from the mob at 10, he revised that number down to three, with 30 people killed in the gunfire.

"Mob action killed three passersby, two of them were burnt beyond recognition," he said.

The University of Jos said the attack, "and the consequential tensions it has generated", prompted it to postpone exams scheduled for yesterday and today. The state government said in-



A Nigerian military vehicle is stationed at the scene of an attack, the morning after gunmen killed multiple people in an overnight attack in Angwan Rukuba, Jos North, Plateau State, Nigeria, yesterday. (Reuters)

vestigations were "ongoing", without giving a toll or naming suspects, and ordered a curfew in Jos North from Sunday to Wednesday.

That same evening as the Plateau attack, unidentified gunmen in the northwestern state of Kaduna killed 13 people at a pre-wedding bachelor party, local and security sources told AFP.

Nigeria's northwest suffers from rural organised crime gangs, locally called "bandits", which kidnap, kill and extort citizens.

In the Plateau state countryside, farmers and herders have been clashing for years over land access, sometimes erupting into massacres where entire villages are emptied out.

Because the violence falls across ethnic lines, some -- including politicians in both Nigeria and the United States -- have charac-

terised the killings as religiously driven, a view rejected by most experts. Violence has been rare in recent years in Jos, said Malik Samuel, an Abuja-based researcher at the nonprofit Good Governance Africa. However the city saw deadly sectarian riots in 2001 and 2008 that killed hundreds across religious lines, and remains "a keg of gunpowder", he said.

Samuel said the government was smart to quickly institute a curfew, to halt further reprisals.

"But having a clear identity and motive of the perpetrators will go a long way to dousing whatever tension is simmering in the city," he added.

Posts on social media after the Angwan Rukuba attack variously blamed -- without evidence -- on herders or "bandits" for targeting a community on Palm Sunday.

The Plateau chapter of Jama'atu Nasril Islam, a Nigerian civil society group, called the attacks a "grave threat to peace and coexistence".

"We urge all citizens to exercise restraint. We must not allow anger and grief to push us into actions that could worsen the situation," it said.

Researchers blame Plateau state's current, mostly rural, crisis on climate change, illegal mining and population growth squeezing available land.

Impunity for killings across rural areas largely abandoned by the state often spark recurrent reprisals.

Local politicians are also known to inflame tensions in Plateau, where the question of which ethnic groups are "indigenous" to the land is politically sensitive.

# Somali army takes control of strategic city, regional leader quits

Reuters  
Mogadishu

Somalia's national army took control of the biggest city in South West state yesterday, prompting the regional leader to resign two weeks after his administration said it was severing ties with the federal government.

The strategic city of Baidoa, the administrative capital of South West state, is home to international peacekeepers and humanitarian agencies in an area affected by drought, conflict and displacement.

"Federal forces have taken over Baidoa, ... it is now calm ... but it

looks like a ghost town," local elder Adan Hussein told Reuters.

A shopkeeper in Baidoa, Hussein Abdullahi, said federal troops were in control of his part of the city, which is about 245 km (150 miles) northwest of the capital Mogadishu.

South West state president Abdiaziz Hassan Mohamed Laftagareen wrote in a statement on Facebook that he had resigned, days after being re-elected for another five-year term.

Many residents have fled Baidoa over the past week and some aid agencies suspended activities, fearing clashes could erupt between the army and regional forces. The dispute between South

West state is the latest sign of strain in the Horn of Africa country's fragile federal system, where disputes over elections and the balance of power between Mogadishu and regional administrations repeatedly open up political fault lines.

Laftagareen's administration opposed constitutional amendments backed by the federal government.

Somalia's federal information ministry said in a message read out on national television that "the former South West state administration ... created political conflict". It said federal forces had been welcomed in Baidoa yesterday.



Civilians walk along a deserted street following clashes between Somalia's federal army and forces loyal to the South West state, home to international peacekeepers and humanitarian agencies, in an area affected by drought, conflict and displacement, in Baidoa, yesterday. (Reuters)

# Attacks leave 30 villagers dead in western Niger

AFP  
Niamey

Attackers killed 30 villagers last week in several raids in western Niger, near the Nigerian border, the governor of the Tahoua region said yesterday on state radio.

While the assailants' identities are unknown, Tahoua has suffered militant attacks and is also a stronghold of armed bandits operating between Niger and Nigeria.

"Thirty martyrs fell and at least 500 head of livestock were carried off" by the assailants in the series of attacks on Thursday, Tahoua's governor Colonel Souleymane Amadou Moussa said.

He said the attackers "withdrew into a neighbouring country where their rear base is located".

The wider Tahoua region is also known as a smugglers' crossroads for fuel, drugs and counterfeit medicines.

The governor, who went to the site of the attacks Sunday, said the area was under the control of the security forces.

State radio reported that five people were also wounded and said that attackers on motorbikes had targeted three isolated villages in a mountainous area of the Birni N'Koni department, near the border with Nigeria.

"The assailants came heavily armed on numerous motorbikes, killed at least 30 people

and returned towards Nigeria," a resident of Zata, one of the villages attacked, told a local radio station.

Last week's attacks come after several soldiers were wounded in an attack on a military drone base at Tahoua airport in early March, which was repelled by the army, according to state media.

About a week earlier, a customs officer and at least three civilians had been killed in an assault on a checkpoint in the N'Koni department, which local sources blamed on "terrorists".

According to conflict monitor ACLED, the Islamic State in the Sahel group has been claiming a spate of assaults in Tahoua, especially ambushes of the Nigerian army.

# Ex-Gambian minister appeals Swiss conviction for crimes against humanity

A former Gambian minister appeared in a Swiss court yesterday to appeal against a conviction for crimes against humanity under ex-dictator Yahya Jammeh, Reuters reported from Geneva. Ousman Sonko's conviction for homicide, torture and false imprisonment in May 2024 was historic since he was the highest-ranking former official ever to be tried in Europe using universal jurisdiction, which allows for the prosecution of the most serious crimes anywhere. Five of the 10 Gambian plaintiffs in the case were present at the Higher Appeals Chamber of the

Federal Criminal Court in the city of Bellinzona alongside the defendant, witnesses said. Sonko, who acted as interior minister until the former strongman Jammeh dismissed him in 2016, is appealing the ruling for crimes allegedly committed between 2000-2016. His lawyer Philippe Currat argued in court yesterday that many of the alleged acts happened before the relevant Swiss legislation took effect in 2011. "The conditions for criminal prosecution are not met," he said in a statement. Plaintiffs and the prosecution are also appealing the ruling.

# Kenya launches drive to enlist new voters amid youth apathy

AFP  
Nairobi

Kenya yesterday kicked off a drive to register new voters ahead of next year's general election, with youths using TikTok reels and music to shake off apathy among their peers.

In June 2024, a wave of protests led by the so-called "Gen Z" swept the country after President William Ruto announced tax hikes, denting his popularity among young people.

They escalated into wider unrest over corruption and rights abuses and left more than 100 people dead and dozens others missing, according to rights groups.

While the protests have faded, many youths remain disillusioned with the Ruto administration, which came to power promising to uplift the young and the poor.

"People are suffering, people are dying. Money is just getting lost out of thin air," said 21-year-old Mark Kipchumba, citing eco-

nomical hardship and rampant corruption as the catalyst for registering as a first-time voter.

The 30-day mass voter registration drive launched by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) aims to enlist at least 2.5mn new voters in its first phase.

The commission says it hopes to add 6.3mn new voters before next year's election, 70% of them youths. "I am here because of the hope that this card brings for the future," said Peter Mwangi, 22, a film student at Multimedia University of Kenya.

Despite the current low numbers, a youth-led campaign, called #NikoKadi (I have the voter's card), is steadily turning voter registration into a fad by urging new voters to enlist.

From TikTok reels to businesses offering discounts to those registered and a planned music concert in May requiring a voter's card for entry, young people are deploying creative tactics to drive up registration.

Activist Ademba Allans, the

brains behind the #NikoKadi drive, says the mobilisation is gaining momentum, but added, "apathy is one of the main things that we are trying to fight."

Kenya's 2022 election saw its lowest turnout in 15 years, with youth -- who make up a large share of the population -- accounting for just 39.8% of registered voters, a 5.2-point drop from 2017, according to the Kofi Annan Foundation.

Allans hopes to change this and the east African nation's politics, long dominated by politicians widely seen as out of touch with the realities of young Kenyans.

"We want to shift the system. We want to take everybody that is in the government home," the 26-year-old said.

Velma Omondi, a 22-year-old, said she threatened "to cut off" two friends if they did not register, which they did.

"I gave them an ultimatum," she said.

"We cannot call for change if we are not willing to take part in the change," she added.



A young man has his biometrics captured in a makeshift setup by officials using a biometric voter registrations kit (BVR) at a pop-up registration centre for new voters during a mass voter registration drive by the national election regulator, Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) in the Kenyan capital Nairobi, yesterday. (AFP)



## US embassy resumes operations in Venezuela

Reuters/AFP  
Washington

The United States has formally reopened its embassy in Caracas, the State Department said yesterday, citing “a new chapter” in diplomatic relations with Venezuela less than three months after US forces seized the country’s then-president Nicolas Maduro in a raid on the capital.

President Donald Trump’s administration has engaged with an interim government led by former Maduro ally Delcy Rodriguez, including on an agreement for the US to sell Venezuelan oil, and has issued sanctions waivers to encourage US investment.

The two countries agreed in early March to re-establish diplomatic relations that were severed in 2019 after the first Trump administration refused to recognise Maduro as the country’s legitimate leader, following a disputed election, and instead recognised an opposition lawmaker as the country’s president.

Since 2019, the United States



The US embassy in Caracas. -AFP

had run diplomatic operations for Venezuela out of neighbouring Colombia.

“Today, we are formally resuming operations at the US embassy in Caracas, marking a new chapter in our diplomatic presence in Venezuela,” the State Department said yesterday.

US forces captured Maduro on January 3 after months of heightened tensions between the two countries, setting off a chain of changes in Venezuela.

Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, are on trial in New York on drug trafficking charges.

The raid came after the Trump

administration said it would reassert US dominance in the Western Hemisphere, but Trump has also cited the success of deposing Maduro as a model for the war with Iran that began last month.

The move against Venezuela cut off a major source of oil to Cuba, where the president has also hinted at US military action.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said days after the Caracas raid that Washington would first seek to stabilise Venezuela, then begin a recovery phase where US companies would have access to the country’s energy resources, before finally beginning a political transition.

## US airports returning to normal as TSA staff get their salaries

Reuters/AFP  
Washington

Major US airports that suffered massive disruptions for weeks after 50,000 Transportation Security Administration (TSA) security officers went unpaid since mid-February say operations are returning to normal.

Airports in Baltimore, Houston, New York, New Orleans and Dallas, which have all experienced massive delays in recent weeks, all reported very short lines yesterday.

The standoff brought chaos and in some cases security lines topping four hours, the longest in the TSA’s nearly 25-year history.

President Donald Trump signed an emergency directive on Friday ordering TSA workers to get paid despite a failure of Congress to end the 45-day-old partial government shutdown and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said workers are to be paid from the start of the week.

Some workers reported on social media that paychecks arrived in their bank accounts early yesterday.

Yesterday the union that represents federal workers said pay had started flowing.

“They haven’t received all their back pay, but they have started seeing their payments,” said Johnny Jones, secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Government Employees TSA Council 100.

Absences on Friday hit a high since the shutdown began with about 3,560, or 12.4% of workers, not showing up, and massive lines were reported at many major airports.

More than 500 airport security officers have quit since February.

More than a third of workers did not show on Friday at New York JFK.

Baltimore, Atlanta and New Orleans and 45% of workers did



Travelers walk through nearly empty TSA screening corridors at Ronald Reagan International Airport in Washington, DC, yesterday. -AFP

not show up on Friday at Houston’s two airports.

Democrats in Congress have held up funding for the DHS while demanding changes in rules governing its immigration operations, after agents in Minneapolis shot and killed US citizens Renee Good and Alex Pretti.

Congressional Democrats had proposed funding the TSA separately while negotiating over reforms on how Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents operate.

Republican leaders in the US House of Representatives on Friday rejected a bipartisan Senate compromise to end the six-week deadlock over DHS funding and passed a bill to fund all of the DHS.

Airports are grappling with a school spring-break travel surge with about 5% higher volume than last year’s.

Hundreds of US immigration agents and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) officers began deploying at 14 US airports last week to aid security screening and the White House said they would remain in place until operations returned to normal.

The DHS funding lapse entered its 45th day yesterday, a record in the United States, although government shutdowns typically impact broader segments of the federal workforce.

## Judge questions Pentagon about new press restrictions

Reuters  
Washington

A US judge sharply questioned the Pentagon yesterday over whether it defied a court order protecting journalists’ access, in a closely watched clash over press freedom and executive power.

US District Judge Paul Friedman expressed concerns at a hearing in Washington that the Defence Department’s revised restrictions for journalists covering the seat of US military power went even further than earlier rules he had blocked.

“Is this Kafka? What’s going on here?” the judge asked after reading a declaration by the *New York Times* describing reporters’ difficulty accessing areas of the Pentagon.

He did not issue a ruling but said the government must respond to the newspaper’s declaration.

The Pentagon under Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said in October that journalists could be deemed security risks and have their press badges revoked if they solicited unauthorised military personnel to disclose classified, and in some cases unclassified, information.

Of the 56 news outlets in the Pentagon Press Association, only one agreed to sign an acknowledgment of the policy, with reporters who did not sign surrendering their press passes to the Pentagon.

Friedman ruled on March 20 that the policy violated protections for news gathering and due process in the US Constitution.

He issued an injunction requiring reporters’ credentials to be restored immediately.

The *New York Times*, the lead plaintiff that sued to challenge Hegseth’s policy, told Friedman last week that the Pentagon had not complied with his order but instead released what it called a new “interim” policy defying the court ruling.

The policy, the *Times* said, bars reporters with press passes from entering the building without an escort, sets up rules governing when a reporter can offer anonymity to a source and prohibits reporters from knowingly “inducing” sources to share unauthorised information.

“Nothing will stop them. Not a court order. Not an injunction,” a lawyer for the *Times*, Ted Bontros, told Friedman at yesterday’s hearing.

He said the department embarked on a “mad scramble” not to comply with the court’s prior order but to violate it.

The Pentagon has argued that it is in compliance with the court’s order.

Justice Department lawyer Sarah Welch said at yesterday’s hearing that the department crafted a “materially different” policy that should be upheld.

She said its move to relocate the Pentagon press corps to a separate annex was part of a prior workspace plan that was announced last year.

Welch asked the court to allow additional written arguments to defend its revised rules.

The Pentagon Press Association said in a court filing that the Pentagon’s new rules are “a clear violation of the letter and spirit” of Friedman’s ruling.

Reuters is a member of the association, which includes the *Times*, ABC News, Fox News and other outlets.

## Military complex being built beneath White House ballroom project: Trump

President Donald Trump said on Sunday that the US military is planning to construct a large complex beneath the new ballroom he is building at the White House.

“The military is building a massive complex under the ballroom, and that’s under construction, and we’re doing very well, so we’re ahead of schedule,” Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One.

“It’s part of it, the ballroom essentially becomes a shed for what’s being built under,” Trump said, without elaborating on the unprecedented arrangement.

He said information about the plan had come out recently “because of a stupid lawsuit”.

Last October, the former real estate developer had an entire wing of the White House bulldozed, in order to build a vast ballroom to host receptions and state dinners.

Trump speaks frequently and in great detail about the construction work, which has thus far been undertaken without the usual byzantine vetting procedures for changes to Washington’s built landscape.

“We are using onyx and stones that are incredible,” he recently told a press conference dedicated in part to the war in the Middle East.

The ballroom project – one of the most ambitious undertakings at the White House in over a century – has continued to grow in scope, with its privately-funded budget doubling from \$200mn-\$400mn.

The ballroom has faced legal and political challenges, including a lawsuit from the National Trust for Historic Preservation alleging the administration bypassed required reviews and public input.

A federal judge has said he will decide by the end of March whether to issue an in-



Trump speaks to members of the media while holding up renderings of the planned White House ballroom, aboard Air Force One en route to Joint Base Andrews in Maryland. -Reuters

junction halting the project while the lawsuit proceeds.

No firm completion date has been given but the White House has said it will be “long before the end” of Trump’s term.

Eager to leave his mark on the US capital, he has also renamed an iconic performance venue as the “Trump-Kennedy Centre”, and plans to build a grand arch in Washington inspired by the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. -AFP/Reuters

## Nasa set for first crewed Moon return in over half a century

By Joey Roulette  
Reuters

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) is preparing to launch the first crew of astronauts toward the Moon in over 53 years with its second Artemis mission, a key test flight in humanity’s broader lunar goals as the US races to reassert leadership in space faced with growing competition from China.

Three US and one Canadian astronaut are due for liftoff aboard Nasa’s Orion capsule and Space Launch System (SLS) rocket tomorrow for a 10-day test mission swinging around the Moon and back, a winding journey taking them deeper into space than humans have ever gone before.

The mission is the first crewed test flight in Nasa’s Artemis programme, the flagship US effort to begin regular flights to the Moon, at an estimated cost of at least \$93bn since 2012.

Not since Apollo 17 in 1972 have humans touched down on the Moon’s surface, a tricky feat Nasa aims to repeat in 2028 at the rugged lunar south pole.

The US is the only country to have put humans on another celestial body with its six lunar landings of the Apollo programme, driven by competition with the former Soviet Union.

China, a formidable technological rival to the US, has made steady progress in its own Moon programme in recent years, with a string of robotic lunar landings and a 2030 goal to put its own crew on the surface.

US officials have focused on beating China to the surface.

Nasa astronaut Christina Koch, Artemis II mission specialist, said on Sunday that the Moon is a “witness plate” to the solar system’s formation, and a stepping stone to Mars, “where we might have the most likelihood of finding evidence of past life”.

“Many, many countries have recog-



People photograph Nasa’s next-generation Space Launch System (SLS) rocket with the Orion crew capsule, on Pad 39B ahead of the Artemis II mission launch at the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida. -Reuters

nised the value that there is in exploring further into the solar system, to the Moon and on to Mars,” she told reporters. “They recognise that not only can we gain all these extremely tangible benefits, but that we have the opportunity to answer the question that could be the question of our lifetime, which is, are we alone?”

“Answering that question starts at the Moon,” she said. “The question is not should we go, but should we lead, or should we follow?”

Through a series of increasingly advanced Artemis missions extending into the next decade, the US aims to set precedent for how others will operate and coexist on the Moon’s surface, where someday countries and companies can exploit rocky lunar resources and practice for much more difficult missions to Mars.

Nasa is relying on an array of companies in its Moon programme with the hope of stimulating a commercial lunar market in the future, the value

of which is hard to estimate, analysts say.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers report from January estimates \$127bn in revenues by 2050 from lunar surface activities, with investments potentially reaching \$72bn to \$88bn through the same period.

However, for now, and in the near future, governments will drive companies’ lunar strategies and revenue.

It will be a long time before commercial growth exists on the Moon independently of government funding, said Akhil Rao, an economist at analysis firm Rational Futures who was a research economist at Nasa.

“Nasa did not see a short-run economic value that companies would be able to derive that would allow Nasa to be hands-off,” said Rao, who was among a team of economists and space policy staff laid off last year amid the Trump administration’s sweeping federal workforce cuts.

The Artemis II mission will pose a

### ANNOUNCEMENT

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## Democratic lawmakers seek data on US gun exports linked to cartels, criminal violence

Two Democratic members of Congress are pressing the Commerce Department for detailed data on US exports of semi-automatic weapons, citing concerns that legally exported American firearms are fueling criminal violence and arming cartels across the Western Hemisphere.

Reuters reviewed the letter sent on Sunday by Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Representative Gregory Meeks of New York to Under-Secretary of Commerce Jeffrey Kessler.

Warren and Meeks, the top Democrats on the Senate Banking Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee, respectively, invoked their oversight authority under the Export Control Reform Act of 2018 to demand a sweeping accounting of semi-automatic firearm export licences approved since January 2025.

The request covers semi-automatic rifles, pistols, shotguns and associated accessories, and asks the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security to disclose the number of licences approved, the countries receiving the exports, the types of purchasers cleared to receive them, and details of any monitoring conducted to

prevent diversion into illegal markets.

The letter requested a response and a full briefing to the committees by April 13.

The lawmakers cited data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives showing that legal US firearm exports account for nearly 20% of crime gun traces in Central America and more than 37% globally outside of North America.

The letter is the latest move by Warren to scrutinise the flow of US-made weapons into criminal hands.

In early March Warren introduced legislation to stop an Army-owned ammunition plant in Missouri from selling military-grade bullets to civilians, asserting that some rounds have been diverted to Mexican drug cartels and used in over a dozen American mass shootings.

In 2023 the Commerce Department paused export licensing of most civilian firearms and ammunition for months to assess the "risk of firearms being diverted to entities or activities that promote regional instability, violate human rights, or fuel criminal activities".

US companies that sell firearms include Sturm Ruger & Co and Smith & Wesson Brands. - Reuters

## At least 16 dead, 10 injured in Haiti town gang clashes: police

At least 16 people were killed and 10 more injured in an attack in Petite-Riviere, in Haiti's breadbasket Artibonite region, police said yesterday, amid a conflict with the Gran Grif gang.

A preliminary report by local civil protection authorities suggested a higher toll, reporting 17 dead and 19 injured.

Local media said the violence began in the Jean-Denis neighbourhood.

The attack follows United Nations reports that more than 2,000 people were recently displaced by armed raids in nearby Verrettes, prompting residents in Petite-Riviere to flee their homes.

The Artibonite department, a key agricultural area, has seen some of the country's worst violence as gang conflict spreads beyond the capital, Port-au-Prince. - Reuters

## School shooting in Argentina leaves one dead, eight wounded

A 15-year-old boy opened fire in a school in Argentina yesterday, killing another pupil and wounding eight other people in a rare burst of US-style violence, officials said.

The assailant was taken into custody after the shooting in the Mariano Moreno School in the central town of San Cristobal, the Santa Fe provincial government said.

"I went upstairs, and just as I was about to come down, some students saw a boy come out of the bathroom with a gun and started screaming," Priscila, a student at the school, told local broadcaster Radio Con Vos. "He started shooting into the air and we all ran out."

Six students were treated for superficial injuries sustained while fleeing the scene and are all out of danger, the ministry said.

Two other students were transferred to the Rafaela Regional Hospital, one in serious though stable condition.

The identities of the assailant and the victims were not immediately released.

The shooting happened as students waited to raise the national flag, a ritual performed daily before classes begin at the school in the town of some 16,000 residents.

The weapon used by the assailant "is believed to be a shotgun", Ramiro Munoz, San Cristobal government secretary, told TN television.

Classes were suspended and the students sent home.

"This is a very, very sad and deeply shocking moment. Above all, we want to offer our support to the family of Ian, the young man who lost his life today," said Pablo Cococcioni, provincial justice and security minister.

Regarding the suspected assailant, "he has no criminal record; we had no reason to intervene throughout his entire school career", Cococcioni told a news conference.

However, he revealed the shooter "was going through a very complex private family situation" leading authorities to understand "this was not a school-related conflict".

He added: "It's very difficult to explain these events - even more so when they happen in a school setting. This is something completely extraordinary, something we never expected."

Previous school shootings in Argentina included the killing in 2000 of one student in Rafael Calzada and three in 2004 in Carmen de Patagones, both in Buenos Aires province. - AFP

## Air Canada chief to retire after row over English-only condolence message

Air Canada said yesterday that chief executive Michael Rousseau will retire later this year, an announcement following controversy over his failure to issue condolences both in English and French for a fatal airport disaster.

Rousseau had sparked controversy by issuing an English-only video message to express condolences after a deadly collision late on March 22 between an Air Canada jet and a fire truck at New York's LaGuardia Airport.

Canada has two official languages - English and French - and media reports noted that one of the pilots killed in the accident was from French-speaking Quebec.

Rousseau has informed the company's board that he will retire by the end of the third quarter, the airline said, adding that work is underway to choose his successor.

"The board will consider a number of performance criteria in assessing candidates including the ability to communicate in French," Air Canada said in the statement.

Until he steps down, Rousseau is set to continue leading the company and serving on its board.

Air Canada is the country's largest airline and is headquartered in Montreal, Quebec - Canada's traditionally French-speaking region.

The company is required to offer services in both languages.

Rousseau had earlier issued an apology over his English-only message, saying that he was saddened that his limited French "has diverted attention from the profound grief of the families".

"Despite many lessons over several years, unfortunately, I am still unable to express myself adequately in French," he said in a statement.

He added: "I sincerely apologise for this, but I am continuing my efforts to improve."

In 2021, Rousseau also issued an apology over his lack of French proficiency.

At the time, he apologised for causing offence by giving a speech almost entirely in English, pledging to improve his French.

After remarks to business groups and comments to journalists that he had managed to get by without French for years, Rousseau faced backlash from politicians. - AFP

# Cubans ready for Russian oil but some say it's not enough

By Laurent Thomet and Lisandra Cots  
AFP

Cubans cautiously welcomed yesterday the imminent arrival of a Russian oil shipment, with some warning that it would do little to ease an energy crisis after US President Donald Trump granted a reprieve from an oil blockade.

The Anatoly Kolodkin, a tanker under US sanctions carrying 730,000 barrels of crude, was due to arrive today with the first shipment of oil to the communist-ruled island since January.

Trump's decision to let Russia deliver oil to Cuba avoids a confrontation with Moscow and provides a potential lifeline to a country that has endured blackouts, fuel rationing and dwindling public transportation.

"It's wonderful. Of course it's going to be a huge help given the situation we're facing in our country," Miriam Joseph, a 65-year-old government worker in Havana, told AFP.

Others said it was not enough to solve Cuba's crisis.

"It's a drop in the bucket compared to what this country needs. It means next to nothing," said Raul Pomares, a 56-year-old gardener waiting for a taxi in the capital. "It's a symbolic gesture that won't have any real impact on the economy for ordinary Cubans."

Moscow said yesterday that it was "pleased" that the tanker had reached Cuban waters.

"Russia considers it its duty to step up and provide necessary assistance to our Cuban friends," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

He said Moscow and Washington had been



A man walks along the beach as tanker ships are seen in the background at the Supertanker Base in the Industrial Zone of the port of Matanzas, Cuba. - AFP

in touch over the shipment.

"We don't mind having somebody get a boatload, because they need - they have to survive," Trump said on Sunday. "I told them, if a country wants to send some oil into Cuba right now, I have no problem with that. Whether it's Russia or not."

However, he predicted that the oil delivery would have no impact as he renewed his threats against the Cuban government.

"Cuba's finished, they have a bad regime,

they have very bad and corrupt leadership, and whether or not they get a boat of oil it's not going to matter," Trump said.

Cuba lost its main regional ally and oil supplier in January when US forces captured Venezuela's socialist leader Nicolas Maduro. Trump subsequently threatened to impose tariffs on any country sending oil to Cuba and has mused about "taking" the island of 9.6m people.

Washington slightly eased the blockade last month to allow oil sales to Cuba's small private sector.

The Anatoly Kolodkin was just north of central Cuba yesterday and is estimated to arrive at the western port of Matanzas by morning today, according to shipping tracker MarineTraffic.

It would take about 15-20 days to process the oil and another 5-10 days to deliver its refined products, according to Jorge Pinon, an expert on Cuba's energy sector at the University of Texas at Austin.

The Russian shipment could be converted into 250,000 barrels of diesel, enough to cover the country's demand for around 12.5 days, Pinon told AFP.

The government would have to decide whether to use the fuel for backup power generators or for buses, tractors and trains needed to keep the economy going for two weeks, he added.

"This little diesel that they have, which is not a lot, where do they prioritise it?" Pinon said.

Orlando Ocana, a 76-year-old retiree, said the Russian shipment was a "Band-Aid".

"It's a relief, but it's not the solution," he said. "The real solution to our problems is building new thermoelectric power plants."

# Chile axes plans to give papers to almost 200,000 people

AFP  
Santiago

Chile's new right-wing government said yesterday that it will cancel plans to grant legal status to tens of thousands of migrants who entered the country without permission.

The previous leftist government of president Gabriel Boric had prepared a decree giving the green light to 182,000 people who applied for legal status.

However, the new government of Jose Antonio Kast, who campaigned with a pledge to crack down on immigration, will not act on this decree, the Migration Service told AFP.

"We are not going to proceed with a massive granting of residency papers as proposed by the Boric government," Mi-

gration Service director Frank Sauerbaum said.

Earlier this month Kast ordered the start of construction of new barriers on the Peruvian border to crack down on immigration from Peru and Bolivia and create a "border shield," vowing to impose a state of emergency to that end.

He said yesterday that recent years had seen "Chile damaged by illegal immigration, drug trafficking and organised crime".

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

Explaining why the decree would not proceed, the Migration Service said that "today we found out 6,000 of the 182,000 have already committed a crime".

Kast's election brought the most right-wing president to power in Chile since the

military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet from 1973 to 1990.

The government estimates around 337,000 foreign nationals in Chile, mainly Venezuelans, without residency papers.

The previous government wanted irregular migrants to register on a voluntary basis in order to identify them - but Kast's arrival has changed all that.

"All this situation is generating much uncertainty," Freymar Marquez, a Venezuelan homemaker of 30, told AFP. "If they denying regularisation to those who have registered, what will be left for those who have not?"

Murders and kidnappings have increased and foreign criminal gangs such as Venezuela's Tren de Aragua have entered the country.

However, Chile remains one of the region's safest countries, with a homicide rate of 5.4 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2025, one of Latin America's lowest.

Five days after taking office, Kast traveled to the Arica region, on the Peruvian border, to oversee the construction of barriers to prevent entry into three northern regions.

He also set a 90-day deadline for their completion and announced he would beef up the number of military personnel deployed and upgrade surveillance technology, including drones, cameras, sensors and specialized equipment.

He further plans to submit two bills to congress aimed at curbing migration.

One will punish those helping migrants enter Chile irregularly and a second would make illegal entry into the country a crime, although he ruled out mass raids.

"We don't want to conduct house-to-house searches. But every single person knows that they will have to face the authorities at some point," Kast told broadcaster Canal 13.



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## Air China resumes flights to N Korea but stops taking fresh bookings

Reuters  
Beijing

China's flag carrier resumed flights between the capital Beijing and North Korea's Pyongyang yesterday, but it has stopped taking fresh bookings on the route, according to Chinese state media and a tour operator.

Air China restarted the weekly flights for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic, Chinese state media said and Reuters reported this month based on information from tour operator Young Pioneer Tours, which has had business in North Korea.

But the airline stopped taking further bookings and future flights had not been confirmed, Rowan Beard from Young Pioneer Tours said yesterday, citing his com-



Zhao Bin, a Chinese business traveller, speaks to media after checking in for a flight to Pyongyang, North Korea, at Beijing airport yesterday. (AFP)

pany's communications with Air China.

The airline did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The flights between Beijing and Pyongyang had been reinstated following the resumption of pas-

senger train services between the capital cities.

Still, North Korea is largely closed to foreign tourism, with few exceptions, such as for some Russian tour groups under restricted arrangements.

"With tourism currently non-existent, it becomes much harder to fill those planes even with just a once-weekly service," Beard said.

Yesterday's flight from Beijing to Pyongyang, there were only around 10 passengers, South Korea's Yonhap News Agency reported.

Beard said high fuel costs were possibly another reason why Air China had stopped flights into North Korea.

A Reuters search of Air China's website did not show any available future flights between Beijing and Pyongyang.

## China sanctions Japanese lawmaker over Taiwan trips

AFP  
Beijing

China announced sanctions yesterday against a Japanese lawmaker over his visits to Taiwan, as Beijing and Tokyo lock horns in a months-long diplomatic row.

Relations between China and Japan have deteriorated since Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi suggested in November that Tokyo could intervene militarily in any attempt by Beijing to seize Taiwan.

Beijing considers self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory and has not ruled out the use of force to take control of the island, threatening countermeasures against diplomatic engagement with Taipei.

Keiji Furuya, a conservative lawmaker and Takaichi ally, is banned from entering mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau from yesterday, according to a Chinese foreign ministry statement.

He made "multiple runs to Taiwan in defiance of China's strong opposition... seriously undermining China's sovereignty and territorial integrity", the statement said.

People and groups in China are also banned from engaging with the Japanese lawmaker.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said that despite China's calls to avoid Taiwan, Furuya had continued to "exclude and stir up trouble with Taiwan", and his sanctioning should "serve as a warning to others".

The announcement comes af-

ter Furuya met Taiwan President Lai Ching-te in Taipei this month, when the 73-year-old lawmaker said Takaichi's comments on Taiwan "maintain the Japanese government's previous position and are not problematic".

In Tokyo, Furuya shrugged off China's decision, saying that he has no assets in China and had not visited the country in decades.

"The fact that they are imposing sanctions on something like this really makes me think: 'That's typical of China,'" he told reporters.

The Japanese government has urged China to lift the sanction, said Masanao Ozaki, deputy chief cabinet secretary.

"This is highly regrettable from the perspective of Japan-China relations," he told a daily media briefing.

## Australian fugitive shot dead by police after seven-month manhunt

AFP  
Melbourne

Australian police said yesterday they shot a fugitive wanted for killing two officers, ending a seven-month manhunt for one of the country's most-wanted criminals.

Desmond Freeman fled into dense bushland in August last year after shooting and killing two police officers who came to search his rural home in Victoria state.

Hundreds of police have pursued Freeman through the region's rugged terrain over the past seven months, pouring resources into one of Australia's largest manhunts.

Police tracked Freeman to a caravan parked on a "very remote" property in rural Victoria, police commissioner Mike Bush said, shooting him after he refused pleas to surrender. "Everything I know at this point tells me that this shooting was justified," Bush told reporters.

"There was a standoff. There was an opportunity for him to surrender peacefully, which he did not."

The state coroner would now confirm the identity of the body and cause of death, he added.

Two local residents told AFP Freeman had been shot at a property in Thologolong, near the border of New South Wales and Victoria states.



A police vehicle at the scene where police said they believe fugitive gunman Desmond Freeman, who had been on the run for seven months for allegedly killing two police officers, was shot dead in a police operation in Porepunkah, Australia, yesterday. (Reuters)

The property's owner had been away for several weeks, they said.

"The place is off the grid entirely. I honestly don't think it's a place you just stumble across. You have to know where it is," said Thologolong resident Jasmine Teese.

"There's no house there. The man who resides there lives in a collection of caravans, containers and old cars," she added.

Another local resident, cattle farmer Mike Gadd, told AFP it was "hard to believe" Freeman had remained undetected for so long.

Police said they had yet to speak to the owner.

Local media described Freeman as a conspiracy theorist and member of the so-called "sovereign citizen" movement, which falsely

believes it is not subject to the law. The 56-year-old - known as "Dezi" - escaped into a national park littered with disused mineshafts.

Helicopters, dog squads and reinforcements from New Zealand were dispatched to help track Freeman, who reportedly possessed strong bushcraft and outdoor survival skills. Police considered Freeman armed and dangerous.

At one point involving around 450 police officers, the manhunt was one of the "most significantly resourced police operations" in Australian history, Bush said.

Police believed Freeman may have evaded capture with the help of locals sympathetic to his anti-authority views.

"It would be very difficult for

him to get to where he was without assistance," Bush said.

They offered a AU\$1 million (\$685,000) reward - the largest possible - for information that helped bring him into custody.

Freeman opened fire on police as they raided his home in the small village of Porepunkah in August.

He killed 59-year-old detective Neal Thompson and 35-year-old senior constable Vadim De Waart.

A third officer was wounded in the lower body.

"Today, we won't reflect on the loss of a coward," said the Police Association of Victoria. "We will remember the courage and bravery of our fallen members and every officer that has doggedly pursued this outcome for the community."

## Rights group condemns trial of Chinese artist charged with slander

AFP  
Beijing

A rights group called for the immediate release of jailed Chinese artist Gao Zhen, whose works criticised former leader Mao Zedong, as his trial began yesterday.

The US-based Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) said 69-year-old Gao, who is accused of slandering China's heroes, was tried behind closed doors at a court in the northern city of Sanhe, though no verdict has yet been announced.

"Gao Zhen has the right to freedom of artistic expression. The use of a contrived, retroactively applied law and a closed trial underscores serious due process violations," CHRD researcher Shane Yi said in a statement.

"The charges should be dropped and Gao Zhen released immediately."

Gao and his brother Gao Qiang gained fame in the early 2000s for art touching on sensitive political topics like the Cultural Revolution, the Tiananmen Square protests and the legacy of Mao, who led China from 1949 until his death in 1976.

Their works include a sculpture of the Communist leader kneeling, titled "Mao's Guilt", and another called "Execution of

Christ", in which several bronze statues of Mao aim rifles at one of Jesus.

Gao Zhen, who emigrated to the United States in 2022, was detained at his studio on the outskirts of Beijing in August 2024 during a visit to China.

He was indicted in June last year on charges of insulting "heroes and martyrs", according to CHRD.

Since 2021, that crime has carried a maximum sentence of three years in prison, but authorities appear to be applying it retroactively to works that Gao created between 2005 and 2009.

Gao has several medical conditions, and his health has deteriorated during his detention, CHRD said.

His wife and their seven-year-old son, a US citizen, have been barred from leaving China.

The absence of a verdict yesterday indicated that "a political decision has not yet been made about the case", CHRD's co-executive director Sophie Richardson said.

"This has nothing to do with law."

The space for artistic expression in China has narrowed since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, with authorities often using the crime of insulting heroes and martyrs to target artists and cultural figures.

## Jakarta confirms Indonesian peacekeeper killed in Lebanon

Indonesia confirmed yesterday that one of its peacekeepers was killed in Lebanon, where the UN force said a projectile hit one of its positions. The war in the Middle East spread to Lebanon in early March after Iran-backed Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has reported that its positions have been hit more than once since the start of the latest fighting. On Sunday, a projectile exploded near the town of Adchit Al Qusayr, killing one peacekeeping soldier on Sunday, said UNIFIL.

UNIFIL said it did not know the origin of the projectile but had launched an investigation to find out. The Indonesian foreign ministry said "indirect

artillery fire" near town of Adchit Al Qusayr killed one of its peacekeepers and wounded three others.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved family, and we wish a full and swift recovery to the injured personnel," the ministry said.

"Indonesia is working with UNIFIL to ensure the prompt repatriation of the fallen and the best possible medical treatment for the injured."

Indonesia strongly condemned the incident and called for an investigation, adding that safety and security of UN peacekeepers must be respected "at all times".

Adchit Al Qusayr lies near Lebanon's southern border with Israel, where Israeli forces have been battling Hezbollah fighters for nearly a month. (AFP)

## Rescuers search for 27 missing after Indonesian fishing boat sinks

More than two dozen crew are unaccounted for after their fishing boat sank off the east coast of an Indonesian island yesterday, a local search and rescue agency said.

The vessel, which carried 27 crew, sank early yesterday in bad weather after it departed Taliabu island in the eastern province of North Maluku a day before, the agency said in a statement.

The skipper informed the shipowner at around 4:00am local time that the boat had sunk and all crew had carried out "self-evacuation" to a longboat, it added.

"The team is continuing the search but as of now, there is no information regarding the whereabouts of the victims or of the longboat that reportedly evacuated them," said the statement.

Marine accidents are a regular occurrence in the Southeast Asian archipelago, due in part to lax safety standards and inclement weather.

In January, three Spanish tourists died when their boat sank off eastern Indonesia, and a 10-year-old boy was listed as officially missing after authorities ended the search. (AFP)

## Sunset over Sydney Harbour Bridge



People watch the sunset over Sydney Harbour Bridge in Sydney, Australia, yesterday. (Reuters)

## South Korea considers nationwide driving curbs as oil prices soar

Reuters  
Seoul

South Korea is considering extending driving curbs to the general public if global oil prices climb further, senior officials said, as authorities seek to rein in energy demand amid supply strains due to the US-Israeli war with Iran.

Finance Minister Koo Yun-cheol said on Sunday the govern-

ment could expand restrictions on passenger car use beyond public institutions if crude prices rise to around \$120-\$130 a barrel, up from the current \$100-\$110 range.

If expanded to the entire public, the policy would mark the country's first nationwide driving curbs since the 1991 Gulf War, when the government imposed a 10-day vehicle rotation system to conserve energy.

"If the Middle East situation worsens, the crisis alert would

have to move up to the 'warning' stage, and around that point we would need to curb consumption," Koo said on a local broadcast, referring to a move up to the third-highest level in the country's four-stage resource security crisis alert system.

He added the government may also consider further fuel tax cuts to ease the burden on households.

The finance ministry said in a separate media release yesterday that mandatory driving curbs for

the private sector remain undecided, adding that authorities would weigh energy supply conditions and broader economic factors before taking any action.

South Korea imports about 70% of its crude oil from the Middle East, leaving the country highly exposed to supply disruptions and sharp price swings stemming from tensions in the region. The government last week enforced a mandatory five-day vehicle rotation system for the public sector, restricting vehicle

use based on licence plate numbers.

Energy Minister Kim Sung-whan said last Thursday authorities were reviewing tighter demand-management measures should the alert level rise further, including widening enforcement of driving curbs, while encouraging voluntary participation by companies and the financial sector. Major conglomerates such as Samsung Electronics and SK Group have joined the effort, urging employees to cut back on pri-

vate car use and adopt fuel-saving measures.

Lawmakers and senior politicians have also taken to social media, posting about using public transport and bicycles to set an example and calling on the public to join energy-saving efforts.

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung urged the country to accelerate a shift to renewable energy such as electric vehicles, saying that the energy issue is "so severe that even I can't sleep at night."

## India is 'free' of Maoist insurgency

AFP  
New Delhi

India yesterday declared the country free of the Maoist insurgency, fulfilling a long-standing deadline to defeat the decades-long rebellion.

Home Minister Amit Shah told parliament India was "free" of the rebels, known as Naxals.

"I can say it openly, that we have become Naxal-free - there is no hesitation in saying this," Shah told parliament, adding that "once the entire operation is completed, I will also inform the country."

India in the last two years stepped up its campaign against the last remnants of the Naxalite rebellion, named after the village in the Himalayan foothills where the Maoist-inspired insurgency began nearly six decades ago.

The rebellion controlled nearly a third of the country with an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 fighters at its peak in the mid-2000s, but had been dramatically weakened in recent years.

Most armed insurgents were limited to central Chhattisgarh state's Bastar region, a vast mineral-rich sprawl of dense



Former Maoist insurgents attend a vocational training programme at Dantewada district's rehabilitation centre for surrendered Maoists, in Chhattisgarh's Bastar division yesterday. (AFP)

forests and hills, roughly the size of The Netherlands.

In 2025, security forces killed 364 insurgents, arrested 1,022, and another 2,337 surrendered, including senior leaders, according to statistics tabled in India's parliament.

Civilian and security force deaths have dropped by 90 percent since 2010, and annual Maoist attacks have fallen from more than 1,900 to roughly 200 last year.

"The days of those who commit Mao-

ist violence, of those who perpetrate Naxalism's violence, are over now," Shah added.

The Maoists said they were fighting for the rights of marginalised indigenous people in forest regions, where mining companies also eye valuable resources.

More than 12,000 rebels, soldiers and civilians have died in the conflict since a handful of villagers rose up against their feudal lords in 1967.

## Indian officials to begin counting world's largest population

Reuters  
New Delhi

More than 3mn Indian officials are to spend a year counting every single person in the world's most populous nation, a mammoth task delayed in part by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The once-in-a-decade population survey, originally due in 2021, will start on April 1 with a short window for citizens who wish to register themselves online, the government said yesterday.

There will then be two phases of physical door-to-door surveys. The first will list houses and housing conditions, the second - inhabitants and their economic and social parameters, Census Commissioner Mritunjay Kumar Narayan told reporters.

With a population of more than 1.4bn people, India overtook China in 2023, according to the UN Population Fund.

Analysts and economists do not see the size of India's population as a cause for alarm. The government has long hailed

its predominantly young population as an opportunity to create a large pool of skilled workers while many major economies struggle with declining and ageing workforces.

The census will also collect details of castes, Narayan said. The rigid social stratification system dates back thousands of years and pervades Indian life and politics.

There are scores of caste-based political parties, and many state institutions must offer affirmative action quotas to the so-called lower castes for employment and college places.

Supporters have stressed the need for data on those deserving government assistance, while critics say caste has no place in a country with ambitions of becoming a major world power.

India recorded its castes in 2011 for the first time in 80 years, but the data was not fully publicised amid concerns about its accuracy. The census is expected to conclude next March. Narayan said several data sets from the census, being recorded digitally for the first time, would be released soon after.

## Myanmar paves way for junta chief to become civilian president

AFP  
Naypyidaw

Myanmar cleared the way yesterday for coup-leading general Min Aung Hlaing to become president and maintain his rule in civilian garb, with lawmakers nominating him as a vice-presidential candidate and the junta replacing him as military commander.

Min Aung Hlaing has ruled Myanmar since 2021 when he ordered a coup toppling the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi - detaining the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, dissolving her party and triggering civil war.

After five years of hardline rule, he oversaw heavily restricted elections that criminalised protest or criticism of the vote and returned a walkover win for pro-military parties in late January.

"This political manoeuvring signals that Min Aung Hlaing intends to continue ruling the country with an iron fist," said analyst Naing Min Khant of the Institute for Strategy and Policy Myanmar think tank.

"He fundamentally lacks legitimacy but desperately craves the facade of it."

Lower house MP Kyaw Kyaw Htay nominated Min Aung Hlaing for vice-president yesterday



Myanmar's outgoing military chief Min Aung Hlaing (front left) and his successor Ye Win Oo (front right) during a handover ceremony in Naypyidaw yesterday. (AFP)

morning, according to a television broadcast of a parliamentary session on state-run media.

Three vice-presidents will be chosen, one of whom will be elected as president in a parliamentary vote.

The lower house also nominated Kyaw Swe for vice-president, lower house speaker Khin Yi said in parliament.

Kyaw Swe is from the junta-aligned National Unity Party, formed by retired military officers in 1988 after mass pro-democracy protests challenging the rule of former military dictator Ne Win were brutally crushed by the

armed forces.

The upper house nominated two other vice-presidential candidates: Tuu Jar, a former ethnic minority armed group leader from northern Kachin state whose party is now aligned with the military, and Nan Ni Ni Aye, a regional MP from Karen state with the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party.

Democracy watchdogs have long warned that the government will be a proxy of the military, which has ruled Myanmar for the vast majority of its post-independence history.

The junta also installed a new military commander-in-chief,

with former spymaster Ye Win Oo replacing Min Aung Hlaing, according to a junta statement.

"Today the current responsibilities of the commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw have been transferred to General Ye Win Oo," the statement said, referring to the Myanmar military.

Min Aung Hlaing "will continue to work with all his strength and intelligence for the benefit of the state, the people and the Tatmadaw", it added.

Ye Win Oo was promoted to the top military role at a ceremony in the capital Naypyidaw.

The two generals, bedecked with military medals across their chests, were seen shaking hands at the event, which was broadcast by state media.

In a further reshuffle of generals, armed forces deputy commander Soe Win was replaced by Kyaw Swar Lin, who was also made army chief, a junta statement said.

"A transfer of duties within the Tatmadaw is not a routine or normal handover. Rather, it is a transfer based on trust, confidence and the systematic pre-training of suitable candidates," Soe Win was quoted in the statement as saying in a speech.

"Duties are being transferred to the younger generation through successive levels of responsibility"

## Sri Lanka raises electricity prices

AFP  
Colombo

Sri Lanka announced yesterday a nearly 40 percent increase in electricity prices from tomorrow as it battles an energy shortage caused by the war in the Middle East.

The Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka said further increases were likely in April, in-line with global energy prices.

"The increases we announce today were calculated on the basis of prices that prevailed before the Middle East conflict," PUCSL Chairman K P L Chandralal told reporters in Colombo.

For most middle-class consumers, a kilowatt hour of electricity will cost 84 rupees (\$0.28), up from 61 rupees or a 39.34 percent increase, while the lowest consumers - those who use less than 30 kilowatt hours a month - will see their bills rise by 11.11 percent.

Sri Lanka has raised fuel prices three times this month, increasing them by more than a third, and has announced a

four-day working week in a bid to save energy.

The government has also asked the private sector to re-introduce work-from-home arrangements where possible.

The Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway through which some 20 percent of global crude and gas exports pass in peacetime, has been effectively closed by Iran after US-Israeli strikes on the country late last month sparked a larger regional conflict.

Sri Lanka imports all of its oil and also buys coal for electricity generation.

It buys refined petroleum products from India, Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea, while crude oil for its Iran-built refinery is sourced from the Middle East.

The government has warned that the fighting in the Middle East, and any prolonged war, could seriously undermine its efforts to emerge from the economic meltdown of 2022.

Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt in 2022 after the country ran out of foreign exchange. Since then, Colombo has secured a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout.

## Bangladesh PM orders probe into measles outbreak

AFP  
Dhaka

Bangladesh's prime minister has ordered an urgent nationwide review following a measles outbreak with more than 600 cases, officials said yesterday.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has directed two senior ministers to travel across the South Asian nation of 170mn people to assess the scale of the crisis and co-ordinate response efforts, according to a statement from his Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Ministry of Health senior official Md Halimur Rashid, head of the disease control unit, said there have been 674 measles cases across the country this year.

Measles is one of the world's most contagious diseases, according to the World Health Organisation, and spreads

through coughs or sneezes. Complications can include brain swelling and severe breathing problems. While it can affect anyone, it is most common in children.

Bangladesh has made significant advancements in vaccinations to tackle infectious disease, but a measles drive that had been due in June 2024 was delayed by unrest during a mass uprising that toppled the government.

"Regular vaccine drives have been ongoing, only the special campaign drive which was scheduled for June 2024 had to be postponed due to political unrest," Rashid told AFP, saying the next campaign will begin in June.

The WHO estimates as many as 95,000 measles deaths globally every year, mostly among unvaccinated or under-vaccinated children under the age of five, according to its latest statistics.

There is no specific treatment for measles once caught.

## Nepal court orders government to justify arrest of ex-PM Oli

AFP  
Kathmandu

Nepal's Supreme Court yesterday ordered the government to justify the detention of former prime minister KP Sharma Oli, arrested for his alleged role in a deadly crackdown on 2025 protests that ousted him.

The order came as hundreds of his supporters marched demanding the release of Oli, blocked by heavy police deployments as they neared the charred old parliament building, set on fire in the September violence in which at least 76 people were killed.

"It is the politics of revenge," said protester Balkumari BK, aged 37. "This is a political vendetta," she added.

Oli, 74, and ex-home minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested in pre-dawn raids on Saturday, a



Supporters of Nepal's former prime minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli march during a protest against his arrest in Kathmandu yesterday. (AFP)

day after Prime Minister Balendra Shah was sworn in following the first elections since the September uprising.

Yesterday, the Supreme Court ordered the government to provide justification for Oli's arrest

after his wife submitted a petition, claiming the government's action was unlawful.

"The Supreme Court issued a show-cause order to the government, asking for the reason behind the arrest of former prime minister

KP Sharma Oli," Supreme Court spokesperson Arjun Prasad Koirala told AFP.

"It has given three days to submit a written justification for Oli's arrest."

The arrests of Oli and Lekhak came after an inquiry commission recommended that the four-time ex-prime minister and other officials be prosecuted for failing to stop security forces from opening fire on demonstrators.

"Release KP Oli," around 300 protesters chanted. "Scrap the commission report!"

Oli, who has health issues, appeared in court via video-link from hospital on Sunday, where an order was given to extend his detention for five days.

The two men were arrested over their alleged involvement in the protest crackdown. Neither has been charged, and both deny responsibility for the violence.

## UK's Starmer to host industry leaders for ME war talks

AFP  
London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will today convene senior government and military officials alongside energy, shipping, finance and insurance sector leaders to discuss the Middle East war, his office said late Sunday.

The roundtable meeting in Downing Street will examine the impact of Iran's effective closure of the vital Strait of Hormuz, which has driven up oil prices and costs in various sectors around the world.

Participants will include representatives from energy giants Shell, BP and Centrica, shipping firms Maersk and CMA as well as banking executives at HSBC and Goldman Sachs, Starmer's office said.

Senior officials from Lloyd's of London, the world's leading insurance marketplace, will also attend, it noted.

"The roundtable will include an operational update from Commander Maritime Operations, who is responsible for directing and co-ordinating UK naval and Royal Marine operations globally," the statement from Starmer's Down-

ing Street office added.

"He will set out the maritime security picture in the Strait of Hormuz and the wider Middle East, which is having a direct effect on shipping and the freedom of navigation."

Downing Street said it wanted to "hear directly from industry leads" and "set out the situation in the region, as well as how it is engaging with partners and allies in the region to work on de-escalation."

"They will discuss how the government and private sector can work together as the conflict in

the Middle East continues to have a significant impact on the British people back home," it added.

"The prime minister will reiterate that the best way to reduce the impact of the war on the cost of living is de-escalation."

Separately yesterday, Starmer will launch his ruling centre-left Labour party's local elections campaign, ahead of voters heading to the polls on May 7 in Scotland, Wales and parts of England.

The UK leader - whose popularity has plummeted since he took office in July 2024 - will defend his decision to keep Britain out of



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer attend a meeting to discuss the US-Israeli conflict with Iran and the impact on the Strait of Hormuz, in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

offensive operations in the joint US-Israeli war on Iran, according to Labour.

"We will protect our forces, our people, our allies in the region," Starmer was set to tell a launch

event in the West Midlands.

"But I made the decision that it is not in our national interest to commit British forces to a war, without a clear legal basis and a clear plan - and I stand by that."

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**GULF TIMES**

## Priced low, growing fast: women's sports draw smart money

Wealthy investors are increasingly turning to women's sports as a rare opportunity to tap into a fast-growing market at lower valuations, favouring strong returns over the high entry costs and limited upside of marquee men's franchises in the NFL or the UK's Premier League.

Once considered underdeveloped, women's sports are gaining traction as rising media rights, sponsorships and viewership create a mix of low valuations and high growth potential.

The US women's sports market is expected to grow at 16% annually, roughly three times faster than men's sports, to generate about \$2.5bn in annual revenue for rights holders by 2030, according to consulting firm McKinsey. The gap in growth, also fueled by the emergence of women superstars such as Indiana Fever guard Caitlin Clark, is drawing ultra-high-net-worth investors seeking stronger long-term returns.

"Valuations are growing very rapidly and there is still plenty of room to grow," said Jason Wright, partner at Ariel Investments and a former National Football League executive. Ariel backs the National Women's Soccer League club (NWSL) Denver Summit, which debuted this year.

Rising expansion fees and team valuations highlight demand as the league fee for a NWSL team has surged from the \$2mn paid to launch Los Angeles' Angel City FC in 2020 to the \$165mn put up by the owners of the new Atlanta franchise launching in 2028, according to consulting firm Navigate.

That valuation upside applies to existing franchises as well. Digital sports media platform Sportico estimates that Angel City is now worth \$335mn, up 34% from just over a year ago, when the club's controlling stake was sold to former Walt Disney CEO Bob Iger and his wife, journalist Willow Bay. That deal valued the team at \$250mn – setting a global record for a women's sports franchise at the time.

And investors are increasingly underwriting that upside. Tommy Nordam Jensen, chief executive at New York-based women's sports investment platform Pitch15, said that "well-executed investments in the sector could potentially deliver roughly 2-5x over five to 10 years as the market matures," the kind of returns rarely available in established men's leagues.

### Women's sports face a valuation gap vs men's despite soaring viewership and media deals

Media rights are also reinforcing that investment case, with the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) signing an 11-year broadcast and streaming deal worth about \$200mn annually – more than triple its previous agreement, according to Navigate.

Similarly, the NWSL has seen a sharp rise as well. Its 2023 rights deal netted the

league about \$60 million a year, according to Navigate. Yet, a large valuation gap persists.

Sportico estimates the average WNBA team is worth about \$269mn, compared with about \$5.5b for a National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise, even as the viewership of WNBA playoff games approach levels comparable to the NBA's regular season ones.

The WNBA's Golden State Valkyries is the most valuable women's sports franchise, worth about \$500mn, according to Sportico, but that figure is still only a fraction of Dallas Cowboys' valuation of \$12.8bn. "A lot of people talk about women's sports being ahead of valuations that are justifiable, yet at the same time, if viewership and fan attention are the biggest drivers of value, there is a mismatch in valuation that the market has not yet caught up with," Ariel's Wright said.

Also driving growth is corporate sponsorship as combined spending on the WNBA and NWSL shot up 32.7% year-on-year to a record \$195mn in 2025, according to SponsorUnited, with financial companies such as JPMorgan Chase, CashApp and Ally among the most visible endorsers.

The sports intelligence platform said this expansion was running more than three times faster than the men's leagues, driven by the impact of women superstars such as Clark and newer stars like Angel Reese and Paige Bueckers, some of whom have been signed by dozens of brands. Even so, women's sports are expected to account for only about 2% of the US sports market by 2030, McKinsey estimated, at a time when Ivo Voynov, head of sports finance at Citi Wealth, says that men's team valuations are largely "fully priced".

"The number of people globally who can write multi-billion dollar checks to acquire these (men's sports) assets is not expanding at the same rate as team valuations," Voynov said, underscoring the scale of the untapped potential in women's sports. — Reuters

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# Recent geopolitical developments reshape investor behaviour toward safe-haven assets

**QNA**  
Doha

**G**lobal gold prices are experiencing heightened volatility amid escalating geopolitical tensions linked to the war on Iran, alongside disruptions in global energy markets. These developments are directly impacting investor behaviour and their orientation toward safe-haven assets, foremost among them gold. However, the traditional safe haven is no longer responding at the same pace to shocks, due to shifting market priorities toward liquidity and returns.

Financial experts explained to Qatar News Agency (QNA) that the initial phase of the crisis witnessed a significant decline in gold prices despite rising geopolitical risks – an apparent paradox that reflects a structural shift in how assets are priced. They noted that gold has recently come under intense selling pressure, recording sharp weekly losses exceeding 11% by some estimates, and even reaching around 16% at the peak of volatility within just a few days – its worst performance in decades.

This occurred alongside a strengthening US dollar index and rising yields on US Treasury bonds, which increased the attractiveness of income-generating assets compared to gold, which does not provide periodic returns. The experts clarified that this decline was not due to a loss of confidence in gold as a strategic asset, but rather the result of severe liquidity pressures that forced financial institutions and hedge funds to liquidate part of their holdings to cover losses or meet margin calls, as gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs) recorded outflows amounting to billions of dollars, further deepening the downturn.

However, the experts pointed out that markets showed a noticeable rebound as initial signs of a potential negotiation track between the parties emerged, leading to a recovery in prices of approximately 4%, driven by easing tensions. In this context, a financial analyst Mubarak al-Tamimi told QNA that gold has not strategically failed in its role as a safe-haven asset; rather, it experienced a short-term tactical setback at the beginning of the crisis.

He explained that markets initially favoured holding cash liquidity amid expectations of continued interest rate increases driven by the energy shock, which limited immediate demand for gold. Al-Tamimi added that the

 <b>Mubarak Al Tamimi</b> Financial analyst	 <b>Ramzi Qasmieh</b> Investment Manager at Qatar Securities Company
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•• Markets initially favored holding cash liquidity amid expectations of continued interest rate increases ••</li> <li>•• Gold-backed exchange-traded funds have seen outflows of \$7.9 billion during the latest downturn ••</li> <li>•• 95% of central banks expect to increase their gold reserves over the next 12 months ••</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•• The decline in gold's performance during the crisis is directly linked to the strength of the US dollar and rising bond yields ••</li> <li>•• Rising yields on US Treasury bonds made them more attractive to investors compared with gold ••</li> <li>•• The rise of US federal debt to nearly \$40 trillion has prompted many countries, to increase their gold reserves ••</li> </ul>



inflationary nature of the shock played a key role in enhancing the appeal of cash and yield-bearing instruments, as the surge in oil and gas prices fueled inflation expectations, prompting investors to anticipate prolonged monetary tightening, which in turn exerted downward pressure on gold in the short term.

He further noted that the behaviour of financial institutions during the crisis suggests that gold has partially become a "liquidity victim," as it was utilized as a quick source of cash, pointing out that gold-backed exchange-traded funds have seen outflows of \$7.9bn during the latest downturn.

On the strategic front, al-Tamimi said that the rise in US federal debt to around \$39.01tn is reinforcing central banks' shift toward diversifying their reserves, with growing demand for gold as a sovereign asset, noting that estimates indicate that 95% of central banks expect to increase their gold reserves over the next 12 months, while 43% are already planning to expand their holdings.

For his part, Investment

Manager at Qatar Securities Company (QSC) Ramzi Qasmieh told QNA that the decline in gold's performance during the crisis is directly linked to the strength of the US dollar and rising bond yields. The US Dollar Index surged to nearly 101 points, its highest level in several months, driven by expectations of persistent inflation and higher interest rates.

Qasmieh added that rising yields on US Treasury bonds made them more attractive to investors compared with gold, due to their ability to generate periodic income. This, he said, increased the opportunity cost of holding gold, particularly in a financial environment characterized by elevated real yields.

He underlined that the markets witnessed intense gold selling over a short period, resulting in the biggest weekly loss since 1983, with declines exceeding 11%, as financial institutions liquidated positions to raise cash and cover losses in other assets.

Qasmieh added that the rise of US federal debt to nearly \$40tn has prompted many countries, especially in emerging markets,

to increase their gold reserves and reduce reliance on the dollar as part of a strategy to diversify assets and hedge against financial and geopolitical risks.

Qatar Chamber Board Member and Chairperson of the Gold and Jewellery Committee Nasser bin Sulaiman al-Haider affirmed in a press statement that the committee closely monitors the gold market, overseeing compliance by retailers with pricing and the availability of bars and jewellery. He denied any speculation or deliberate refusal by traders to sell.

He explained that the current challenges stem from disruptions in supply chains, noting that gold imports rely heavily on air shipments, which have been affected by the prevailing circumstances.

He added that traders are facing circumstances beyond their control, making it unfair to hold them responsible for shortages or accuse them of malpractice. He emphasized that price fluctuations and supply disruptions remain the main pressures on the market at present.

## 8 Arab, Islamic nations condemn Israeli restrictions on worship in occupied Jerusalem

The foreign ministers of Qatar, Jordan, the UAE, Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt condemned, in the strongest terms, and rejected the continued restrictions imposed by Israel on the freedom of worship for Muslims and Christians in occupied Jerusalem, including the prevention of Muslim worshippers from accessing Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif, and the prevention of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Custos of the Holy Land from entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to celebrate the Palm Sunday mass.

They renewed their condemnation and rejection of any Israeli attempts to alter the legal and historical status quo at Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, affirming that these continued Israeli measures constitute a flagrant violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as of the legal and historical status quo, and represent an infringement on the unrestricted right of access to places of worship.

The ministers affirmed their absolute

rejection of the illegal and restrictive Israeli measures against Muslims and Christians in Jerusalem, including preventing Christians from freely accessing the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to perform their religious rites. They stressed the necessity of respecting the legal and historical status quo in Jerusalem and its Muslim and Christian holy sites, reiterating that Israel, as the occupying power, holds no sovereignty over occupied Jerusalem, and underscoring the need to halt all measures that impede worshippers' access to their places of worship in Jerusalem.

The ministers renewed their condemnation of Israel's continued closure of the gates of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif to worshippers for 30 consecutive days including during the holy month of Ramadan, and the restriction of freedom of worship, which constitutes a serious violation of international law, the existing legal and historical status quo, and Israel's obligations as the occupying Power. They warned of the dangers of these

escalatory measures to regional and international peace and security. The ministers reiterated that the entire area of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif, amounting to 144 dunams, is a place of worship exclusively for Muslims, and that the Jerusalem Endowments and Al Aqsa Mosque Affairs Department, affiliated with the Jordanian Ministry of Endowments, Islamic Affairs, and Holy Sites, is the legal entity with exclusive jurisdiction to administer the affairs of the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif and regulate entry thereto. The ministers called on Israel, as the occupying power, to immediately cease the closure of the gates of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif, remove access restrictions in the Old City of Jerusalem, and refrain from obstructing Muslim worshippers' access to the mosque. They also called on the international community to adopt a firm position that compels Israel to halt its ongoing violations and illegal practices against Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, as well as its violations of the sanctity of these holy places. (QNA)

## Captain of Russian 'shadow tanker' sentenced to one year in French prison

AFP  
Brest

A French court yesterday issued an arrest warrant and a one-year jail sentence against the Chinese captain of a suspected Russian "shadow fleet" tanker over failing to comply with orders to stop his ship.

Chen Zhangjie, 39, was sentenced in absentia after the French navy boarded the Boracay tanker in September before releasing the vessel and its crew days later, in what Russian leader Vladimir Putin condemned as "piracy".

The court in the western city of Brest also ordered Chen to pay a 150,000-euro (\$172,000) fine. The vessel, claiming to be flagged in Benin, was thought to be part of a fleet transporting Russian oil in violation of Western sanctions imposed over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Vessels in the "shadow fleet" frequently change the flags they fly, a practice known as "flag-hopping", and sometimes sail under invalid flags in an attempt to escape detection and tracking.

When the French navy approached the ship in international waters off western France on September 27, it was thought to be transporting Russian oil to India, without a visible banner.

They informed the vessel they were going to board it at 14:32pm local time (1342 GMT) for a nationality check, according to the investigation.



This aerial picture taken off the coast of the western France port of Saint-Nazaire shows the tanker Boracay from Russia's so-called "shadow fleet". (AFP/File Photo)

An hour later, the crew hoisted a Benin flag, but the authorities in Porto Novo had already told their French counterparts that no tanker was registered in their country.

The captain told the French authorities during his time in custody that he had not put it up initially because of the weather. "It was raining and you don't put up a flag when it's raining," he said.

The captain stalled any boarding, saying he was waiting for authorisation from the ship's owner, until the navy eventually boarded.

The Boracay, today named The Phoenix and flying the Russian flag, was yesterday in the Strait of Malacca between Malaysia and Indonesia, according to tanker tracking website Marine Traffic.

## Ukraine inks defence deal with Bulgaria

AFP  
Kyiv

Ukraine yesterday signed a 10-year defence agreement with Bulgaria, a major arms manufacturer, covering production of drones and other weapons, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced.

The Ukrainian leader said he was "very pleased" with the deal, signed during a visit to Kyiv by Bulgaria's interim Prime Minister, Andrey Gyurov.

The agreement covers "joint production, on the territory of our countries, of various types of weapons, including drones," Zelensky said at a press conference.

The length of the accord should make it possible to "systematise" security co-operation, Zelensky said, in particular keeping up with the rapid pace of technological change in the drones, a key weapon in Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion.

Bulgaria, now a member of Nato and the EU, was part of the communist bloc during the Cold War, and for decades produced ammunition and weapons to Soviet standards, which



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky welcomes Bulgarian Prime Minister Andrey Gyurov, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, yesterday. (Reuters)

are also used by the Ukrainian army. According to government data, nearly four % of the Bulgaria's GDP comes from the defence industry, which has thrived since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine launched in 2022.

Sofia has sent large quantities of weapons to Kyiv. Gyurov hailed the new accord as the "result of long preparation."

"This is not a mere formality, but a joint commitment to our Euro-Atlantic security," he said in English at the press conference Zelensky.

The two leaders also said they are working together on the creation of a gas corridor, called the Vertical Gas Corridor, to link Greece with several countries in southeastern Europe.

## Rain, storms kill dozens in Afghanistan, Pakistan

AFP  
Kabul

Heavy rain and storms have killed at least 45 people over the past few days across Afghanistan and Pakistan, disaster officials in both countries said yesterday.

Rain sweeping across Afghanistan since Thursday has caused floods and landslides in multiple provinces.

"Twenty-eight people were martyred, and 49 people were injured," Afghanistan's disaster management authority (ANDMA) said, while more than 100 homes have been destroyed.

Across the border in Pakistan's

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 17 people were killed and 56 wounded since Wednesday, the provincial disaster management authority said.

Those killed in Afghanistan include a 14-year-old boy struck by lightning in the northwestern Badghis province, police spokesman Sediqullah Seddiqi told AFP.

In the same province, Seddiqi said "three people drowned while trying to recover driftwood to use for heating".

The stormy weather also destroyed at least 130 homes, while more than 430 houses were damaged, ANDMA said.

In central Daikundi, the provincial disaster management department said a five-year-old was

killed when a roof collapsed.

A woman was killed in the same circumstances in eastern Nangarhar, which borders Pakistan, according to police spokesman Sayed Tayeb Hamad.

Afghanistan's disaster management authority warned people to stay away from "rivers and flooded streams, and follow the weather forecast seriously".

The weather has already prompted the closure of several highways, officials in central and eastern Afghanistan said, with further rain and storms forecast for today.

The latest casualties follow more than 60 people being killed in snow and heavy rain that hit Afghanistan in January.

## Stray Ukrainian drone that fell in Finland had a warhead, police say

Reuters  
Helsinki

A Ukrainian drone that crashed in Finland on Sunday carried an unexploded warhead according to a preliminary assessment, Finnish police said yesterday.

Ukraine said it had apologised for the incident, and that the drone fired in its war with Russia had gone astray, most likely because of electronic interference from Moscow.

There were no reported injuries or damage from the crash in Finland's southeast, the first time the Russia-Ukraine war has spilled onto its soil.

Ukraine has stepped up drone attacks on Russian oil refineries and export routes over recent weeks, some close to Russia's

border with Finland, in an attempt to weaken Moscow's war economy.

"The UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) that came down north of Kouvola was found, in a preliminary assessment by the authorities, to have an unexploded warhead attached," Finnish police said in a statement.

It was identified as a Ukrainian AN-196 drone, with a wingspan of 6.7 metres (22 feet), and was destroyed in a controlled detonation.

Debris from a second drone, also thought to be Ukrainian, was found in the municipality of Luumaki, east of the town of Kouvola, and officers were investigating whether it detonated when it crashed, police added.

"We can confirm that under no circumstances were any Ukrainian drones directed towards Fin-

land ... We have already apologised to the Finnish side for this incident," Ukraine's foreign ministry spokesman said.

Finland's President Alexander Stubb and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky discussed the incident in a phone call on Monday. "Alex and I see the situation in the same way. We are sharing all necessary information," Zelensky wrote on social media.

Some of Ukraine's allies sent Kyiv "signals" about the possibility of scaling back its long-range strikes on Russia's oil sector amid a spike in global energy prices, Zelensky said yesterday.

Stubb did not ask Ukraine to reduce its strikes on Russian assets in Finland's vicinity in the call with Zelensky, Stubb's office told Reuters. "This was not discussed between the presidents," it said in an e-mailed statement.

## Germany arrests Ukrainian accused of spying for Russia: prosecutors

AFP  
Berlin

German prosecutors yesterday said they had arrested a Ukrainian national on suspicion of spying for Russia, the latest in a string of alleged Russian espionage cases amid the Ukraine war.

The man, partially named as Vitalii M, is accused of "gathering information on behalf of a Russian intelligence service about a man residing in Germany who had taken part in combat operations for the Ukrainian armed forces", prosecutors said.

"The espionage operation presumably also served to prepare

further intelligence operations against the target person in Germany," they said.

Vitalii M was arrested in the western city of Hagen on Friday and has been remanded in custody, they added.

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

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

The agents have no formal

training and carry out acts, ranging from arson to property damage and drone overflights of sensitive sites, in exchange for small sums of money, officials say.

Last week, German authorities said a man and a woman had been arrested on accusations of spying on a drone supplier in Germany on behalf of Moscow.

Earlier in March, three Ukrainians went on trial accused of taking part in a test run to send explosive parcels that would ignite in Germany or Ukraine.

In December, an Armenian, a Ukrainian and a Russian went on trial for allegedly working with Russian intelligence to tail a former Ukrainian soldier for a possible assassination plot.

## Spain closes airspace to US planes involved in Iran war, defence minister says

Reuters  
Madrid

Spain has closed its airspace to US planes involved in attacks on Iran, a step beyond its previous denial of use of jointly-operated military bases, Defence Minister Margarita Robles said yesterday.

"We don't authorise either the use of military bases or the use of airspace for actions related to the war in Iran," she told reporters in Madrid.

Spanish newspaper El Pais had first reported the news yesterday, citing military sources.

The closure of the airspace forces military planes to bypass Nato member Spain en route to their targets in the Middle East, but it does not include emergency situations, El Pais added.

"This decision is part of the decision already made by the Spanish government not to participate in or contribute to a war which was initiated unilaterally and against

international law," Economy Minister Carlos Cuerdo said during an interview with radio Cadena Ser when asked if the decision to close Spain's airspace could worsen relations with the US. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has been one of the most vocal opponents of the US and Israeli attacks on Iran, describing them as reckless and illegal. President Donald Trump has threatened to cut trade with Madrid for denying the US use of Spain's bases in the war.

## Paintings by Renoir, Cezanne and Matisse stolen from Italian museum

Three paintings by French masters Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Paul Cezanne and Henri Matisse, reportedly worth an estimated \$10 million in total, have been stolen from a museum in northern Italy, police said yesterday. The theft took place at the Fondazione Magnani Rocca, on the outskirts of the city of Parma, during the night of March 22-23,

the Carabinieri police said in a statement. Thieves broke into the building's main entrance and took Cezanne's "Tasse et Plat de Cerises" (Cup and plate of cherries), Renoir's "Les Poissons" (The fish) and Matisse's "Odalisque sur la Terrasse" (Odalisque on the terrace), the police added.

Italian public broadcaster Rai reported the stolen works were worth 9mn euros (\$10.34mn), a figure that was not confirmed by the Carabinieri. The museum, home to a private collection compiled by the late music critic and musicologist Luigi Magnani, said separately that the theft took less than three minutes. (Reuters)

## France arrests two more suspects on Bank of America's foiled attack

French authorities have arrested two more suspects yesterday over a foiled attack on Bank of America's Paris offices, bringing the total number of detained to five, the country's anti-terrorism prosecutor's office said.

The custody of the first three suspects, all of them minors of age and who were arrested on Saturday and Sunday, was extended, the prosecutor's office said in a statement.

The statement did not disclose any information on the identity of the two new suspects or on their links with the other three.

Under French law, suspects in terrorism cases can be held in custody for up to 96 hours, with further extensions possible under judicial oversight.

French police arrested one minor on the scene in the early hours of Saturday in Paris' 8th arrondissement after a patrol assigned to protecting sensitive sites spotted two individuals placing and attempting to ignite an improvised explosive device outside the bank. The other managed to escape.

The device, though rudimentary, could have been lethal, and officers prevented it from being ignited, Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said on Saturday.

He added the individuals appeared to be "common-law" offenders acting as paid intermediaries,



Private security members gather outside Bank of America's Paris offices, after French anti-terrorism prosecutors opened an investigation into attempted destruction by fire or other dangerous means in Paris, yesterday. (Reuters)

in what he described as a known modus operandi involving proxies recruited to carry out such attacks.

He pointed at suspicions involving Iran as a possible sponsor, though no conclusion has been reached, he insisted. The Iran embassy did not respond to messages seeking comment. (Reuters)

## Plans afoot to expand list of strategic specialisations in govt scholarship scheme

**QNA**  
Doha

Director of the Scholarship Department at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) Noura Mohammed al-Ansari confirmed that the ministry is working on developing its future plans to expand the list of strategic specialisations within the government scholarship programme, in line with the requirements of national development and the needs of the labour market in the country.

In an exclusive statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), al-Ansari explained that the process of updating specialisations is carried out according to a precise methodology based on studying the needs of the state in the public and private sectors, in co-ordination with the concerned authorities, to

ensure that the outputs of scholarships are aligned with national priorities. She referred to MoEHE's keenness to include specialised fields that meet the growing demand in vital areas, and contribute to supplying the labour market with qualified national talents capable of supporting the comprehensive development process.

She added that the plans to expand into strategic specialisations come within the framework of the trend towards investing in human capital and enhancing the competitiveness of national cadres, in line with the rapid developments at the regional and international levels. Al-Ansari affirmed that MoEHE continues to review its programmes periodically to ensure responsiveness to future changes, in order to achieve the state's vision of building a knowledge-based economy.

The director of the Scholarship



Noura Mohammed al-Ansari

Department indicated that the list of specialisations is subject to periodic review and annual update based on actual needs, where vacancies are allocated to priority specialisations, in contrast to excluding specialisations in which sufficiency has been achieved.

She pointed out that this process is carried out in direct co-ordination with the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau regarding the government sector, and with the Ministry of Labour to determine the requirements of the private sector. Afterward the 'scholarship ending with employment' plan is prepared.

Regarding the inclusion of the Clinical Psychology specialisation in the scholarship plan, al-Ansari explained that its inclusion for the 2026/2027 academic year came as a result of the urgent need for this specialisation. It will be offered as part of the external scholarship program, and students are invited to seek acceptance from accredited universities abroad in preparation for their training in this vital field.

She also confirmed that the inclusion of the Nuclear Engineering specialisation came as a result of an extensive study of the needs of

the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, which prompted the launch of a national initiative to send Qatari students to study in this field. Al-Ansari pointed out that the MoEHE is working to promote this specialisation through approved incentives that encourage students to enroll in it, in line with the goals of the higher education sector to supply employers with quality competencies and address the reluctance towards specialized fields.

Regarding the monitoring of scholarship students in light of the current international circumstances, al-Ansari confirmed that MoEHE is monitoring the conditions of approximately 5,000 students in local and foreign scholarship programmes through multiple communication channels and a 24-hour hotline, stressing the stability of the general conditions of scholarship students and their

commitment to completing their studies in co-ordination with the cultural attaches.

The director of the Scholarship Department explained that MoEHE has taken proactive measures to deal with some limited challenges, such as activating remote learning for students who faced obstacles in attending field lectures, and the number of scholarship recipients present inside the country is being monitored to ensure their safe return to their mission headquarters.

Concluding her remarks to QNA, al-Ansari emphasized that the selection of specialisations is done according to institutional mechanisms based on identifying needs through strategic partners to ensure the preparation of an annual plan that guarantees efficient employment and keeps pace with the aspirations of Qatar National Vision 2030.



CCQ researchers at the conference.

## Community College researchers participate in future of education conference at Oxford

**By A Staff Reporter**  
Doha

In a new academic achievement that highlights the growing global presence of Qatari research, the Community College of Qatar (CCQ) took part in the World Conference on Future of Education, hosted by the University of Oxford at the Said Business School. The college contributed through a research paper presented by teaching associates Abdulrahman al-Naimi and Aisha al-Kubaisi, titled 'Hybrid and Traditional Teaching in Higher Education: Lecturers' Perspectives from a Qatari Institution'.

The paper successfully passed a rigorous peer review process, earning both researchers a place among the official speakers at this international conference and strengthening the college's presence in leading academic forums. The paper examines Qatar's experience in adopting and developing hybrid learning models. It offers an analytical perspective on how higher education institutions align traditional teaching methods with modern technologies, adding meaningful insight to global discussions on the future of this vital sector amid rapid transformation.

Commenting on the participation, researcher al-Naimi described the conference as "a valuable platform to present Qatar's experience to the international academic community." He expressed pride in showcasing the real transformation taking place in Qatar's higher education sec-

tor at the University of Oxford.

Researcher al-Kubaisi explained that this participation reflects the growing academic presence of Community College researchers on the international stage. She emphasised its role in strengthening knowledge exchange with peers worldwide and enriching the local research landscape.

On this occasion, Dr Jathnan al-Hajri, dean of the Management Science Division, praised this international participation and affirmed that it reflects the competence of the college's academic staff and their ability to represent Qatari research at leading global universities. He stressed that supporting scientific research and developing academic talent remain central priorities in the college's strategic agenda.

Dr Menahi al-Qahtani, head of the Management Department at CCQ, expressed his pride in this achievement. He noted that achieving a global research platform, such as the University of Oxford, demonstrates the high academic standards of the college's faculty members. He also commended their contributions to advancing research and expanding knowledge in the field of hybrid learning.

This participation aligns with the college's strategic direction to support research and enhance educational practices, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030, and reinforces its commitment to strengthening its position as a leading educational institution at both the local and international levels.

## Confidence grows as Qatar resumes daily life after precautionary measures

**By Shaima Sheriff**  
Staff Reporter

Residents in Qatar are gradually returning to normal life, with schools and workplaces reopening under precautionary measures, as families gather outdoors and confidence grows following recent regional developments.

Following a temporary shift to online schooling and remote work as a safety measure amid regional developments, authorities have overseen a structured return to in-person activities, supported by clear guidelines, alerts and awareness campaigns. Across schools and universities, students have resumed classes while being equipped with safety protocols, including evacuation procedures and emergency awareness. Similarly, workplaces have resumed regular operations, reinforcing a sense of stability.

At Old Doha Port, the atmosphere reflected this return to normalcy, as residents spent time outdoors with friends and family, enjoying the pleasant weather and a renewed sense of calm.

Abdullah Butt, a 29-year-old resident, said daily life has largely stabilised. "I feel like it's pretty normal here," he said. "Even during the recent situation, we didn't really sense it much. The safety level in Qatar is very high, and I feel safe and secure."

He added that government measures played a central role in maintaining stability. "They prioritised our safety at every level, from work-from-home arrangements to online schooling," he said. "Now that everything is going back to normal, with regulations in place, life is returning to normal again."

Butt also highlighted public confidence in



the country's systems. "There's nothing to worry about," he said. "There are no shortages, and the ministries are taking strong action. They are monitoring everything and ensuring the best for residents and citizens."

For students, the return to routine has been both emotional and reassuring. Ayesha Mohammad, a university student, described the initial period as challenging. "Before, when everything was happening, we were really scared and stayed indoors," she said. "I didn't go out for almost a month."

However, returning to university brought a sense of normality. "It was my first day back, and everything felt normal again," she said. "People are back to classes, and I even joined swimming; it feels calm and nice now."

While some effects of the situation remain, particularly heightened sensitivity to sounds, Ayesha noted that government communication has helped ease concerns. "Sometimes when I



At Old Doha Port, the atmosphere reflected this return to normalcy. **PICTURES:** Shaima Sheriff

hear loud sounds, it feels like an alert," she said. "But the videos and updates shared by the government give a sense of hope and safety." She also pointed to the importance of preparedness measures introduced across institutions. "They informed us about evacuation plans and safety measures," she said. "It makes you feel safer because you know there is a plan."

Ayesha highlighted the government's proactive response during earlier precautionary evacuations. "They prioritised residents and arranged housing quickly," she said. "That shows they are taking safety seriously."

As public spaces reopen and daily routines resume, the overall sentiment among residents reflects confidence and resilience. From classrooms to workplaces and public areas such as Doha Port, the return to normal life is being shaped by continued vigilance and trust in the systems in place.

## 3-2-1 Sports Museum launches Olympic heritage artist initiative

The 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum (QOSM) and the Olympic Museum, located in Lausanne, Switzerland, announced the launch of the second edition of the Olympic Heritage - Artists in Residence program.

This initiative provides artists with the opportunity to take part in three-month residencies at either institution to develop innovative, boundary-pushing artworks that deepen public engagement with Olympic culture and heritage. Two artists will be selected by an international jury based on their creativity, technical skill, and their ability to engage with Olympic and sporting themes by using innovative, digital media as a key part of their practice.

The residencies are scheduled to take place from Sept 1 to Dec 1, 2026. Each museum will provide the selected artists with resources and access to their permanent collections, offering a unique research environment to explore the historical and cultural significance of the

Olympic Games and the Olympic movement. Studio space will be provided at the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum and at La Becque Artist Residence in La Tour-de-Peilz, Switzerland.

Director of the 3-2-1 QOSM Abdulla al-Mulla said: "The Olympic Heritage-Artist in Residence program reflects our commitment to reimagining how Olympic history and sports culture can be experienced through contemporary artistic practice. The program creates a meaningful dialogue between collections, contexts, and creative perspectives. We are proud to continue this collaboration with the Olympic Museum and to support artists in producing new work that speaks to the global and enduring values of the Olympic Games."

"With the Olympic Heritage - Artists-in-Residence Program, the Olympic Museum continues to draw inspiration from 3,000 years of history while opening new paths for contemporary creation," added Olympic Museum deputy director and Chair

of the Jury, Yasmin Meichtry. "Reviving this successful collaboration -- and extending the residencies from two to three months -- reflects the growing strength of our partnership with QOSM. We warmly encourage young digital artists from around the world to apply and contribute their own legacy to the promotion of the Olympic values."

The call is open to artists aged at least 18 and under 35 on 31 December 2026, who work with any form of digital media, including AI, data-driven art, and augmented and virtual reality, any of which may also be combined with physical media. Access to the museum collections will be facilitated by the museums, supporting artists throughout their research and production phases.

Applicants can apply using the following link: <https://preview-321qosm.qm.org.qa/en/calendar/olympic-digital-artist-in-residence-open-call/>. The deadline for submission is 30 April 2026. **(QNA)**

## Robust vet services boost livestock health in Qatar

Local livestock breeders have commended the efforts made by relevant authorities and concerned entities to ensure the availability of veterinary medicines and services across the country. They highlighted a clear abundance of supplies at veterinary centres nationwide, with no significant shortages reported.

They also confirmed that vaccination programmes are being implemented regularly according to precise schedules, playing a vital role in maintaining herd health and limiting disease spread. Despite regional challenges, authorities continue to uphold high standards of veterinary care, supported by ongoing vaccination campaigns and direct communication with breeders through SMS notifications to keep them informed of immunisation schedules.

Jaber Mufad al-Marri, a livestock breeder, stressed the importance of sustained

institutional support in stabilising the sector. He pointed to the availability of veterinary medicines and the steady supply of subsidised feed. Al-Marri, who owns more than 120 sheep and 70 camels, also welcomed the decision to allow grazing earlier, in March rather than May, aligning with the spring season and improved vegetation. He noted that grazing enhances animal health and reduces disease risks compared to the summer months.

Nabil al-Ajmi, another breeder, highlighted the efficiency of veterinary services despite minor challenges that do not affect the continuity of care. Owing more than 500 sheep in the North Barn Complex, he described the services as comprehensive, covering vaccinations, examinations, and rapid response.

"Veterinary services demonstrate high efficiency, with doctors often arriving

within a day of requesting assistance," he said, noting that five to six vaccination campaigns are conducted annually against various diseases.

Ibrahim al-Ghazali emphasised the continued effectiveness of veterinary services amid rapidly changing regional conditions, praising the authorities for maintaining consistent healthcare for livestock. He also commended the regular vaccination campaigns and the use of SMS alerts to communicate with breeders. Al-Ghazali further expressed support for regulations governing grazing, particularly restrictions on early grazing after rainfall, noting their importance in preserving vegetation and maintaining environmental balance. Meanwhile, Fawwaz a-Muhannadi said Qatar's livestock sector is experiencing notable stability, supported by the availability of essential veterinary services and medicines. He highlighted the



role of subsidised feed, particularly barley and straw, in reducing production costs, while noting that green fodder prices remain subject to market fluctuations. Al-Muhannadi added that the current season has seen improved productivity and higher birth rates due to favourable



weather conditions, describing it as a "season of goodness and blessing." He also called for further development of veterinary centres to meet the growing needs of breeders.