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## SPORT | Page 1

Iran will be at World Cup and play in US, says FIFA president

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# Amir underlines regional security in UAE talks

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani held talks yesterday with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan in Abu Dhabi, focusing on latest regional and international developments and efforts to restore stability.

The two leaders discussed the rapidly evolving situation in the region, including ongoing tensions linked to Iranian attacks and their wider security implications as well as the impact of recent events on global energy supplies and market stability.

His Highness the Amir emphasised the importance of prioritising diplomatic solutions to resolve conflicts, highlighting the need for strengthened cooperation to safeguard regional security and limit the global repercussions of ongoing crises.

The talks also covered bilateral relations between Qatar and the UAE, with both sides stressing the importance of continued coordination and consultation across key issues, reflecting the strong fraternal ties and strategic partnership between the two nations.

The meeting was attended on the Qa-

tari side by Personal Representative of His Highness the Amir, His Highness Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al-Thani; HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani; and HE Chief of the Amiri Diwan, Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Khulaf; along with a number of senior officials.

On the Emirati side, attendees included Vice-President, Deputy Prime Minister, and Chairman of the Presidential Court, Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan; Deputy Ruler of Abu Dhabi and National Security Adviser, Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed al-Nahyan; and Deputy Chairman of the Presidential Court for Special Affairs, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan; along with a number of Sheikhs and senior officials.

The Amir had arrived earlier yesterday in Abu Dhabi and was welcomed by the UAE president alongside vice-president, deputy prime minister, and chairman of the Presidential Court; deputy ruler of Abu Dhabi and National Security adviser; and deputy chairman of the Presidential Court for Special Affairs along with a

## Amir emphasises joint co-ordination

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani said he discussed regional developments and their impact with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. In a post on his official account on X, the Amir said yesterday's talks in Abu Dhabi addressed recent events in the region and their consequences, stressing the importance of intensifying joint co-ordination to safeguard the security and interests of both countries and support peaceful measures aimed at containing escalation.

number of Sheikhs and senior officials.

At the conclusion of the visit, the Amir departed from the capital Abu Dhabi and was seen off by the UAE president alongside vice-president, deputy prime minister, and chairman of the Presidential Court; deputy ruler of Abu Dhabi and National Security adviser; and deputy



chairman of the Presidential Court for Special Affairs along with a number of Sheikhs and senior officials.

His Highness the Amir and his accompanying delegation returned home later yesterday. (QNA)

## Qatar backs ongoing mediation efforts

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Qatar has reaffirmed its firm stance in favour of de-escalation, declaring its opposition to any measures that could deepen the regional conflict or threaten stability, as its armed forces continue to intercept attacks on its territory.

Speaking at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' weekly briefing yesterday, HE the Adviser to the Prime Minister and Spokesman for Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari said Qatar's immediate focus is on defending its sovereignty and responding to ongoing attacks. He confirmed that the Qatar Armed Forces have successfully intercepted more than 90% of Iranian missiles and drones targeting the country.

Dr al-Ansari expressed appreciation for defence co-operation with allied partners, singling out the United States, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and European



MoFA spokesperson HE Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari at the press briefing yesterday.

partners, as well as GCC states, whose co-ordinated joint defence efforts he described as both active and effective.

While clarifying that Qatar is not currently engaged in direct mediation with Iran, Dr al-Ansari said the country continues to extend full support for diplomatic initiatives led by Pakistan, Egypt, and Türkiye, expressing hope these efforts would yield peaceful outcomes. He stressed that GCC leaders remain in daily contact and are united in their call for restraint. **To Page 2**

## Amir, UK secretary explore defence co-op

### UK pledges solidarity with Qatar, proud of its support

UK Defence Secretary John Healey has reaffirmed Britain's commitment to Gulf security during a visit to Doha, declaring that the country stands firmly alongside Qatar and its regional partners in the face of what he described as Iran's widespread and dangerous attacks. Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Healey said the visit was aimed at discussing the latest security developments and exploring ways to deepen defence co-operation. "Britain stands with you. We are not watching from a distance – we are here, shoulder to shoulder as you defend your skies from Iran's widespread attacks," he said, adding that he was grateful for Qatar's contribution to regional security. During his visit, Healey met His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saud

bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani, and senior Qatari defence officials, with discussions focusing on overall defence co-operation between the two countries. Healey stressed that Britain's commitment to Gulf security went beyond rhetoric. "It is demonstrated every day by our forces flying defensive missions across this region alongside our partners, and our air defence teams and systems integrated with Gulf nations," he said. He described Iran's attacks as severe and wide-ranging, noting that Tehran has fired over 3,500 missiles and drones at civilian infrastructure, desalination plants, airports, and hotels across the Gulf since the conflict began. "The threat Iran poses to regional security is severe and real, and we take it extremely seriously. That is why the UK has been flying defensive missions alongside partners in the region from day one of this conflict, and why we continue to step up our support to Gulf partners," he said. **To Page 2**



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met yesterday at the Amiri Diwan with UK Secretary of State for Defence John Healey. They discussed the latest regional and international developments amid escalating tensions in the Middle East. The two sides also reviewed avenues of bilateral co-operation, particularly in the field of defence, and explored ways to further enhance and develop them in a manner that serves the shared interests of the two friendly countries, especially military co-operation and efforts aimed at addressing security challenges. (QNA)

## Qatar wakes to heavy rain



A scene from Umm Ghuwallina near Woqod petrol station yesterday. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekayil

By Joseph Varghese  
Staff Reporter

Residents woke up to heavy rains yesterday as it rained across the country and most parts of Qatar experienced heavy rains right from early morning. The weather was very cloudy in the morning and the rains subsided later in the day towards noon. While Doha and the suburbs had heavy rains in the morning till early afternoon, various places such as Dukhan received heavy rains from Monday night. However, unlike last week, there were no winds or thunder and lightning accompanying the rain and normal life continued all through the day without any disruption. Commuters and motorists had no major issues to negotiate the roads and most roads were free flowing and traffic was quite smooth as most residents rather enjoyed the morning showers. **To Page 2**

## US pump prices hit \$4 a gallon as global energy supply wobbles

Reuters  
New York

US average gasoline prices has risen above \$4 a gallon for the first time in more than three years, capping the sharpest monthly rise in decades, data from price tracking service GasBuddy showed, as the US-Israeli war on Iran roiled global energy markets. The \$4 per gallon milestone was last reached in August 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine. Some analysts have called this level a psychological barrier for consumers. Prices for crude oil used to make gasoline have also surged, along with prices for many goods, since Iran blocked most shipping through the Strait of Hormuz. US households were already squeezed by rising costs even before gasoline prices started to rise. This has created a political headache for President Donald Trump and his Republican

Party's lawmakers campaigning to hold thin majorities in both houses of the US Congress in November midterm elections. Trump had vowed to lower energy prices and ramp up US oil and gas production. So far, much of his second term has been marked by volatile markets, geopolitical turmoil and shifting policies on issues such as tariffs. US national average retail gasoline prices have climbed about \$1.06 a gallon, or 36%, since the US and Israel attacked Iran at the end of February. The monthly increase in retail gasoline prices in March is the steepest in GasBuddy data going back to 2000. "The price spike will impact near-term economic data," Macquarie analysts said last week about the possibility of US gasoline average surging past \$4 a gallon. "There should be higher inflation figures and a potential lift to nominal spending growth," the analysts said.

## Amir, UK defence secretary hold talks



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met yesterday at the Amiri Diwan with Secretary of State for Defence of the United Kingdom John Healey. The meeting discussed the latest regional and international developments amid escalating tensions in the Middle East. The two sides also reviewed avenues of bilateral co-operation, particularly in the field of defence, and explored ways to further enhance and develop them in a manner that serves the shared interests of the two friendly countries, especially in military co-operation and efforts aimed at addressing security challenges. **(QNA)**

## Amir, UAE president discuss regional security



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has held talks with President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan in Abu Dhabi, focusing on recent regional and international updates and efforts to restore stability. During the meeting yesterday, the two leaders discussed the rapidly evolving developments in the region, including ongoing tensions linked to Iranian attacks and their wider security implications. They also examined the impact of recent events on global energy supplies and market stability. His Highness the Amir emphasized the importance of prioritizing diplomatic solutions to resolve conflicts, highlighting the need for strengthened co-operation to safeguard regional security and limit the global repercussions of ongoing crises. **(QNA)**

## Defence minister receives calls from Swedish, Italian counterparts

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan bin Ali al-Thani received a phone call yesterday from Swedish Defence Minister Pal Jonson. During the call, both sides discussed security developments in the region, as well as avenues for co-operation and mutual co-ordination amid the current conditions. HE Sheikh Saoud also held a phone call with Italian Defence Minister Guido Crosetto. The call discussed latest developments and security updates in the region, along with aspects of joint co-operation and co-ordination in light of current circumstances. **(QNA)**

## Deputy PM holds talks with British defence secretary



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman bin Hassan al-Thani met yesterday with Secretary of State for Defence of the United Kingdom John Healey, during his visit to Qatar. The meeting discussed the latest developments and security situation in the region, as well as aspects of defence co-operation and joint co-ordination in light of current circumstances. Senior officers from both sides attended the meeting. **(QNA)**

## PM meets UK defence secretary

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani met yesterday in Doha with Secretary of State for Defence of the United Kingdom John Healey. The meeting dealt with discussing bilateral co-operation between the two countries and ways to support and enhance it, particularly in the field of defence. They also addressed developments in the 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 the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs stressed the need to stop the unjustified Iranian attacks on Qatar and countries of the region, warning against irresponsible targeting of vital infrastructure, especially those related to water, food, and energy facilities. He also emphasized, during the meeting, the importance of strengthening co-ordination, intensifying joint efforts, returning to dialogue, and prioritising reason and wisdom to contain the crisis, in a way that ensures global energy security, freedom of navigation, environmental safety, and regional stability. **(QNA)**



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## PM of Libyan unity govt meets Qatari ambassador



Prime Minister of the Government of National Unity of the State of Libya, Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh met with ambassador of Qatar to Libya Dr Khalid Mohammed bin Zaben al-Dosari. During the meeting, they discussed co-operation relations between the two countries. **(QNA)**

## Qatar's envoy in Somali meeting



Ambassador of Qatar to Somalia Dr Abdullah bin Salem al-Nuaimi participated in the meeting of President of Somalia Dr Hassan Sheikh Mohamud with ambassadors accredited to Somalia. During the meeting, an urgent briefing was given on the latest political and security developments in the region, as well as a review of ways to enhance joint co-operation. **(QNA)**

## Online registration for evening centres now open via Maarif Portal: ministry

The registration for evening centres for students enrolled in the adult education system (home-based - parallel track) is now open, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) said in a statement. It added that the move marks the academic year 2025-2026, in sync with MoEHE's strategy to offer flexible and full educational opportunities for a wide diversity of community segments. It is part of the ministry's commitment to helping students move ahead with their educational paths in an organized and motivating environment, the statement noted, adding that it will boost continuing education opportunities and provide essential academic support. The statement further clarified that registration will be conducted online via the Maarif Portal for Public Services to help students accomplish registration procedures more expeditiously. **(QNA)**

## Qatar backs ongoing mediation efforts

From Page 1

On Qatar-Iran relations, al-Ansari said Doha has not severed diplomatic ties but has lodged a formal rejection of the attacks and warned of their damaging effect on bilateral relations. He underscored the importance of preserving neighbourly relations in the long term.

Al-Ansari warned that Iran had crossed multiple red lines through strikes on critical civilian and energy infrastructure across the region, describing such actions as wholly unacceptable and a clear breach of international law. He cautioned that continued escalation — unaddressed since 2023 — risks drawing additional parties into the conflict and pushing it to more dangerous levels. The targeting of power and water facilities, he added, poses a direct threat to civilian populations.

On the economic dimension, al-Ansari raised alarm over the potential closure of the Strait of Hormuz, warning it would trigger a sharp rise in global energy prices and disrupt supply chains worldwide.

Despite the prevailing volatility, he affirmed Qatar's standing as a reliable energy supplier committed to main-

taining stable flows to international markets. He noted that recent high-level meetings in Washington, led by HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, centred on protecting freedom of navigation and the uninterrupted movement of trade through the Strait.

He further cautioned against strikes on nuclear and energy installations, warning of potentially catastrophic consequences including radioactive contamination and widespread power outages with implications far beyond the region.

On Lebanon, al-Ansari reaffirmed Qatar's support for Lebanese sovereignty and its rejection of Israeli strikes on civilians and incursions into Lebanese territory, describing such actions as clear violations of international law.

Regarding legal accountability, al-Ansari confirmed that Qatar has submitted formal communications to the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary-General to document violations it has faced, adding that legal efforts in this regard would continue.

He said a full assessment of economic losses would be conducted once the crisis subsides.

## UK pledges solidarity with Qatar, proud of its support

From Page 1

Healey outlined the scale of Britain's enhanced military presence in the region, noting that the UK now has more jets flying there than at any point in the past 15 years, with aircraft having completed over 1,100 hours of defensive operations. He confirmed that HMS Dragon has been deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean and that the UK's Typhoon deployment in Qatar has been extended. He added that F-35 aircraft, air defence systems, and counter-drone teams had been pre-positioned in the region before the conflict began, a move he said made a tangible difference from the very first day.

On the bilateral defence relationship with Qatar specifically, Healey noted that the two countries had agreed last January to deploy the joint 12 Squadron, with additional aircraft deployed at the start of March. "This is a partnership that continues to grow stronger, and I am proud that the UK has been able to support Qatar," he said.

Regarding the United States, Healey described Washington as Britain's principal defence and security partner, noting that the two countries' commanders are in daily communication. He confirmed that Britain had agreed to an American request to use its bases for specific and limited defensive operations, including degrading missile sites used to attack vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, in line with international law and the principle of collective self-defence.

He was emphatic, however, that the UK had made a deliberate decision not to join offensive action and had not participated in the initial strikes on Iran. On the question of maritime security, Healey said Iran's attacks on commercial shipping and its effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz were completely unacceptable, describing freedom of navigation as a fundamental principle of international law. He said the UK was working urgently with partners to develop a multilateral plan to restore safe navigation, stressing that any such plan must be viable, multilateral, and consistent with international law.

Healey was candid about the gravity of the situation. "These are deeply uncertain times, and I will not minimise the seriousness of the situation. Iran has already struck over ten countries, hitting civilian infrastructure, hotels, and airports. The risk of further escalation is real," he said. He outlined Britain's approach as resting on three clear principles: defensive action only, close coordination with allies, and a firm legal basis for all its activities.

He reaffirmed that the United Kingdom would not be drawn into a wider war, and called on Iran to immediately cease its attacks. He said Britain's preference remained firmly diplomatic. "The best path forward for the region and the world is through diplomacy," he said, adding that the UK would continue to push strongly for a swift resolution to the conflict in close coordination with its allies. Healey concluded by reiterating Britain's long-term commitment, saying the UK would continue to defend its people, support its allies, and stand by its Gulf partners for as long as necessary. **(QNA)**

## Qatar wakes to heavy rain

From Page 1

The Meteorology Department had forecast heavy rains for a short spell starting from Monday evening to today. However, according to the latest forecast, rains are not expected for Wednesday. The forecast for Wednesday notes that the weather could be misty to foggy at some places and poor horizontal visibility at some places in the morning. Officials had sent out alerts and messages through social media channels to warn the residents about the weather conditions and to drive slowly. The Ministry of Interior had through a video on its social media channels had highlighted the importance of driving slowly through the rains urging everyone to reduce the speed of the vehicles and leave sufficient safety distance between the vehicles. Moreover on the roads, precautionary messages

were displayed on traffic systems urging the motorists to drive carefully and safely.

Some of the low lying areas of the city as well as the surrounding places had experienced waterlogging following the heavy rainfall. However, water tankers were in action to drain the areas as they immediately reached the water-logged places and cleared the places within a short time. Many workers also could be seen clearing the water from various locations in the city and most puddles were cleared of water well before noon.

Meanwhile, the weather department has emphasised the importance of obtaining weather information from official sources to ensure accuracy and public safety. It has also noted that the authorities are closely monitoring the situation and urged the public to avoid spreading rumors and exaggerations.



PICTURE: Shaji Kayamkulam

## Labour minister chairs Workforce Planning Committee meeting



HE Minister of Labour and Chair of the Workforce Planning Committee (WPC), Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri, chaired yesterday the Committee's regular meeting, which discussed progress on initiatives and projects under the National Development Strategy for an effective and highly productive workforce. The discussions covered several programmes aimed at developing and qualifying national talent, increasing their participation in the private sector, and attracting highly skilled expatriate professionals. These co-ordinated efforts contribute to enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of the labour market, in line with the objectives of the Third National Development Strategy and Qatar National Vision 2030. (QNA)

## Transport minister reviews co-operation with EU official

HE Minister of Transport Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Thani has held talks with EU Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism Apostolos Tzitzikostas. During a phone conversation yesterday, the two officials discussed avenues of co-operation and ways to

strengthen bilateral relations between Qatar and the European Union in the field of transport. They also reviewed the current regional situation and its impact on transport operations and supply chains, highlighting the importance of modern technologies in enhancing efficiency and resilience in the sector. (QNA)

## QatarEnergy announces fuel prices for April

QatarEnergy yesterday announced fuel prices in Qatar for April 2026, with diesel and 91-octane gasoline (premium) maintained at current levels, while 95-octane gasoline (super) was increased. QatarEnergy set prices of Premium Gasoline (91) at QR 1.85 per litre, Super Gasoline (95) at QR 2.05 per litre, and diesel at QR 2.05 per litre. (QNA)

## Ministry recalls Ford, Lincoln and Mercedes models

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), in co-operation with Almana Motors Company, Qatar's Ford and Lincoln, has announced the recall of Ford Taurus, Flex, Explorer, Mustang, Fusion and Lincoln MKT, MKZ 2015- 2016 models.

The recall is due to the potential of a blank or distorted image appearing on the central display screen when the vehicle is in reverse.

MoCI in co-operation with Nasser Bin Khaled and Sons Automobiles, Qatar's Mercedes-Benz dealership, has announced the recall of Mercedes-Benz V Class 2026 models. The recall is due to the back seats monitoring control unit software not conforming with current

production series, which may lead to a defect resulting from low voltage. The ministry said the recall campaign comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to protect consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs. The ministry has urged all customers to report any violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial Fraud Department, which processes complaints, inquiries and suggestions through the following channels: Call Centre: 16001, e-mail: info@moci.gov.qa, ministry's accounts on social media: @mociqatar, ministry's Mobile App: MOCIQATAR (available on iOS and Android devices)

# Es'hailSat, EgyptSat sign multi-year pact for VSAT services

Es'hailSat, the Qatar Satellite Company, and EgyptSat have signed multi-year satellite capacity agreement for EgyptSat to provide VSAT services to their customer base located in Egypt and spread across the Middle East and North Africa region.



in the best interest of VSAT customers across Egypt and the Mena region." "As the satellite operator of choice for commercial, government and defence customers across Qatar and the Middle East & North Africa region, our satellite services remain available to provide resilient and secure connectivity. We welcome this growth in the partnership with EgyptSat and continue to grow our VSAT and managed service portfolio for such key customers," he added. This partnership stands to benefit a diverse set of customers across applications such as VSAT communications, enterprise connectivity, telecommunications, and other digital services.

In a statement, Es'hailSat explained that this agreement follows from the partnership signed last year between both companies to leverage the combined satellite services as well as the wide ground infrastructure of both companies that brings with it the latest technologies in satellite communications and VSAT technology.

President and CEO of Es'hailSat Ali Ahmed al-Kuwari said, "Es'hailSat is delighted to enter into this multi-year capacity agreement with EgyptSat that combines the high-powered Es'hail-1 satellite and ground segment strength of both companies

VSAT is a satellite-based solution that provides high-speed Internet connectivity in remote areas and is considered an ideal solution for companies that require continuous connectivity, such as oil platforms and mining sites. (QNA)

## Qur'an Radio, education ministry launch 'Morning Assembly' to promote values

As part of an active educational partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Qur'an Radio - affiliated with the Qatar Media Corporation - has announced the launch of its new radio programme, "Morning Assembly."

The initiative aims to instill moral values, strengthen language proficiency, and enhance public speaking skills among school students through an educational competition that has seen wide participation across all academic levels. The competition drew strong engagement from more than 48 schools representing various educational stages for both boys and girls. Each school was represented by four students, creating a rich educational experience designed to boost self-confidence and develop students' abilities in preparation, presentation, and delivery.



Programme episodes were recorded in the presence of students at the radio studios. The show is hosted by broadcaster Musabir al-Shehal, directed by Mohammed Islam Obaid, co-ordinated and supervised by Fahad Ahmed Haroun, Asma Rashid al-Kuwari, and executed by Salman Luqman and Moatasem Al-Salama. Broadcasting begins on April

5, airing daily from Sunday to Thursday at 6.15am for 30 minutes, aligning with the start of the school day through meaningful messages and high-quality educational content. Evaluation of participants is based on clear educational criteria, including proper use of the Arabic language, adherence to moral values, and the demonstration of creativity in preparation and presentation. Winning schools will be honoured after the evaluation process concludes. The 'Morning Assembly' programme underscores Qur'an Radio's role in supporting the educational process, strengthening partnerships with academic institutions, and contributing to the development of a conscious generation grounded in its values, proficient in its language, and capable of expression and creativity.



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## UNRWA head seeks probe into killing of staff in Gaza war

Reuters  
Geneva

Discussions are under way for a UN investigation into the killing of more than 390 employees in the two-year Gaza war, the head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency said yesterday, making it the deadliest conflict in the global body's history.

"I believe that we need to have a panel — a high-level panel of experts to look into the killing of our staff," said Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA Commissioner-General at a press conference in Geneva on the last day of his term. The topic has been raised with the office of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and with member states in New York, he said. "Part of the reason this has not (been)

### Israeli strikes kill six in Gaza Strip: medics

Israeli strikes killed at least six people in the Gaza Strip in separate attacks yesterday, health officials said, in the latest violence overshadowing a fragile five-month-old US-brokered ceasefire deal, Reuters reported from Cairo. Medics said an Israeli airstrike in Jabalia, north of the enclave, killed at least three people earlier

in the day, while another airstrike killed a father and his son in Khan Younis, in the south. Later yesterday, an Israeli airstrike against a group of Palestinians near a police checkpoint in the Mawasi area in the southern Gaza Strip killed at least one person and wounded eight others, health officials said. There was no Israeli comment on any of the incidents.

operationalised yet is there is still an ongoing conflict," he said, referring to Israel's continuing airstrikes in the enclave despite an October ceasefire that ended the Israel-Hamas war.

Asked to react, Israel's ambassador to the UN in Geneva Daniel Meron challenged the agency's neu-

trality. The UN has said that nine UNRWA staff may have been involved in the Oct 2023, Hamas storming of Israel and were fired in 2024. The UN has vowed to investigate all accusations made of links to Hamas and has repeatedly asked Israel for evidence, which it says has not been provided.

## US ready to thwart Iran attacks after threats to firms

### Iran has 'will' to end war, but seeks guarantees, president says

Reuters  
Washington

The White House said yesterday that the US military was prepared to thwart any attacks by Iran, responding to threats by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps against US companies in the region.

"The United States military is and was prepared to curtail any attacks by Iran, as evidenced by the 90% drop in ballistic missile and drone attacks by the terrorist regime," said a White House official, who did not wish to be named.

The IRGC said earlier that they would target US companies in the region as of April 1 in retaliation for attacks on Iran, state media reported.

Earlier, Iran has the "necessary will" to end the war with the US and Israel, President Masoud Pezeshkian said yesterday, stressing that Tehran was seeking guarantees the conflict would not flare up again, AFP reported from Tehran.

The comment by the head of state — which boosted markets in the US — came after a day of heavy strikes on Iran and followed a tough warning from the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The Guards threatened to retaliate against leading US tech firms such as Google, Meta and Apple from today if more Iranian leaders were killed in "targeted assassinations".

The Guards charged that 18 companies, also including Intel, Tesla and analytics firm Palantir, were complicit in previous killings and warned they "should expect the destruction of their relevant units in exchange for every assassination in Iran".

US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launched the war on February 28, killing Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and setting off a wave of retaliatory attacks across the region.

Trump has since zigzagged on whether Washington plans to further escalate the war that has roiled the world economy — possibly by deploying American ground forces — or try to end it through negotiations with Tehran.

Pezeshkian, in a phone call with the president of the European Council, said



Smoke and fire rise following an explosion in Isfahan, Iran, in this screengrab obtained from a social media video released yesterday. (Reuters)

Iran had "the necessary will to end this conflict, provided that essential conditions are met — especially the guarantees required to prevent repetition of the aggression".

Responding to a 15-point US plan to end the war last week, Tehran had put forward a counterproposal demanding a mechanism guaranteeing that Israel and the US would not return to war.

Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth, speaking earlier after he visited US troops in the Middle East, vowed that "the upcoming days will be decisive. Iran knows that, and there's almost nothing they can militarily do about it."

Asked about next steps, Hegseth said that "you can't fight and win a war if you tell your adversary what you are willing to do, or what you are not willing to do, to include boots on the ground".

Trump had threatened Monday that if Iran didn't agree to a deal, US forces would "obliterate" all of its oil wells, its main Kharg Island export terminal, and possibly its water desalination plants.

Yesterday, heavy strikes hit Iran, including the central city of Isfahan and Tehran, where AFP journalists heard blasts, with air defences activated.

Iranian state media also reported damage to a religious centre in Zanjan, while the government said airstrikes had hit a plant making cancer drugs and anaesthetics, claims AFP could not independently

verify. Tehran residents spoke of life in a city during wartime still clinging to some routine, despite reported explosions that yesterday sparked power outages in parts of the capital.

"When I make it to a cafe table, even for a few minutes, I can almost believe the world hasn't ended," dental assistant Fatemeh, 27, told AFP journalists in Paris via a messaging app.

"And then I go back home, back to the reality of living through war, with all its darkness and weight."

Iran has denied Trump's claims of direct talks so far, and has kept firing at Israel and US allies in the Gulf, joined in the regional war by its Lebanese ally Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis fighters.

Explosions were heard yesterday in Dubai, and two people were wounded near the Saudi capital Riyadh when air defences intercepted a drone.

Kuwait's state oil company said one of its oil tankers was temporarily on fire off Dubai after a "direct and malicious Iranian attack".

Iran has also maintained its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of global oil normally passes.

The average gasoline price at US pumps soared past \$4 a gallon, the highest in nearly four years, while Indonesia announced fuel rationing.

The EU urged member states to try to push down domestic demand for fuel. "It is clear that the more you can do to save oil, especially diesel, especially jet fuel, the better we are off," EU energy commissioner Dan Jorgensen said in Brussels.

Trump in a Truth Social post lashed out at Nato allies and other countries that have refused to help the US secure the crucial waterway.

"The USA. won't be there to help you anymore, just like you weren't there for us," he wrote. "Iran has been, essentially, decimated. The hard part is done. Go get your own oil!"

Israel, meanwhile, kept pounding Lebanon in its war on Hezbollah as it mourned four Israeli soldiers killed in southern Lebanon. Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney denounced Israel's deployment of troops in Lebanon as an "illegal invasion".



Members of the Iranian Red Crescent Society work at the site of a reported strike, in Tehran, Iran, in this screengrab taken from a handout video released yesterday. (Reuters)

## US journalist kidnapped in Iraq

An American journalist was kidnapped yesterday in Baghdad by a suspected Iraqi armed group, the US said, as regional security deteriorates following the US-Israeli attack on Iran, AFP reported from Baghdad. The State Department said it had warned the journalist of security risks and was working to ensure the American's release "as soon as possible".

"An individual with ties to the militia group Kataib Hezbollah believed to be involved in the kidnapping has been taken into custody by Iraqi authorities," Dylan Johnson, the assistant secretary of state for global public affairs, wrote on X. Iraq said that authorities intercepted a vehicle that overturned as they tried to flee. "Security forces were able to arrest one of the suspects and seize one of the vehicles used in the crime," the Iraqi interior ministry said in a statement. "The Ministry affirms that efforts are ongoing to track down the remaining individuals involved, secure the release of the kidnapped journalist," it added. An Iraqi security source told AFP the abduction occurred in Baghdad. Iraqi authorities did not identify the perpetrator or the victim. The journalist was identified as Shelly Kittleson, a freelancer by media advocacy groups as well as Al-Monitor, one of the news outlets for which she worked.

## The Transport Company MOWASALAT (KARWA)

Mowasalat (Karwa) announces the following tender:

Tender Ref. No.	Tender Title	Tender Fee	Electronic Tender Fee Payment Dates	Tender Bond	Bid Closing Date
TC-003-ITC-2026	Provision of IT Outsourcing (SAP Resources) On Call-off Basis	QAR 800	01st April 2026 to 09th April 2026	QAR 40,000	23rd April 2026

### CONDITIONS:

- Interested bidder shall pay the tender fee to Mowasalat Bank Account details as shown:
- Bidder must submit proof of tender fee payment (Bank Deposit Slip + a Signed & Stamped Expression of Interest (indicating Tender Ref. No. and Title / Company Name and details of nominated contact person i.e., Tel. No., Fax No., and Email address) + Copy of valid Commercial Registration to Mowasalat Secretary - Tender Committee at email: [tenders@mowasalat.com](mailto:tenders@mowasalat.com)
- Tender documents will be released via email on the next working day after the tender fee payment due date to all bidders who have submitted the bank deposit slip and other documents requested.
- Bonds: Tender Bond & Performance Bond:** Bids must be accompanied by Bonds issued by a local bank operating in the State of Qatar as per the Qatar Central Bank template. Further details of bonds can be found in the tender documents. *Bids without Tender Bond shall not be considered.*
- Tender validity:** Bid validity period shall be 180 days from the bid closing date.
- Tender documents submission:** Bids must be submitted in 3 separate sealed (IN RED WAX) envelopes addressed to Secretary - Tender Committee clearly highlighting the Tender Ref. No. & Tender Title:
  - Envelope 1# must include the Technical Bid submission (1 Original + 1 non-Editable copy in a USB)
  - Envelope 2# must include Commercial Bid submission (1 Original + 1 Editable MS Excel spreadsheet copied in a USB)
  - Envelope 3# must include the Tender Bond (1 Original) + 3 years Audited Financial Statements.
- Bid Closing Date:** Bid submission deadline is 12.00 noon Doha Local Time as on the Bid closing date shown above. The 3 envelopes must be handed over to the Office of The Secretary - Tender Committee, located at Mowasalat Head Office, Industrial Area. Any tender submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

Beneficiary Name	MOWASALAT-KARWA COMPANY
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IBAN	QA07 QNBA 0000 0000 0013 0112 7206 0
Swift Code No.	QNBAGAAQ
Branch Address	Corporate Branch, P.O Box 1000, Doha - Qatar
Currency	QAR
CR No.	26887

Tel.: 4458 8724 Fax: 4458 8850



## QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY INVITATION TO TENDER

### QAFCO ANNOUNCES THE FOLLOWING TENDER

TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS	TENDER FEE (QAR)	TENDER BOND (QAR)	TENDER FEE RECEIPT SUBMISSION DATES	TENDER CLOSING DATE
RFQ 6000005077-	ANALYSIS OF FOOD AND WATER SAMPLING	500/- (Non-refundable)	9,000	1/4/2026 2/4/2026 5/3/2026 6/4/2026 7/4/2026 8/4/2026 9/4/2026	23/4/2026

### GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- During the period this tender is offered, the interested bidders shall first deposit appropriate Tender Fee amount in cash (Cheque will not be accepted) into Company's following Account at any QNB branch:
  - Account Name : QATAR FERTILISER COMPANY (QAFCO)
  - Account Number : 0013-025828-058
  - IBAN : QA51QNBAA000000000013025828058
  - Bank Name : QATAR NATIONAL BANK
- The interested Bidders shall mention their company's name and Tender Number on the payment receipt provided by the bank and submit it as Tender Fee receipt.
- Besides the Tender fee receipt (which should have the Tender Number and bidder's name clearly mentioned on it), interested bidders shall also submit a copy of the valid Commercial Registration, an authorization letter from their company with the name, telephone, fax and e-mail ID of the focal point for this tender (**Very Important**), during the submission of Tender Fee Receipt for ensuring electronic receipt of the Tender Document.
- Tender Fee Receipt along with the specified documents shall be submitted to [purchase@qafco.com.qa](mailto:purchase@qafco.com.qa) on the dates indicated above, after payment of Tender Fee (nonrefundable) and to [jsaade@qafco.com.qa](mailto:jsaade@qafco.com.qa).
- After submission of the above documents to the above email, Tender Document will be provided through an electronic platform separately.
- For any queries related to non-receipt of the tender documents after the submission Tender Fee receipt at the QAFCO Housing Section, you may contact at [purchase@qafco.com.qa](mailto:purchase@qafco.com.qa) or on 44227792.
- Technical & Commercial details and Submission Procedures will be specified in the Tender Documents.
- The Company will not consider any offer without the enclosure of the Tender Bond.

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

## Empty streets, markets in central Nigeria's Jos after major shooting

AFP  
Jos, Nigeria

Major streets were deserted and normally bustling markets and businesses were shut in Jos yesterday, after Nigerian authorities ordered a multi-day curfew following a rare, mass-casualty shooting at a bar.

Plateau state often suffers from rural violence, partly linked to farmer-herder conflicts. But Sunday evening's shooting in the state capital marked a rare and unsettling urban attack.

The city itself, home to diverse religious communities who live side-by-side, often in mixed families, has seen deadly violence across religious lines in the past — prompting faith groups to call for calm after the attack by unknown gunmen killed at least 30 people.

The massacre occurred in Angwan Rukuba, a neighbourhood popular with local university students and staff, and yesterday there was a heavy presence of military, police, civil defence and local volunteer vigilantes, an AFP reporter saw.

"We are calm, there is not much tension, even though we are still in pain," resident Samuel James said.

However, with most people confined indoors for 48 hours

Monday and yesterday, many are shut out from getting food or earning money, he said.

The curfew is set to be lifted today. Jos saw deadly riots across religious lines in 2001 and 2008. Malik Samuel, an Abuja-based conflict researcher for Good Governance Africa, told AFP that the curfew might help stop reprisals.

Resident Jamilu Hassan agreed, saying that the curfew helped de-escalate tensions.

Still, he said, "people cannot come out to do their legitimate business and it is very unfortunate."

The government, he said, "should look at a lasting solution to this problem so that people can move about doing their legitimate work".

President Bola Tinubu yesterday called the attack "cowardly and barbaric", and directed security agencies "to intensify all efforts to pursue the perpetrators and those spreading misinformation that can inflame tensions and further endanger lives".

Plateau state sits in Nigeria's central Middle Belt, which has seen violence from farmers and herders over land access.

But the killings often fall across religious and ethnic lines, which adds to years of sectarian tension in the state — where ethnicity, re-

ligion and who is considered "indigenous" can be politically explosive topics.

Mathew Moses, another Jos resident, said Sunday's attack was a major setback to the relative peace the city has enjoyed in recent years.

"Gradually people have been building trust, businesses fully gaining ground, peace achieving its place -- but unfortunately evil people have again caused us setbacks."

Not far off, northeast Nigeria is the epicentre of a years-long militant insurgency, while much of the centre and northwest suffer from criminal gangs.

Authorities have not said who was responsible for the shooting at the bar. But state governor Caleb Mutfwang vowed "swift and decisive actions" to "restore calm" in a statement yesterday.

Posts on social media blamed, without evidence the "bandits" -- as organised rural criminal gangs are known -- for attacking another community on the Palm Sunday holiday.

In a state radio broadcast yesterday, Mutfwang morning assured that the curfew "will be reviewed periodically, to allow citizens to return to normal life".

Burials for the victims have not yet been scheduled.

## Deposed, detained Niger president's fate unclear nearly three years on

AFP  
Abidjan

The presidential term of Niger's overthrown leader Mohamed Bazoum officially ends tomorrow, but he faces little prospect of freedom from detention or even a trial, making what comes next uncertain.

Bazoum, 66, was sworn in as president on April 2, 2021 after democratic elections in which he won 55% of the vote.

He has been held in a wing of the presidential palace in Niamey with his wife since the junta led by general Abdourahamane Tiani seized power in the west African country on July 26, 2023.

Since being toppled he has refused to step down.

His lawyers argue that April 2 should no longer mark the formal end of his term in office, given he has not been allowed to carry out the role for nearly three years.

"His term was interrupted and did not resume. If Mr Bazoum returns to power tomorrow, the duration of his detention will not be taken into account in the exercise of his duties," Moussa Coulibaly, a member of a lawyers' collective representing Bazoum, told AFP.

Political researcher Valery Ntwali, who specialises in sub-Saharan coups d'etat, said that, based on Niger law, the deposed head of state had however "lost his legality since the constitution on which he was elected was suspended".

The junta halted the constitution and replaced it with a charter adopted in March last year that allows it to stay in power for another -- and renewable -- five years. No elections have been held since the coup.

It remains unclear which law prevails -- that of the military junta that took power by force, or the one in place before the putsch.

"There's no international authority imposing its view. Rather, there are national authorities who will negotiate with the junta and others that do not recognise it," Ntwali said.

While Niger's junta -- like those in its neighbours and allies Burkina Faso and Mali -- has made sovereignty its watchword and has adopted a hostile stance towards some Western nations, it is not entirely isolated on the international stage.

It recently resumed contact with the United States on security co-operation, two years after forcing US soldiers involved in the anti-militant battle to leave Niger, while forging closer ties with Russia.

Ties remain cool with former colonial power France, which was swift to call for Bazoum's release, while relations with the European Union are similar-



File photo of Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum. (AFP)

ly testy. The European Parliament earlier this month adopted a resolution demanding the immediate release of Bazoum, prompting anger from the Sahelian juntas and demonstrations in both Niamey and to a smaller extent in Ouagadougou.

"It's a failure on the part of the international community, I don't know how we were unable to secure the release of this democratically elected president," French MEP Christophe Gomart, who initiated the resolution at the European Parliament, said.

"Europe carries weight in Africa, it gives money to a number of African countries; the European Union should have exerted pressure," said Gomart, a general and former commander of French special operations including in the Sahel.

The European Union helps fund development programmes and the battle against militants, who for years have waged violence in Sahelian countries, including regularly striking in Niger.

Bazoum's presidential immunity was lifted in 2024 but his lawyers believe it unlikely that the official end of his term in office will accelerate him being put on trial.

"For the junta, it's less a question of law than security: what matters to them is that president Bazoum serves as a human shield" in the event of a possible armed intervention, as was once weighed by west African countries, another of his lawyers Mohamed Seydou Diagne said.

After nearly three years, Bazoum is "still held in the same place and in the same conditions" with no windows, doors or visits apart from his doctor, Coulibaly, the lawyer, said.

## SA military to support policing



Members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), and the South African Police Service (SAPS) (unseen) take part in a parade in Belhar in Cape Town, yesterday. This parade forms the final part of the preparations for the SANDF to play a supporting role to the SAPS in crime prevention operations, under the name of Operation Prosper. (AFP)

## Multiple blasts in Burundi's main city after fire at army arsenal

AFP  
Nairobi

Multiple explosions ripped through the city of Bujumbura after a fire broke out late yesterday at a military arsenal in Burundi's economic capital, an army spokesman said.

Fear of a coup in the small African Great Lakes nation gripped the population after a projectile landed close to the national radio broadcaster, a resident living near the affected building told AFP, requesting anonymity.

In a video seen by AFP, a tall mushroom cloud of smoke loomed over a neighbourhood in Bujumbura at nightfall, which another resident described as "spreading terror" across the city.

Very tall flames were also visible in a photo sent to AFP.

"A serious electrical accident in the ammunition store of the FDNB (Burundi National Defence Force) based in Musaga is the cause of the explosions currently being heard in the economic capital Bujumbura," Burundian army spokesman Gaspard Baratuza said.

Musaga sits in the southern suburbs of Bujumbura, the economic capital of a country ranked by the World Bank as the Earth's poorest by GDP per head in 2023.

"We urge the public to remain calm and avoid the surrounding areas; the relevant services are currently intervening," Baratuza added in a message shared in a WhatsApp group for journalists.

A resident of the Gasekebuye neighbourhood, located several

kilometres from Musaga, said that "the base camp is sending out munitions". "It's munitions that are burning. They're sending bombs our way. In my house, some windows have already shattered," the resident told AFP by phone.

For years, Burundi has been gripped by a profound economic crisis, notably a three-year-long petrol shortage paralysing the country.

Since President Evariste Ndayishimiye took power in June 2020, the former Belgian colony has swung between signs of liberalising a government still in thrall to the country's powerful generals and cracking down on the opposition.

Both rights groups and the UN have criticised breaches of human rights in the country.

## Ethiopia rations fuel, prioritises key vehicles as war shortages hit

AFP  
Addis Ababa

Ethiopia will prioritise vehicles transporting essential goods and those in the public transport sector at fuel stations as the country grapples with shortages caused by the Middle East war, authorities said yesterday.

The effective blockade of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran, through which a fifth of the world's oil and gas normally passes, has caused shortages in many countries.

Ethiopia, a nation in the Horn of Africa with around 130mn people, is particularly vulnerable as it imports all its petrol, primarily from the Gulf.

"The government has taken measures to cope with fuel supply disruptions caused by the Middle East war and the broader international crisis," the trade minister said in a Facebook post, listing seven categories of

vehicles to be prioritised at fuel stations. They include vehicles transporting essential goods, tractors carrying agricultural produce, public transport vehicles and others.

Authorities in Addis Ababa said the war and instability have cut daily diesel supply from 9.2 million litres to 4.5 million litres.

The public was urged to use fuel sparingly, walk when possible, rely on public transport and prioritise renewable energy. The country, Africa's second most populous, has promoted electric vehicles for years, scrapping import taxes and planning a future ban on internal combustion engine imports.

But by late 2025, electric vehicles accounted for just seven percent of cars in the country, according to the transport ministry.

Fuel prices have risen in recent days, piling pressure on consumers in a country already grappling with high inflation of around 10% and where 40% of the population lives below the poverty line.

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## As polls show him slipping, Brazil's Lula names VP as running mate

AFP  
Sao Paulo

Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva yesterday named his vice-president as his running mate in October's election in Brazil, as polls show the veteran leftist president slipping to a dead heat with his main opponent.

At the age of 80 Lula will be seeking a fourth term as he faces off against Flavio Bolsonaro, the 44-year-old son of far right former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving a 27-year prison sentence after being convicted of plotting a coup against Lula.

Recent polls show Flavio Bolsonaro gaining ground and in a dead heat with Lula if they face each other in a runoff. In December, Lula led by 15 points.

Lula's vice president and running mate is Geraldo Alckmin, a moderate conservative and ex-rival of the president. They teamed up in 2022 to take on the older Bolsonaro, who was then the incumbent. Besides being vice president, Alckmin is currently also industry minister.

"My colleague Alckmin is going to have to leave the ministry because he is candidate for vice president again," Lula said at a



Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva delivers a speech next to Brazil's Vice-President Geraldo Alckmin (left) during a ministerial meeting at the Planalto Palace in Brasilia yesterday. (AFP)

public meeting with his cabinet.

Alckmin, a 73-year-old doctor, served four terms as governor of Sao Paulo, Brazil's richest and most populous state. He ran for president twice as the candidate of the conservative Brazilian Social Democratic Party. In 2006 he lost a runoff election to Lula.

Yesterday Lula told his cabinet a story of how in 1978 he won re-election as head of Brazil's metalworkers union and told his family he would serve that one last term, then return to domestic life.

"Fifty years have gone by and I never did," he joked.

A poll published March 6 by Datafolha showed Lula with 46% of voter intentions against 43% for Bolsonaro, putting them in a draw as the gap falls within the margin of error.

The younger Bolsonaro, who serves in the Senate, was anointed presidential candidate by his father after the Supreme Court sentenced the latter to 27 years in prison for plotting to stay in power after losing the 2022 election to Lula.

## Renewable energy producers downsize operations in Brazil due to restrictions

Reuters  
Sao Paulo

Brazil's renewable energy sector is facing severe headwinds, with major power generators scaling back operations and cutting jobs due to generation restrictions that the national grid operator imposed on wind and solar plants in 2023, companies told Reuters.

Atlas Renewable Energy, owned by Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) under BlackRock, Newave Energia, co-owned by Gerdau, and French company Voltalia, are among the firms adjusting operations to ensure financial sustainability. None disclosed the exact number of layoffs but confirmed changes aimed at adapting to the challenging market environment.

The crisis marks a critical moment for Brazil's wind and solar sectors, which have become significant pillars of the country's electricity matrix. Renewable energy has helped the country consume more clean energy and shield itself from supply disruptions

when the availability of fossil fuels used in power generation is affected by external shocks, such as the war in Iran. After a power outage in 2023, the National Electric System Operator (ONS) started restricting output from solar and wind power plants more severely during periods when the grid either does not require their electricity or lacks sufficient transmission capacity to accommodate it.

Because battery storage has not been regulated for integration with power plants, these restrictions have led to significant financial losses, with some plants forced to halt generation altogether.

Atlas Renewable Energy reported revenue losses of roughly 25% at some facilities. "You prepare to deliver a volume of energy, build your business around it, and then it becomes unattainable," said the company's vice president of regulatory affairs in Brazil, Manoel Andrade. This month, Voltalia announced that it plans to reduce its workforce by nearly 10% globally, including in Brazil, as part of a broader transforma-

tion. The company told Reuters that fresh investments in Brazil hinge on regulatory stability and long-term returns.

Newave Energia, which recently inaugurated a solar project in Goias, emphasized the need for efficiency and resource optimisation given the volatile environment.

The broader sector outlook remains bleak, with companies like Acciona exiting Brazilian renewables in 2024 and manufacturers such as GE shutting down operations. With close to 3GW in solar projects, Atlas and other firms, including France's Engie, have paused new investments.

Companies say the main problem is the lack of clarity over potential compensation. Congress passed a law last year ordering the reimbursement of part of the outstanding losses, but only retroactively. The law still needs to be regulated.

Government efforts to address the challenges, including transmission upgrades and potential battery storage auctions, remain in early stages.

## \$150mn in adulterated fuel smuggled from Chile: Bolivia

The Bolivian government yesterday said that 5,000 tanker trucks carrying adulterated fuel have entered Bolivia from Chile through a trans-national smuggling network. The smuggling ring is estimated to have moved some \$150mn worth of adulterated fuel between October 2025 and March 2026, Bolivian authorities said at a press conference. The fuel was adulterated with used oil and contaminated water, Bolivia's Interior Minister

Marco Antonio Oviedo said. It originated from three Chilean ports: Arica, Iquique and Mejillones, with investigations ongoing in Mejillones. Such smuggling is occurring in larger volumes in Paraguay and Argentina, Oviedo said, without providing details to avoid interfering with ongoing investigations. The Bolivian government has carried out investigations alongside Chilean authorities to tackle the issue. (Reuters)

## Mexico condemns US immigration deaths after 14th national dies

AFP  
Mexico City

Mexico said on Monday that the deaths of more than a dozen nationals in US immigration custody were "alarming", as American authorities acknowledged a 14th person had died since President Donald Trump began his migration crackdown.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants have been arrested across the United States as Trump looks to fulfil an election pledge to carry out the largest deportation operation ever.

But its scale and ferocity, including an overwhelming use of force by agents who critics say are undertrained, have sparked controversy.

This "is not an isolated case, but rather a reflection of an alarming and unacceptable trend," Vanessa Calva Ruiz, Mexico's Director of Consular Protection, told a press conference in Los Angeles.

"The recurrence and frequency of these deaths are absolutely unacceptable," she said.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) said on Monday that Jose Ramos, 52, had been declared dead on March 25 after being found unresponsive at its Adelanto detention centre in California.

He was the 14th Mexican to die after contact with immigration

authorities since Trump's January 2025 inauguration. He was also the 14th foreign national to die in such circumstances in the first three months of this year.

"These deaths reveal systemic failures, operational deficiencies and possible negligence counter to the United States' own protocols and regulations as well as international human rights standards," Calva said.

ICE gave no cause of death for Ramos, who was detained on February 23, according to Jesus Arias, an attorney who said he would be taking legal action on behalf of the family.

The agency said personnel discovered Ramos "unconscious and unresponsive" and "immediately initiated life-saving procedures."

A statement added that Ramos, whom it characterised as a "criminal illegal alien," was taken to a hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Arias said such a description was a familiar attempt to smear a victim.

"We saw it happen in Minnesota; what this administration does is... disparage the victim," he said, referring to government narratives following the deaths of two Americans who were protesting immigration raids.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said on Monday she would be lodging "protest actions" following Ramos's death.

## Russian oil tanker docks in Cuba after US blockade relief

AFP  
Matanzas, Cuba

A Russian oil tanker docked in a Cuban port yesterday to deliver the first crude shipment to the island since January after Washington gave the crisis-hit country a reprieve from its fuel blockade.

The Anatoly Kolodkin, a tanker under US sanctions, entered the port of Matanzas, east of Havana, after sunrise to deliver 730,000 barrels of crude following a three-week journey from Russia.

US President Donald Trump's decision to let Russia deliver the oil avoids a confrontation with Moscow and provides temporary relief to a country that has endured blackouts, fuel rationing and dwindling public transportation.

"It's great that the country is receiving oil because we need it for the crisis we are facing," Yoanna Rivero, a 49-year-old pharmacy worker who was exercising near the port, told AFP.

Felipe Serrano, a 76-year-old security guard, was waiting for the Russian ship to arrive. "This is crucial for us to be able to survive because the country is paralysed," he said.

Analysts, however, said the shipment would give Cuba only a brief respite.

"It can offer temporary breathing room, but it does not come close to resolving the scale of



Russian oil tanker Anatoly Kolodkin at the oil terminal in the port of Matanzas, northwestern Cuba, yesterday. (AFP)

the deficit the country is facing," Ricardo Torres, a Cuban economist at American University in Washington, told AFP.

"It is clearly not enough," he said, noting that Cuba's power problems are "structural rather than episodic."

Cuban Energy and Mining Minister Vicente de la O Levy thanked Russia for the support, saying on X that the "valuable shipment arrives in the middle of the complex energy situation that we are facing."

The Russian embassy in Cuba replied to his post that it was "a duty to help our Cuban brothers under these difficult conditions!"

Trump, who has mused about "taking" communist-ruled Cuba, said Sunday that he did not object to Russia or others sending oil to the island because Cubans "have to survive."

The White House denied that there was any change to US sanctions policy.

"We allowed this ship to reach Cuba in order to provide humanitarian needs to the Cuban people. These decisions are being made on a case-by-case basis," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said.

The Kremlin said the shipment was discussed in advanced with Washington. Cuba was cut off from oil supplies in January after US forces ousted its main regional ally, Venezuela's socialist leader Nicolas Maduro, and Trump threatened tariffs on countries that send crude to the country.

While Trump has warned that "Cuba is next," President Miguel Diaz-Canel confirmed in March that Cuban and US officials had held talks.

Ricardo Herrero, executive director of the Cuba Study Group, a nonpartisan policy group in Washington, said the aim of restricting oil was to force Havana "to make real concessions at the negotiating table."

"The strategy here is to drive the system to the brink," Herrero told AFP. "But it's not to precipitate a full-blown societal or humanitarian collapse."

"It's all consistent with idea that the US holds all the cards and they'll decide when to hold, when to fold and when they go all in," he said.

Cubans have endured seven nationwide blackouts since 2024, including two in March, and fuel prices have soared. The blackouts as well as persistent shortages of food and medicine have fuelled public frustration and some rare protests.

Jorge Pinon, an expert on Cuba's energy sector at the University of Texas at Austin, said the more urgent need is diesel, which could be used for backup power generators or for transportation systems to keep the economy running.

It would take a month to refine the oil and deliver the diesel, which would be enough to cover demand for about two weeks, he said.

Herrero said the shipment was just "another donation" by Cuba's Russian ally, but he doubted that Moscow wanted to subsidise the Cuban economy in the long term.

"This is not going to help the economy recover," he said. "This is just humanitarian aid."

## Gulf of Mexico drillers exempted from protecting endangered species

By Nichola Groom  
Reuters

A federal panel, convened for the first time in more than three decades, voted unanimously yesterday to exempt oil and gas drillers in the Gulf of Mexico from a law meant to protect endangered species including whales, birds and sea turtles. The meeting of the Endangered Species Committee, nicknamed the "God Squad" because of its power to grant exemptions to the Nixon-era Endangered Species Act, is the latest effort by the Trump administration to unwind regulations it says hold back domestic energy production.

The six members of the committee - Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Administrator Neil Jacobs and Acting Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers Pierre Yared - said they were obligated to vote for the exemption because it had been requested by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Burgum, the committee's chairman, invoked the global oil disruption from the war in Iran in linking the issue with the need for domestic energy sup-

**"We cannot allow our own rules to weaken our standing and strengthen those who wish to harm us. So for these reasons, exemption from the Endangered Species Act in the Gulf is not just a good idea, it is a critical matter of national security"**

plies to support military operations and readiness.

"Current events have shown the impact of what can happen when major energy sources are taken off-line," he said. Hegseth, who was seated next to Burgum at the livestreamed meeting, said he asked for the exemption because pending lawsuits threatened to stop oil and gas activities in the Gulf.

"We cannot allow our own rules to weaken our standing and strengthen those who wish to harm us," Hegseth said. "So for these reasons, exemption from the Endangered Species Act in the Gulf is not just a good idea, it is a critical matter of national security."

The ESA allows for exemptions if the defence secretary finds it is needed for national security reasons,

a provision that has never been tested.

The endangered Rice's whale has been the subject of litigation over oil and gas exploration in the Gulf in recent years. A federal environmental analysis last year found that vessel strikes related to oil and gas drilling are likely to threaten the whale's existence.

Rice's whales are one of the rarest whale species in the world, according to NOAA, with fewer than 100 remaining.

Environmental groups vowed to challenge the vote in court.

"This amoral action by Pete Hegseth and Trump's cronies is as horrific as it is illegal, and we'll overturn it in court," Brett Hartl, government affairs director at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in an emailed statement.

An oil and gas industry group said Gulf activities remained subject to environmental protections under a range of other federal laws, including the Marine Mammal Protection Act and National Environmental Policy Act.

"Today's decision reflects that these robust protections are in place, and that serial litigation from activist groups targeting a lawful, well-regulated industry should not be allowed to indefinitely obstruct projects of clear national importance," Erik Milioti, president of the National Ocean Industries Association, said in an emailed statement.

### ANNOUNCEMENT

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holder of

KENYA Passport No. BK438479  
QID No. 28240400499

hereby change my name

from

BENJAMIN CHAHALE BISAO

to

CYRUS BENJAMIN CHAHALE BISAHO

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

## Huge glass skyscraper envisioned for Trump presidential library in AI video

Reuters  
Washington

The developers working on President Donald Trump's library sketched out a vision for a towering Miami building with room to display multiple planes, and replicas of prominent parts of the White House.

The AI-generated video, which Trump posted on social media on Monday night, displays a tower with a gold entryway and escalator, an illuminated American flag and the word "TRUMP" emblazoned near its top.

Donations are being collected for the project, the White House said yesterday.

"This landmark on the water in Miami, Florida will stand as a lasting testament to an amazing man, an amazing developer, and the greatest President our Nation has ever known," Trump's son Eric Trump said in an X post. It comes as the Republican president is also pursuing an array of plans that

would change the appearance of Washington — including adding a \$400 mn ballroom to the White House, a 250-foot-tall (76m-tall) triumphal arch and rebuilding the Kennedy Center performing arts complex.

Reuters confirmed that various shots of the video were generated by using Google's AI models. The video was analysed with Google's SynthID, an AI detection tool, which concluded the footage was created using one of the tech company's generative AI models. The tool works by detecting a hidden watermark contained in AI-generated or AI-modified images created by Google models and it detected those watermarks in parts of the video.

AI-generated imagery is playing a growing role in US politics, with candidates contesting the midterm elections that will determine control of Congress for the next two years increasingly releasing "deepfake" videos that present misleading images of their rivals. Republicans appear

to be utilising the technology more frequently than Democrats, following the lead of Trump's White House, which has released scores of AI-generated videos and gaming-inspired memes on social media that do everything from disparaging protesters to hyping up the Iran war.

No details were available on any specific architectural plan for the library, but the video depicted some classic Trump decorative touches including a giant gold entrance, a multi-level lobby with what appears to be an Air Force One plane, a fighter jet and a helicopter and a larger-than-life golden statue of Trump holding up his fist in a glittering, defiant salute.

Presidential libraries have been used to preserve documents, records and other historical materials of US presidents after they leave office. They are part of a system administered by the National Archives and sometimes feature museum exhibitions related to the president.

## Tariff refund system progressing, but payments may take up to 45 days: US

Reuters  
Washington

The US customs agency said yesterday it was making progress in setting up a streamlined process for refunding some \$166bn in tariff collections deemed illegal by the Supreme Court, but that its new system could take up to 45 days to review and process refund applications.

In a filing with the US Court of International Trade, US Customs and Border Protection official Brandon Lord said development of a new refund claims portal, review, processing and refund system is now between 60% and 85% complete.

He did not provide a start date for applications, but the agency previously had indicated a 45-day goal, a deadline that ends in late April.

In the declaration filing yesterday, Lord said the new system will begin accepting claims in

### The new system will begin accepting claims in phases

phases, with first priority given to those customs entries liquidated, or finalised, within the preceding 80 days and entries whose liquidation status has been "suspended, extended, or under review."

The initial phase will also accept declarations containing warehouse and warehouse withdrawal entries, Lord said.

The filing also said some 26,664 importers of record had completed the process to receive electronic refunds, representing 78% of entries for which duties or deposits under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act had been paid, an amount totalling \$120bn.

The US Supreme Court last month struck down President Donald Trump's broadest global tariffs under IEEPA, dealing a blow to the central economic

policy of his administration.

More than 330,000 importers paid the IEEPA tariffs on 53mn shipments, according to court documents.

The Supreme Court did not provide guidance on refunding the tariff payments that had been collected from importers since February 2025, leaving that matter to the Court of International Trade in New York City.

Many large importers such as FedEx sued CBP to protect their right to a refund, which Trump said could take up to five years. Many smaller importers feared the cost of the refund process would outweigh the benefits of trying to get reimbursed.

Judge Richard Eaton of the Court of International Trade earlier this month ordered CBP to begin processing refunds using its existing system, but the agency instead proposed a new process that would be ready to accept refund applications as soon as next month and would not require importers to sue.

## FAA restricts some San Francisco airport landings, warns of delays

Reuters  
Washington

The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said yesterday that it was imposing new safety restrictions at San Francisco International Airport that will limit some landings and lead to significant delays.

The 13th-busiest US airport will experience delays due to a runway repaving project and the agency's decision to prohibit flights from making side-by-side approaches to San Francisco's parallel east-west runways in clear weather, the FAA said.

The two measures will reduce maximum rates from 54 flights per hour to 36, the FAA said, adding it does not plan to lift the restrictions once the runway repaving is completed.

The airport's runway project will put the two north-south runways out of service for approximately six months.

San Francisco International Airport said in a statement that the changes would result in flight delays.

While the airport previously forecast about 15% of flights to

be delayed by the runway project, it now expects the change to increase the potential for delays to about a quarter of arriving flights experiencing a delay of at least 30 minutes.

United Airlines accounts for about half of the passenger traffic at San Francisco, followed by Alaska Airlines with about 10%. United said the planned runway construction may cause flight delays.

The FAA said it is now requiring "staggered approaches, with one aircraft offset from the aircraft on the parallel runway."

It said it had never allowed side-by-side approaches in bad weather, adding that it was exploring ways to safely increase the airport's arrival rate and had taken a number of steps to reduce the chances of accidents due to visual separation issues.

The FAA said earlier this month it was tightening helicopter safety rules and would suspend use of visual separation between airplanes and helicopters near major airports.

This follows the January 2025 mid-air collision between an American Airlines regional jet and an army helicopter that killed 67 people.

## Trump says other countries should 'just take' the Strait

AFP  
Washington

US President Donald Trump said yesterday the countries that have not joined the Middle East war but are struggling with fuel shortages should "go get your own oil" in the Strait of Hormuz.

In a Truth Social post, Trump said countries "that refused to get involved" should "build up some delayed courage, go to the Strait, and just TAKE IT," adding that the US would not help them.

"The USA won't be there to help you anymore, just like you weren't there for us. Iran has been, essentially, decimated. The hard part is done. Go get your own oil!"

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth echoed that message during a news conference yesterday.

"This is an international waterway that we use less than most, in fact dramatically less than most," Hegseth said.

"It's not just our problem set, going forward, even though we have done the lion's share of preparation to ensure that that strait will be open," he said.

Hegseth also said that the next days of the Iran war will be "decisive," while refusing to rule out US ground forces playing a role in the conflict.

"The upcoming days will be decisive. Iran knows that, and there's almost nothing they can militarily do about it," Hegseth said.

Asked about concerns among some of President Donald Trump's base about the possible use of ground troops in Iran, Hegseth declined to tip his hand.

"You can't fight and win a war if you tell your adversary what you are willing to do, or what you are not willing to do, to include boots on the ground," he said.

"If we needed to, we could execute those options on behalf of the president of the US and this department. Or maybe we don't have to use them at all — maybe negotiations work," Hegseth said.

The Pentagon chief said talks on ending the war were making progress even as the more than month-long US-Israeli military campaign against the Islamic republic continued.

"They are very real. They are ongoing, they are active, and I think, gaining strength," Hegseth



US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth speaks during a press briefing at the Pentagon in Washington, DC, yesterday. (AFP)

said of the negotiations.

He also said he had made an unannounced trip to visit US troops taking part in operations against Iran.

"We were on the ground in CENTCOM on Saturday for about half the day. For reasons of operational security, so those troops are not targeted, the places and bases will not be named," Hegseth said, referring to the US command responsible for the region.

"Suffice it to say, the trip was

an honour. I had a chance to bear witness, and I witnessed the best of America," he said.

General Dan Caine — the top US military officer — spoke alongside Hegseth, saying that US forces have struck more than 11,000 targets so far.

The US "continues to destroy Iran's ballistic missile and (drone) capabilities. We remain focused on interdicting and destroying the logistical and supply chains that feed these programs," he said.

## US Army probes helicopter flyby of Kid Rock's house

The US Army is investigating an incident in which two Apache attack helicopters flew near the Tennessee home of musician Kid Rock, an ardent supporter of President Donald Trump, a military spokesman said yesterday. Kid Rock — whose real name is Robert Ritchie — posted a video on X over the weekend showing a helicopter hovering near his mountaintop home's swimming pool as he clapped and saluted.

"God Bless America and all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice to defend her," he wrote in text accompanying the video, while a second clip showed there were two of the aircraft in the area.

Army spokesman Major Montrell Russell said the military "has confirmed that on March 28, two Apache helicopters from the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade at Fort Campbell conducted a flight in the Nashville area that has attracted public and media attention." (AFP)

## Pentagon declines to reaffirm Nato's collective defence

Reuters  
Washington

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth declined yesterday to reaffirm the US commitment to Nato's collective defence, saying that would be up to President Donald Trump after European allies had failed to stand with the US in the war against Iran.

The remarks by Hegseth at a Pentagon briefing were extraordinary, given that collective defence lies at the heart of the Nato alliance,

### "As far as Nato is concerned, that's a decision that will be left to the president"

which was formed in 1949 with the primary aim of countering the risk of Soviet attack on allied territory.

Any signal by the US that it might not be willing to defend Nato allies in the event of attack by Russia or another adversary could severely weaken the alliance even if Trump opts against withdrawing from it altogether, something that may require consent by Congress.

Experts have long warned that

such remarks could also encourage Russia to test Nato members' readiness to enforce the alliance's Article 5, which states an armed attack against one member state is an attack on all.

Asked by Reuters at a news briefing if the US is still committed to Nato's collective defence, Hegseth said: "As far as Nato is concerned, that's a decision that will be left to the president. But I'll just

say a lot has been laid bare."

Hegseth then appeared to point to Trump's latest remarks on social media blasting France for failing to allow overflight of US military resupply aircraft headed to Israel and criticising Britain for failing to launch the war against Iran alongside the US and Israel.

"You don't have much of an alliance if you have countries that are not willing to stand with you when you need them. He's simply pointing that out, and ultimately, it'll be his decision of what that looks like," Hegseth said.

## 'A very big deal': Canadian astronaut reflects on historic Moon mission

AFP  
Cape Canaveral

As soon as Wednesday (today), Nasa is poised to make history — sending the first woman, the first person of color, and the first non-American on a voyage around the Moon.

Canadian Jeremy Hansen is among the four-person crew, what astronaut and fellow countryman Joshua Kutryk called "a very big deal."

Wearing a traditional royal-blue flight suit, Kutryk — who is currently training for his own mission to the International Space Station — made the trip to Florida's Kennedy Space Center to cheer on his colleague, who could take off as early as April 1.

In an interview with AFP, Kutryk discusses the significance of this new chapter of American space exploration:

### How do you feel ahead of this mission?

It is a huge deal. It's the first — not

just the first Canadian lunar mission — it's the first mission in the world that isn't purely a US crew.

So, it's a very big deal in Canada. I feel very excited, very proud.

Jeremy is a great friend and a great astronaut and a great ambassador to Canada, and I'm just excited to see him go do this.

### Why does this launch matter for Canadians?

It's not a coincidence that Canada was invited to participate in this mission. It's because of what we've done in Canada that is valued by NASA, and that's something that makes me excited, but even more so proud to be from Canada right now.

Canada has been partnered with the US throughout most of human space exploration. We started back with the Space Shuttle Program. We had astronauts flying in the 80s... We helped to construct the space station. We designed and built the suite of robotic systems that still operates a space station, even as you and I speak today.

Particularly with Artemis



The Vehicle Assembly Building is seen in the distance as Canadian astronaut Joshua Kutryk poses for a portrait at Nasa's Kennedy Space Center, Florida on Monday. (AFP)

though, we were the first country to join the US in this vision of going back to the Moon.

Now there are many countries in the Artemis Accords — Canada was the first. And we contribute, or rather, we committed to contributing technology to help these missions take place.

And we've committed to de-

veloping robotics technology, to developing lunar rovers that are going to help explore the surface.

### Why should we return to the Moon?

There's a lot of things in the world right now — more than enough — to leave people, myself included, feeling pessimistic about things.

This leaves me optimistic... it shows us that we can still do this stuff, the really hard stuff.

We can still do it together — Canada, working with the US, international cooperation — and we haven't backed down from doing the really hard, next to impossible things, which are going back to the Moon.

That's really cool as an astronaut, to think that I have a friend who's going to go around the far side of the Moon.

But it's more than just cool. It's important for us. It's important for societies. It's important for Canada. It's important for our future, because this is how we get better.

It's how we advance and develop new technologies, make new scientific discoveries that chart a better course for us going forward.

And so for me, space is opportunity, and missions like this make me optimistic.

### What's different about the Artemis mission?

What we're trying to do, technology wise, is very different.

The Apollo program was designed to send small crews there for short periods of time and bring them back, and not really to do anything there.

The whole mission with Artemis is sustained, permanent exploration and presence.

If you think about what we do in low Earth orbit now, we have humans working from all over the world together for long periods — six, seven, eight, 12 months at a time — that's what I'm getting ready to do.

We want to do that on the surface of the Moon. That's what Artemis is about, and that's something that we couldn't have done during Apollo because we didn't have the technology to do it.

Another difference that I think is worth pointing out is that Apollo was just the US, for good reasons at the time.

But Artemis is entire collaboration of dozens of countries from around the world — and it's an important difference from that point of view.



## China, Pakistan call for immediate end to war, outline five-point plan

AFP  
Beijing

China and Pakistan called yesterday for an immediate end to the war in the Middle East, and for peace talks as soon as possible, as they agreed to boost their co-operation on Iran.

The two countries outlined a joint initiative "for restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and Middle East region", after a visit from senior Pakistani officials to Beijing.

Both countries have sought to mediate in the Middle East to prevent the conflict from escalating, with Islamabad saying it is ready to host "meaningful talks" between the United States and Iran.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar met his Chinese coun-

terpart Wang Yi and agreed to "strengthen strategic communication and co-ordination on the Iran situation and... make new efforts towards advocating for peace", Beijing said.

Wang backed Pakistan's mediation efforts as "in keeping with the common interests of all parties", according to a Chinese readout of the meeting.

"China supports and looks forward to Pakistan playing a unique and important role in easing the situation and resuming peace talks," Wang said.

Dar's ministry said the two sides had agreed on a five-point plan, starting with the "immediate cessation of hostilities" and the "start of peace talks as soon as possible".

On talks, which the United States claims are ongoing but Iran denies, the governments said dialogue and diplomacy were "the only viable

option to resolve conflicts".

"China and Pakistan support the relevant parties in initiating talks, with all parties committing to peaceful resolution of disputes, and refraining from the use or the threat of use of force during peace talks," according to Pakistan's foreign ministry.

The plan also calls for an end to attacks on civilians and non-military targets, such as energy infrastructure and desalination plants.

Shipping lanes should be secured, allowing "the early and safe passage of civilian and commercial ships" through the strategic Strait of Hormuz, it added.

Both countries said a lasting peace should be based on the UN charter and international law.

Dar's visit comes after he hosted his counterparts from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Türkiye on Sunday for weekend talks about trying to

end the war, which was triggered by US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28.

Concerns are running high about the impact of the fighting, including the choking of maritime traffic through the Strait.

China is a key partner of Iran but has not announced military assistance to Tehran, instead repeatedly calling for a ceasefire.

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

Pakistan is one of China's closest partners in the region.

A Chinese special envoy spent a week mediating between the two countries, Beijing's foreign ministry said this month.

## China expresses 'gratitude' after three ships transit Hormuz strait

Beijing expressed "gratitude" yesterday for co-ordination that enabled three Chinese ships to transit the Strait of Hormuz, the crucial waterway which Iran has all but closed during the war in the Middle East.

Two of the vessels, belonging to state-owned shipping giant Cosco, passed through the strait while exiting the Gulf on Monday morning, data from the MarineTraffic monitor showed. A third ship, a Hong Kong-flagged oil and chemical tanker called the Egret, crossed earlier on March 25 sailing from east to west, according to maritime analytics firm Kpler.

"Following co-ordination with relevant parties, three Chinese

vessels recently transited the Strait of Hormuz," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a press conference.

"We express our gratitude to the relevant parties for the assistance provided," she said.

She did not mention Iran or specify who was involved in coordination efforts. Shipping through the strait has slowed to a trickle since Iran effectively blocked access following US-Israeli attacks on the country. The two Cosco vessels – the CSCL Indian Ocean and the CSCL Arctic Ocean – are both ultra-large container carriers. They passed close to Iran's Larak Island and are bound for Port Klang in Malaysia. (AFP)



Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi announce their statements after their talks at the Akasaka guesthouse in Tokyo, Japan, yesterday. (Reuters)

## Japan to co-ordinate on energy with Indonesia

Reuters  
Tokyo

Japan and Indonesia have agreed to step up coordination on energy security, Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said yesterday, as the US-Israeli war on Iran squeezes oil and gas supplies vital to Asia.

"In light of the Iran situation, the strategic importance of resources and energy security is once again being recognised globally. Indonesia is a major resource-rich nation," Takaichi said alongside Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto after they met for talks in Tokyo.

The summit comes amid mounting concern over the widening Middle East conflict, which has disrupted shipments of oil and gas through the key Strait of Hormuz.

Indonesia is the world's biggest exporter of thermal coal for power generation, supplying

about half of global exports. It is also a major liquefied natural gas exporter, with roughly a quarter of its shipments bound for Japan.

Japan said on Friday it will allow utilities to increase the use of coal-fired power plants from next month to cushion any disruption to liquefied natural gas imports caused by the war in the Middle East.

Japan has also opened up its oil stockpiles, rolled out gasoline subsidies and is seeking energy supplies beyond the Middle East.

Japan and Indonesia would "make their best efforts to convince all parties (in the Middle East) to de-escalate" the conflict, Prabowo said. He also invited "Japan's participation" in the Indonesian economy, including in critical minerals, rare earths, industrialisation and nuclear energy.

Neither leader gave details of how the two countries would co-ordinate in economic security.

## Indonesia urges UNSC meeting after peacekeepers killed

AFP  
Jakarta

Indonesia urged warring parties in the Middle East "to respect international humanitarian law" after three of its peacekeepers were killed in Lebanon, and called for an urgent UN Security Council (UNSC) meeting.

"The safety of peacekeeping troops must be the top priority. All parties to the conflict are urged to respect international humanitarian law and ensure the security of peacekeeping personnel," defence ministry spokesman Rico Ricardo Strait said in a statement.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) said two of its personnel were killed Monday in an explosion and another died late Sunday when a projectile hit their position. The UN force said it launched an

investigation into the separate incidents.

Condemning the "heinous" attacks, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono said yesterday that he had discussed the deaths with UN chief Antonio Guterres, and asked for an emergency UN Security meeting as well as "a swift, thorough and transparent investigation".

"The safety and security of UN peacekeepers is non-negotiable and must be upheld at all times," said Sugiono, who like many Indonesians goes by only one name.

Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN under-secretary-general for peace operations, condemned "these unacceptable incidents and said "all acts that endanger the peacekeepers must stop".

Permanent Security Council member France has said it was seeking a meeting of the body over the matter.

## Australia investigates tech giants over social media ban breaches

AFP  
Sydney

Australia is investigating Facebook, TikTok and YouTube for possible breaches of the country's under-16 social media ban, accusing the big tech companies yesterday of "failing to obey" the world-leading laws.

Australia in December banned under-16s from a raft of the world's most popular social media sites, citing the need to protect young minds from "predatory algorithms" filled with violence.

Three months since the landmark laws came into effect, Aus-

tralia's online safety watchdog found a "substantial proportion of Australian children" were still scrolling banned platforms.

"Australia's world-leading social media laws are not failing. But big tech is failing to obey the laws," Communications Minister Anika Wells told reporters.

"Australia will not let the social media giants take us for mugs."

Australia's eSafety Commission flagged "significant concerns" about Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube.

"None of this is impossible. None of this is even difficult for big tech, who are innovative billion-dollar companies," Wells said.

"If these companies want to do

business in Australia, they must obey Australian laws."

Australia would decide any punishments by mid-2026.

Tech companies face fines of up to \$33.9mn (Aus\$49.5mn) under the laws.

More than 5mn accounts belonging to underage Australian users have been removed since the laws came into effect, the eSafety Commission said.

A growing body of research suggests too much time online is taking a toll on teen well-being.

Australia's ban has been hailed as a godsend for parents sick of seeing children glued to their phones.

It has also drawn interest across the globe – with Malaysia,

France, New Zealand and Indonesia among the nations now eyeing similar measures.

Although social media companies have pledged to abide by the laws, they have warned the measures could instead push teenagers into dark, unregulated corners of the internet.

Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, said accurately proving users' ages had been "a challenge for the whole industry".

It told AFP it would "keep investing in enforcement to detect and remove under-16 accounts".

Image-sharing platform Snapchat told AFP it was "fully committed to implementing reasonable steps under the legislation" and had

so far locked 450,000 accounts.

TikTok said it had no comment, while inquiries on YouTube did not receive a reply.

Social media companies bear the sole responsibility for checking that Australia-based users are 16 or older.

They must prove they have taken "reasonable steps" to weed out young teenagers, although it remains unclear how this will be interpreted by the government.

Some platforms have said they would use AI tools to estimate ages based on photos, while users could also choose to prove their age by uploading a government ID.

Online discussion site Reddit has filed a legal challenge against

## Macron arrives in Japan for talks dominated by war

AFP  
Tokyo

French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Japan yesterday for a visit that initially aimed to strengthen partnerships in nuclear energy and space innovation but will now be dominated by the Middle East war.

Macron landed shortly before 5:30pm (0830 GMT) in rainy and windy Tokyo, ahead of an expected evening meeting with several cultural figures including a renowned kimono painter.

He will then hold talks with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi today, and "the crisis in the Middle East will be at the heart of discussions", the Elysee said ahead of his Asia trip, which will also include a visit to South Korea.

The two leaders will discuss "how we can try to find common solutions", it added.

Japan depends on the Middle East for 95% of its oil imports and has had to dip into strategic stockpiles to temper the impact of rising fuel prices since the start of the war.

Iran has virtually closed the vital Strait of Hormuz – through which a fifth of global crude and gas flows – since the US and Israel began striking the country on February 28.

Economy and finance ministers of G7 countries, which include France and Japan, said on Monday they stood ready to take "all necessary measures" to ensure the stability of the energy market as they tackled the economic consequences of the war.

Wednesday will be Macron's "first full-fledged meeting" with Takaichi, according to a Japanese foreign ministry official, though the two met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in November.

Among expectations for the talks was "continued communication" with a view towards the "calming down of the situation in Iran", the official said.

The two countries are also expected to discuss security and partnerships in the space sector, and intend to sign a roadmap on nuclear power in Japan, the Elysee said.

Macron's visit, his fourth to the



French President Emmanuel Macron (third left) and his wife Brigitte Macron (second left) attend a dinner at Happon-en in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

country, comes as China-Japan ties worsen following Takaichi's suggestion in November that Tokyo might intervene militarily in any Chinese attempt to take Taiwan.

Macron visited China in December.

He and his wife Brigitte are due to have lunch with Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako on Thursday but a hoped-for viewing of Japan's famous cherry trees

in full bloom could be spoiled by rain forecast for the next three days in the Japanese capital.

He will be in Japan until April 2, and he will then visit South Korea at the invitation of President Lee Jae Myung.

"Macron will be the first European leader to make a state visit to South Korea since the launch of (our) new administration," the South Korean presidential office said earlier this month.

## Japan deploys long-range missiles in southwest region near China

Japan has deployed long-range missiles in a southwest region near China, its defence minister said Tuesday, at a time when ties with Beijing are at their lowest in recent years. The missiles were installed in Kumamoto in the southern region of Kyushu, as Japan is attempting to shore up its military capacity as China steps up naval activity in the East China Sea.

"Standoff defense capabilities enable us to counter the threat of enemy

forces attempting to invade our country... while ensuring the safety of our personnel," said Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi. "This is an extremely important initiative for strengthening Japan's deterrence and response capabilities," he added. The surface-to-ship guided missile system has a range of around 1,000km (620 miles), putting parts of the Chinese mainland within reach – Shanghai lies about 900km from Kumamoto. (AFP)

## Thailand's king endorses new cabinet

Thailand's king endorsed the new cabinet of second-term Prime Minister Anutin Charuvirakul, with the nephew of jailed ex-leader Thaksin Shinawatra made a deputy prime minister, the Royal Gazette said yesterday.

The cabinet posts, mostly reserved for members of Anutin's party, include six deputy prime minister positions – one of which was given to Yodchanan Wongsawat, the top candidate of Thaksin's Pheu Thai party in the general election last month.

Anutin's Bhumjaithai party won the most seats in parliament in the February 8 poll. But without an outright majority, Bhumjaithai allied with the third-placed Pheu Thai of tech billionaire Thaksin.

Yodchanan, a biomedical engineering professor, was also made minister for higher education, sci-

ence, research and information.

Anutin himself will pull double-duty, also serving as interior minister. Bhumjaithai members and its loyalists hold 32 cabinet positions, including the economic and defence portfolios, with several ministers from Anutin's first short-lived term being re-appointed.

Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow will retain his position as Thailand's top dip-

## Philippines to rename disputed South China Sea islands

AFP  
Manila

The Philippines said yesterday it will rename more than 100 island features in a bid to reinforce its "sovereignty" in the disputed South China Sea, including areas claimed by China.

The features to be renamed under President Ferdinand Marcos's executive order belong to

the Spratly archipelago, site of repeated confrontations between Philippine and Chinese vessels.

Beijing claims the South China Sea in nearly in its entirety despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

Manila most prominently used the renaming mechanism in 2012 under the Benigno Aquino administration, when it dubbed areas of the crucial waterway nearest its coast the West Philippine Sea.

"More than 100 Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) features will have Philippine names... which strengthens administration and governance, as well as sovereignty, in Palawan and the West Philippine Sea," the presidential palace said yesterday in a statement.

The executive order directs all government agencies as well as schools to begin using the new names, which have yet to be revealed.

It also orders the country's mapping agency to publish updated charts and maps for the area.

The Philippines and China, along with Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam have competing claims to areas of the South China Sea, most importantly the Spratlys, which are believed to sit on vast oil and gas resources.

The Chinese embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment.



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

Australia's ban, which it described as "legally erroneous".

The US-based company said there were serious privacy concerns associated with platforms verifying age, with the collection of personal data creating a risk of leaks or hacks.

Reddit's challenge is yet to be heard in Australia's High Court.

## Seized weapons on display after India declares end to Maoist insurgency

AFP  
Dantewada

Indian police yesterday displayed large caches of arms and ammunition seized from Maoist rebels, a day after officials declared the six-decade-long insurgency was over following a sustained security crackdown.

Over the last two years, India 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.

It has since been dramatically weakened, with most remaining armed cadres confined to the Bastar region of central Chhattisgarh state — a vast, mineral-rich expanse of dense forests and hills. In Bastar's Dantewada district yesterday, police laid out a haul of weapons ranging from crude, country-made mortars to carbine rifles looted from security forces.

Rather than marking victory with a parade, officials said the display was intended to signal the rebels were "joining the mainstream".

Five former insurgents were presented copies of India's consti-



Weapons seized from Maoist rebels and fighters upon their surrender are displayed at a police facility in Dantewada in Chhattisgarh state's Bastar division yesterday. (AFP)

tution during the event.

Bastar police chief P Sundarraj told AFP the strength of the insurgency had fallen to "single digits", down from nearly 4,000 fighters less than half a decade ago.

"Mission 2026 is coming to an end," Sundarraj said, referring to the government's long-promised deadline of defeating the rebellion by March 31, 2026.

"There will be a new beginning from April 2026 onwards."

Sundarraj said the surrendered rebels were being given new civilian identities through vocational training and rehabilitation programmes.

"Earlier someone was in the armed squad (but now) they will be identified as a tractor driver or an electrician," he said. "Our focus is to get their violent past to be changed into a new identity."

At one such rehabilitation centre, women were seen knitting blouses while men welded metal salvaged from discarded electric rickshaws to build park benches.

"I will hopefully set up my own tailoring shop back in the village," said 19-year-old Kope Madvi, who quit the insurgency after six years as an armed fighter.

Others said they longed for a simple life away from conflict.

"I just want to go back home, farm and feed my family," said Vijay Oyam, 26.

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.

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

## Syrian president meets King Charles, Starmer on UK visit

AFP  
London

King Charles III yesterday hosted Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa at Buckingham Palace as the former rebel leader made his first official visit to London and met with Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

The UK monarch held an audience with Sharaa yesterday afternoon, Buckingham Palace said. Sharaa was making his first visit to Britain since ousting long-time iron-fisted former president Bashar al-Assad in 2024.

Earlier yesterday, Sharaa discussed the war with Iran in talks with Starmer at Downing Street.

The leaders "discussed the need for a viable plan to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, in the face of the severe economic impact of prolonged closure, and agreed to work with others to restore freedom of navigation," a Downing Street spokesperson said.

Since Sharaa has been in power, sectarian tensions have continued to cause repeated bloodshed in Syria, while the Islamic State group remains at large.

Starmer said he welcomed the Syrian government's "action" against Islamic State and noted progress on counter-terrorism, the spokesperson said.

The British prime minister urged "closer work together on returns (of illegal migrants), on border security, and on tackling people smuggling networks".

Between 2011 and 2021, nearly 31,000 Syrians were granted asylum in Britain after the civil war there sparked a refugee crisis, according to government statistics.

The president's visit came after London announced the resumption of diplomatic relations with Syria in July 2025.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer greets Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa at 10 Downing Street, in London, yesterday. (Reuters)

It followed a visit by then foreign minister David Lammy to Damascus, the first visit to Syria by a British minister in 14 years.

The British government said at the time that its engagement with Damascus was aimed at supporting the country's political transition and assisting economic recovery as well as reducing illegal migration, and addressing the issue of chemical weapons.

Sharaa met German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in Berlin on Monday, as he seeks to keep Syria insulated from the repercussions of the current Middle East war.

Europe's top economy is home to the largest Syrian diaspora in the European Union at more than a million, many of whom arrived during the peak of the migrant influx in 2015-2016.

Merz, who has made a tougher immigration policy a priority since taking office last year, said he and Sharaa had agreed eight out of 10 Syrians in Germany should go back "over the next three years".

## King Charles to pay state visit to US in late April

AFP  
London

King Charles III will visit the US in late April, Buckingham Palace announced yesterday, despite some calls for the trip to be cancelled or delayed amid strains over the Iran war.

Confirmation of the monarch's first state visit to the US comes at a rocky time for the so-called US-UK "special relationship", with US President Donald Trump repeatedly criticising Prime Minister Keir Starmer's reticence over the US-Israel war against Tehran.

But Trump, whose mother came from Scotland and is a big fan of the British monarchy, welcomed news of the visit as "TERRIFIC".

The US leader posted on his Truth Social platform that the trip would take place on April 27-30 and include a "beautiful Banquet Dinner at the White House on the evening of April 28th".

"I look forward to spending time with the King, whom I greatly respect. It will be TERRIFIC!" he added.

The visit will come as the US marks its 250th anniversary of independence and will be followed by an official visit by the king to Bermuda, a British Overseas Territory.

Washington's envoy to Britain, Warren Stephens, warned last



US President Donald Trump shakes hands with Britain's King Charles, as Trump departs Windsor Castle, in Windsor. (Reuters/File Photo)

week it would be a "big mistake" for the US visit to be cancelled.

Trump has repeatedly railed against Starmer since the start of the war, accusing him of not doing enough to support the US.

"This is not Winston Churchill that we're dealing with," Trump said earlier this month, after Starmer initially declined to let US warplanes fly from UK bases to strike Iran.

"I'm disappointed with Keir," Trump has also said, slamming Starmer's "big mistake".

Trump also caused offence with recent remarks about UK troops' participation in Afghanistan.

The visit will be Charles's first trip to the US as king, after he hosted Trump for a lavish state visit last September.

The mercurial US president has frequently expressed admiration for Britain's royal family, which treated him to a full state dinner at Windsor Castle, military parades and a flyover during last year's visit.

It was an unprecedented second state visit for Trump, who was also hosted in 2019 by the late queen Elizabeth II before her death.

But in his latest broadside aimed at Starmer's government, Trump told countries like Britain to secure the Strait of Hormuz themselves

because "the USA won't be there to help you anymore, just like you weren't there for us".

A YouGov poll published on Thursday found nearly half of British citizens opposed the king's visit to the US, with only a third saying it should go ahead.

Emily Thornberry, a senior MP in Starmer's ruling Labour party, said earlier this month it would be "safer to delay" the trip.

She warned Charles and Camilla could be left feeling "embarrassed" because of the ongoing conflict.

"Why are we rewarding Donald Trump with a state visit from our king?" asked Ed Davey, leader of the minority opposition Liberal Democrats party.

The last British monarch to make a state visit to the US was Queen Elizabeth II in 2007.

That visit was the last of four made by the late queen whose visit in 1991 included an address to Congress.

The royal family's soft power diplomacy is viewed as an important way of engaging with Trump.

Charles helped smooth Starmer's visit to the White House last year by signing a letter inviting Trump to visit the UK which the prime minister handed to the president in the Oval Office.

In front of the TV cameras a beaming US president read the invitation and declared the king "a beautiful man, a wonderful man".

## Mayor Khan asks diplomats to push back against Trump's 'lies' about British capital

Reuters  
London

London's mayor Sadiq Khan called on British diplomats stationed around the world yesterday to help counter what he described as "disinformation and lies" about the capital amplified by US President Donald Trump.

Trump, a frequent critic of Khan whom he has called a "terrible mayor", has made a series of claims about London, including assertions that crime is "through the roof" and that the city wants to "go Shariah law".

Khan, in an interview with Reuters following a meeting with British diplomats, ambassadors and high commissioners, said that London was not perfect but that it remained a safe city — safer than major US cities.

Khan, who represents Prime Minister Starmer's centre-left Labour Party, in 2016 became the first Muslim to be elected mayor of London. He has since won two more mayoral elections and has the largest personal mandate of any British politician.

Khan pointed to data showing that, last year, London recorded its lowest number of homicides per capita since records began, along with a recent decline in phone snatching incidents.

"A lot of this misinformation, disinformation and lies comes from the US of America," Khan said. "It's really important to counter the propaganda coming from President Trump."

The White House did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

"One of the things that we've got to do better is to rebut these lies that exist across the globe," Khan said, adding that Brit-



Mayor of London and co-chair of C40 Cities, Sadiq Khan, speaks during an interview as he attends the COP30 Local Leaders Forum at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. (Reuters/File Photo)

ish diplomatic staff must be equipped with facts to challenge false claims about London and educate people.

The mayor warned that exposure to such claims on social media could deter people from travelling to, investing in, living in, or studying in London, potentially harming the capital's prospects.

The meeting, attended by British diplomats from countries including the US, the United Arab Emirates and Japan, also included representatives from London's Metropolitan Police.

The long-standing public feud between Trump and Khan dates back to at least 2017, when Khan condemned Trump's pledge to impose a travel ban on several majority-Muslim countries.

## Britain to send additional air defence equipment, troops to Middle East

Reuters  
London

Britain plans to send additional air defence equipment and troops to help its allies in the Middle East as Iranian attacks continue, defence minister John Healey said yesterday as he visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain.

Healey held talks with allies where they discussed the Strait of Hormuz and further UK-Gulf co-operation on regional security, Britain's Ministry of Defence said.

UK will deploy Sky Sabre, a ground-based air defence system used by the British Army, in Saudi Arabia, statement said.

The deployment of British Typhoon fighter jets in Qatar,

where the UK operates a joint squadron with Qatar, will be extended, Healey announced.

Britain's Lightweight Multirole Launcher is now in Bahrain, where it is being integrated into that country's defence systems, the MoD added.

Healey told reporters that British troops will help install, train, and operate the new air defence systems, with nearly 1,000 soldiers expected to be deployed across the Middle East to help "defend the skies and reinforce air defences".

"I pay tribute to the heroic efforts of our partners across the Gulf in protecting their nations. We will stand by our long-term partners in the Middle East and continue to push for a swift resolution to this conflict," Healey said in the MoD's written statement.

## Nepal arrests senior ex-official over protest crackdown

AFP  
Kathmandu

Nepali police arrested a former Kathmandu senior official yesterday, a spokesman told AFP, the latest high-profile detention linked to a deadly crackdown on youth-led protests last year.

In the days since a new government took power following elections, former prime minister KP Sharma Oli and ex-home minister Ramesh Lekhak have already been arrested for their alleged involvement in the 2025 crackdown that killed at least 76 people.

An inquiry commission into the violence had recommended that Oli and Lekhak, as well as the capital Kathmandu's former chief district officer Chhabilal Rijal, be investigated under laws addressing deaths caused by negligence.

Yesterday, Rijal was "arrested to further en-

quire about the force used during the September 8 and 9 uprising, based on the investigation commission's report", police spokesman Abi Narayan Kafle told AFP.

"His case is similar to that of the former prime minister and the former home minister" Rijal, in a statement to the commission, had said that he had given a "verbal order to fire rubber bullets aimed below the knee", and insisted that he "did not give an order to shoot (live) bullets".

Later yesterday, Rijal was granted bail, Kathmandu district police chief Ramesh Thapa said.

"Police handed him over to his relatives after questioning him ... he will have to appear before the authorities when summoned (again)," Thapa told AFP.

Oli and Lekhak both deny responsibility for the violence.

They were arrested in pre-dawn raids on Saturday — a day after Prime Minister Balendra Shah

was sworn in, capping months of interim administration following the anti-corruption protests in September.

Neither Oli nor Lekhak have been charged, and they remain in custody — the former prime minister in hospital — pending further investigation and the outcome of a petition at the Supreme Court.

Supporters of Oli have protested in Kathmandu demanding his release, and police deployed on Tuesday in anticipation of further demonstrations.

In a separate case relating to money laundering, former energy minister Deepak Khadka has also been arrested.

The centrist Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) swept March 5 elections, taking 182 of the 275 seats in the House of Representatives, just two short of a two-thirds majority.

The new parliament is expected to convene for its first session tomorrow.

## Sri Lanka rushes to solar batteries as energy crisis bites

AFP  
Colombo

Sri Lanka announced plans yesterday to urgently set up battery storage for solar energy and use it during the nighttime peak demand currently met by coal and diesel powered generators.

Government spokesman Nalinda Jayatissa said a 50-megawatt battery energy storage system

(BESS) would be launched immediately as part of a 300-megawatt solar power system.

"The Cabinet of Ministers approved a proposal to set up batteries which will store solar power for 40 hours," Media minister Jayatissa told reporters in Colombo.

Faced with an energy shortage due to supply disruptions caused by the Middle East conflict, Sri Lanka has raised fuel and electricity prices by as much as 40%.

Since the US and Israel began bombing Iran, triggering retaliatory attacks that disrupted global energy supplies, Sri Lanka has rationed fuel.

Sri Lanka is also observing a four-day working week, while ordering streetlights and advertising illuminations to be turned off.

Public servants have been asked to switch to table fans instead of air conditioners, despite the country facing its hottest period, when daytime temperatures reach 38C.

The Cabinet of Ministers, which met on Monday, also decided to seek international funding for a proposed \$800mn, 600-megawatt hydroelectricity project that could become the island's first pumped-storage power station.

The Maha Oya project is expected to pump water back to the reservoir during periods of low electricity demand and draw from it when demand is high. It is expected to be online by 2031.

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**GULF TIMES**

## Currency fall and oil rise: Asian nations confront hard choices

Asian currencies – some already struggling – have come under heavy selling, putting them among the largest losers globally. This has brought back memories of the Asian financial crisis and leaves policymakers with some unpleasant choices: Raising rates, spending reserves, or seeing their currencies sink further.

Like in the rest of the world, the effect of the US-Israeli war on Iran in Asia is the prospect of rising inflation and damaged growth. Asia buys about 80% of the oil that is shipped through the Strait of Hormuz, according to JP Morgan commodity analysts. India's rupee, Indonesia's rupiah and the Philippine peso have all been pulled to record lows against the dollar, along with major troughs for the yen and South Korean won.

The dollar, one of the few havens in March, made some of its sharpest gains in Asia – and to historic levels – rising more than 4% against the won, peso and Thai baht against a gain of around 1.5% on the euro. India's rupee fell to a record low on Monday, before recovering, despite recent efforts by the central bank to stem its fall.

The rupee was among Asia's worst forex performers in 2025, and its underperformance has continued well into this year, hitting new lows on a regular basis. But Chinese stocks are emerging as one of the best markets to ride out the Iran war, with their outperformance against global peers on track for the strongest since August 2025.

**Asia buys about 80% of the oil that is shipped through the Strait of Hormuz, according to JP Morgan analysts**



The Chinese yuan has slipped about 0.6% against the dollar since the war, but still outperformed most major Asian currencies even as a gauge of the greenback gained about 2.9%, according to Bloomberg data. For free-falling Asian currencies, there is no simple solution – not least because options short of importing more oil don't actually fix the squeeze, which is already spilling into prices for plastics and fertilisers.

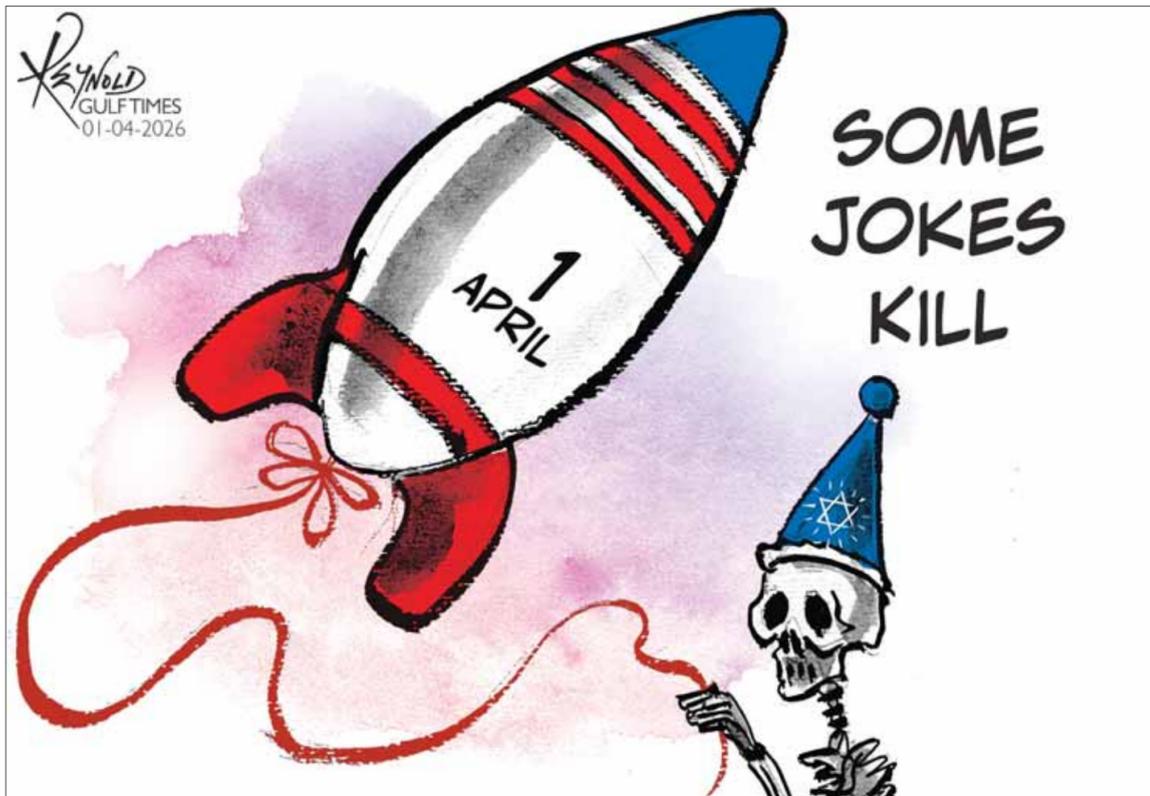
Responding with higher rates risks slowing an economy when it most needs support. Subsidising fuel is expensive, and in emerging markets or countries with budget pressures, such moves could be received badly by bond investors. Direct currency intervention can also be costly and risky in fickle foreign exchange markets. There's still one big factor that may lead to further currency losses – the potential for another upsurge in the price of oil.

An increase of \$10 per barrel in crude may boost

the US dollar by roughly 0.5% to 1%, according to Mitul Kotecha, a strategist at Barclays Bank in Singapore. "From an economic perspective, Asia gets hit a lot more because of the amount of oil that Asia imports," he said in a Bloomberg Television interview last week. "The dollar, I think, remains at least in this environment, quite well supported."

Investors in Asia are struggling to adjust to the new normal, as they try to get to grips with the outsized swings precipitated by rising oil prices while the Iran war rages on. Volatility has climbed for virtually every asset class and the region has borne the brunt of the move. The opening gaps for Asian stocks and major bond markets last month show some of the most extreme moves of the last year, according to a percentile analysis compiled by Bloomberg.

Policymakers in the Asia-Pacific region are facing their toughest test since the Covid-19 pandemic, with few easy options, as they race to cushion their economies from an energy shock that is hitting harder and sooner than elsewhere. A US withdrawal from the Iran conflict would help ease tensions and improve prospects for reopening the Strait of Hormuz – a key artery whose disruption has driven oil prices higher. Restoring flows from the Middle East would benefit major importers in Asia such as India and China and help alleviate concerns about a slowdown in global economic growth.



## The global significance of China's 2026 Two Sessions



By Cao Xiaolin  
Ambassador of China to Qatar

The Fourth Session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) of China and the Fourth Session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) (collectively known as "the Two Sessions") were successfully held last month in Beijing.

The Two Sessions conducted in-depth discussions on major issues such as economic and social development and improvements in people's livelihood, reviewed and approved key documents including the 2026 Government Work Report, made authoritative assessments of China's economic performance, and set clear development goals for 2026.

The most notable outcome was the approval of the 15th Five-Year Plan, which proposes 20 key indicators across five areas, outlines a series of major strategic tasks in 16 fields and identifies 109 major projects. The Plan provides a top-level blueprint for China's development over the next five years.

During the two sessions, President Xi Jinping, also General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), engaged in in-depth exchanges with the deputies of the NPC and members of the CPPCC, discussing major state affairs together. He made a series of important instructions on developing new quality productive forces based on local conditions, expanding high-level opening-up, advancing the Healthy China initiative, and exercising full and rigorous governance over the CPC.

These instructions provided clear guidance for advancing economic and social development during the period of the 15th Five-Year Plan, and demonstrated China's firm determination and confidence in pursuing openness and cooperation with the world. The Two Sessions have not only outlined a grand blueprint for China's development in the new era, but also provided an important window for the world to understand the pulse of China's development in the following aspects.

First, China's scientific and technological innovation is fostering new global momentum for development. In recent years, China has emerged as a global leader in new energy vehicles and photovoltaic industries, achieved continuous breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence

**Under the strategic guidance of President Xi Jinping and His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the China-Qatar strategic partnership has gone through 12 golden years of development. The 15th Five-Year Plan will serve as the "golden key" to unlock the next golden era of the China-Qatar strategic partnership**



and quantum technology, and proactively cultivated future industries like bio-manufacturing and embodied intelligence.

Innovation is now the core engine driving China's economic growth. The Two Sessions have underscored the need to lead with scientific and technological innovation and anchor development in the real economy, promoting the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, the expansion of emerging industries, and the forward-looking layout of future industries.

China's total R&D spending is expected to grow by more than 7% annually during the period of the 15th Five-Year Plan. Emerging sectors, including new energy, new materials, aerospace, and low-altitude economy, are poised to give rise to multiple trillion-yuan-scale markets, contributing to sustained global economic progress amid a new wave of technological revolution.

Secondly, China's opening-up has created new channels for global cooperation and connectivity. Currently, China is the primary trading partner for over 160 countries and regions. It has remained the world's second-largest import market for 17 consecutive years, and has contributed more than \$300 billion in taxes to host countries through outbound investment over the past five years.

The Two Sessions reiterated that China will continue to pursue win-win cooperation, further expand high-level opening-up, steadily advance institutional opening, expand market access and openness, particularly in services, continuously improve the environment for foreign investment, and advance high-quality Belt and Road cooperation.

China remains committed to working with all countries to jointly grow and fairly share the benefits of economic globalization, complement each other's strengths and share opportunities through openness, and achieve mutual development and shared success through integrated interests.

Thirdly, China's resilience has bolstered new confidence in global development and stability. China's economy has maintained an average annual growth rate of 5.4% over the past five years, contributing approximately 30% to global economic growth, exceeding the combined total of the G7 countries. China's economic increment exceeds 5 trillion yuan each year, equivalent to the GDP of a medium-sized country.

Amid a complex and volatile international environment, the 15th Five-Year Plan has signaled stable macroeconomic policies and continued deep reforms, demonstrating China's ability

to maintain long-term planning and policy continuity. This highlights the strong resilience and institutional advantages of China's economy, sending renewed confidence and hope to the world.

Committed to building a community with a shared future for humanity, China will continue to pursue the Chinese path of modernisation, developing itself while benefiting the world, and injecting steady momentum into global prosperity through its high-quality development.

Fourthly, China's diplomacy offers a new approach to non-escalating turbulent situations. The current war on Iran is one of the focal points in international affairs. China has expressed its deep concerns over the conflicts spilling over into neighbouring countries.

At the foreign minister's press conference during the Two Sessions, Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister, elaborated on China's position, proposing five fundamental principles: respect for national sovereignty, refraining from the abuse of force, adherence to non-interference in internal affairs, pursuing political settlement of hot-spot issues, and the constructive role of major powers. These principles reflect not only China's call for peace, but also the shared aspiration of the vast majority of the international community.

Since the very first day of the conflict, China has made concrete and active efforts to promote ceasefire and peace, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi holding extensive communications and consultations with foreign ministers, including HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani. The Chinese Special Envoy on the Middle East Issue, Zhai Jun, has also engaged in shuttle diplomacy across the Gulf region.

As a sincere friend and strategic partner of Middle Eastern countries, China stands ready to work with Qatar and other regional partners to implement the Global Security Initiative, restore order to the Middle East, and bring tranquility to its people.

This year marks the beginning of China's 15th Five-Year Plan period. Under the strategic guidance of President Xi Jinping and His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the China-Qatar strategic partnership has gone through 12 golden years of development. The 15th Five-Year Plan will serve as the "golden key" to unlock the next golden era of the China-Qatar strategic partnership.

Looking ahead, China is ready to work with Qatar to uphold the spirit of China-Arab friendship, enhance the alignment of development strategies, deepen the strategic partnership, comprehensively advance exchanges and cooperation in various fields and at all levels, and write a new chapter of win-win cooperation.

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## France condemns effort to delay major IPCC climate report

AFP  
Paris

France yesterday expressed deep concern over attempts by some countries "to slow down and arbitrarily delay" the publication of the next major report by the UN-mandated expert climate panel.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) publishes reports every five to seven years whose findings on the science of global warming are the benchmark reference for the United Nations.

A technical meeting of the IPCC in Bangkok last week became tense, diplomatic sources told AFP, after Saudi Arabia and India insisted that a delay to the next report be formally considered.

The timetable is contentious as some countries want the report published ahead of a crucial COP summit in 2028 which is supposed to take stock of progress to cut global emissions.

Saudi Arabia and India – which could host the 2028 meet – want the report released in 2029, according to diplomats. The meeting concluded without agreement on the matter.

"France expresses its deep concern at attempts to slow down and arbitrarily delay the publication schedule for the reports of the IPCC's seventh assessment cycle," France's ministry for ecological transition said in a statement.

France is among countries, including many small-island states vulnerable to rising sea levels, pushing for the best available IPCC science to inform the 2028 COP summit.

At that summit, nations are supposed to undertake a "global stocktake" of collective progress in meeting the goals of the Paris climate pact.

They argue that policymakers need the latest science to know where the world stands, if progress has been made in curbing green-

house gas emissions, and if not, how much deeper nations need to dig.

"Science is essential to guide climate action," said France's minister for ecological transition, Mounique Barbut.

Countries "must take necessary decisions at COPs, which they will not be able to do if the IPCC's 7th report is not delivered on time", she added.

Some nations, including India, Saudi Arabia and China, have argued that more time is needed to incorporate science and data from developing nations, and have proposed a later date in 2029.

France condemned any "actions aiming to postpone the publication" of these reports beyond 2028 but did not refer to any country by name.

"France considers that any delay in taking into account the scientific data relevant to addressing the climate emergency would seriously undermine global climate action."

## Europe pushes back on some US military operations

Reuters  
Paris/Rome

France and Italy have pushed back against some US-Israeli military operations, sources said yesterday, as US President Donald Trump criticised Nato allies in Europe as unhelpful in the month-long war in Iran, highlighting divisions. The decisions came against a backdrop of tensions between Washington and key partners over the war. Earlier this month, Trump called longtime Nato allies "cowards" over their lack of support. Yesterday, he slammed countries that did not help in the US-Israeli strikes.

"The Country of France wouldn't let planes headed to Israel, loaded up with military supplies, fly over French territory. France has been VERY UN-HELPFUL with respect to the 'Butcher of Iran,' who has been

successfully eliminated! The USA. will REMEMBER!!!" he wrote on Truth Social.

The French presidency said it was surprised by Trump's social media post and said its decision was in line with France's policy from the start of the conflict. A Western diplomat and two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters earlier that the refusal, which happened at the weekend, was the first time France had done this since the start of the conflict on February 28. The sources said Israel had wanted to use France's airspace to transport American weapons to be used in the war against Iran.

Italy last week denied permission for US military aircraft to land at the Sigonella air base in Sicily before heading to the Middle East, sources said.

According to the *Corriere della Sera* daily, which first reported the news, "some US bombers" had been due to land at the base

in eastern Sicily before flying on to the Middle East.

Italy's Defence Minister Guido Crosetto later denied any tensions with Washington or any change in policy. He posted a message on X to say that US air-bases remained active, but that Washington needed special permission if it wants to use them for purposes not established in previous pacts.

Meanwhile, highlighting divisions within Europe, Spain defended its decision to fully close its airspace to US planes involved in attacks on Iran. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has been among the most vocal critics of the US and Israeli strikes.

Spain will only allow for the use of its bases for the collective Defence of Nato allies, Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles said. Spain was not concerned about any reprisals, Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares told state broadcaster TVE.

## EU top diplomats visit Bucha in a tribute to 2022 massacre

Reuters  
Bucha

The European Union's top diplomat Kaja Kallas and several EU foreign ministers voiced their support for Ukraine's demand for accountability over Russian atrocities committed in Bucha, as they visited the small town yesterday on the fourth anniversary of a massacre there.

Ukrainian officials say Russian forces killed several hundred people in Bucha shortly after the start of the invasion in 2022. Kallas and around a dozen EU foreign ministers and other senior European officials made the trip there, amid tensions within the bloc over EU aid for Ukraine.

"This morning in Bucha we were reminded of what is at stake," Kallas said in Kyiv after the trip.

"There is no starker example of Russia's brutality than what happened there," Zelensky called on partners to remain focused on the war in Ukraine despite the widening impact of the US-Israeli war with Iran. "You know, images from Bucha are very often compared to the horrific scenes of the Second World War, but there is a major difference," he said.

"Right now, that difference does not reflect well on today's world leaders, because Nazism was punished for its crimes, rather than receiving a partial easing of sanctions," he added, an apparent reference to a US waiver for some



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas and Foreign Ministers of the EU member states attend an informal EU-Ukraine Foreign Ministers' meeting, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, yesterday. (Reuters)

sanctions on Russian oil in the wake of the Iran war.

Peace talks to end the war in Ukraine have been suspended due to the Middle East conflict, and officials in Kyiv have expressed concerns that weapons supplies could be diverted away from Ukraine as Western military resources are stretched.

Europe is now the main backer for Ukraine as it fights on against a bigger and better-equipped Russian army along a frontline more than 1,200 kilometres (746 miles) long. However, a 90bn euro (\$103bn) EU loan for Ukraine has been blocked by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban due to a dispute over Russian

oil transit via Ukraine's Druzhba oil pipeline. Hungary is also blocking progress on talks about Ukraine's accession to the EU.

Kallas said European ministers should work for Europe and not Russia in response to a leaked phone call which appeared to show Hungary's and Russia's foreign ministers discussing EU sanctions in 2024, 2-1/2 years after Russia invaded Ukraine.

"We must confront Russia, not bankroll it," she said.

Ukrainian officials plan to use the visit of the senior EU officials to focus on increasing accountability for war crimes. Ahead of the meeting, Sybiha said eight coun-

tries confirmed their readiness to join the enlarged partial agreement for a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine – a planned, ad hoc European international criminal tribunal. He said he hoped that number would grow.

"Perhaps more than anywhere else, it is here in Bucha that we feel the future of Europe and Europe's security are being decided right here – in Ukraine," Sybiha said. "The current frontline is also a line of international law and the shared values we uphold."

Moscow has said it will refuse to recognise the special tribunal and will view any country joining it as a hostile act.

## Ukrainian drones strike Russia's Baltic Sea port again

Reuters  
Moscow

Ukrainian drones yesterday struck Russia's Baltic Sea port of Ust-Luga for the fifth time in 10 days, and industry sources told Reuters an oil loading terminal was hit, likely adding to Russia's difficulties in exporting crude.

Kyiv has stepped up attacks on Russia's oil export infrastructure over the past month, launching its heaviest drone strikes of the more than four-year war against the Baltic ports of Ust-Luga and Primorsk.

At least 40% of Russia's oil export capacity has been halted due to drone attacks, a disputed strike on a major pipeline and the seizure of tankers, according to Reuters calculations based on market data.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Monday that some of Kyiv's allies had sent "signals" about the possibility of scaling back its long-range strikes on Russia's oil sector as global energy prices have surged due to the Iran war.

Regional governor Alexander Drozdenko said three people, including two children, were treated for injuries, and several buildings had been damaged in the overnight attacks.

In a message on Telegram at 0409 GMT, he said air-raid alerts in the region had been lifted

but gave no details on damage to the port.

He later said that the aftermath of the attack on Ust-Luga had been "eliminated" or dealt with. He said the supply of hot water and heating to residential and other units in the region were restored.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the strikes "terrorist attacks," adding that Russia was working on protecting its critical infrastructure.

"This doesn't mean these facilities can be 100% protected from such terrorist attacks. However, intensive work is being carried out, and this applies not only to the port... but to all other critical infrastructure facilities," he told a daily conference call with reporters.

Three industry sources told Reuters Ukrainian drones struck crude oil loading facilities operated by Russian pipeline monopoly Transneft in the latest attack. Transneft did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

Ust-Luga, on the south-eastern shore of the Gulf of Finland, is a sprawling complex of oil-processing facilities and export terminals handling crude oil and oil products.

According to source-based data, the port exported 32.9mm metric tonnes of oil products last year. It typically handles about 700,000 barrels of crude oil per day.

## UK, France extend migrants deal

AFP  
London

Britain and France agreed yesterday to extend for two months a migration deal just hours before it was set to expire in order to complete tough negotiations, UK officials said.

Under a 2018 accord Britain agreed to finance actions taken in France to bolster the borders and stop migrants leaving for the UK.

The deal was prolonged for three years in March 2023, when London agreed to pay Paris £476 million (around \$570 million) over three years to crack down on migrants crossing the English Channel in small boats. It was due to expire at midnight yesterday.

"France and the UK are united in efforts to stop illegal small boat crossings," the interior ministry said in a statement yesterday, adding some 42,000 illegal migrants had been stopped from making the risky Channel crossing to UK shores.

"While positive negotiations on finalising a new and improved UK-France deal continue, operational contracts have been extended to deliver key French law enforcement and surveillance capabilities for a further two months, backed by £16.2 million in UK funding."

It said some 700 French officers "dedicated to intercepting small boats will patrol the French coastline round-the-clock".

"I will do whatever it takes to restore order and control at our bor-

ders," interior minister Shabana Mahmood said.

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

The Labour government, which came to power in July 2024, is under pressure over the hot-button issue of immigration which has been seized on by the hard-right Reform UK party, which has been rising in the polls.

UK media has reported the UK government wants to link further financial contributions to France to higher goals for stopping the number of boats.

France has opposed the idea, warning such a move could endanger lives.

## Spain busts 'maze-like' drug tunnel to Morocco

AFP  
Madrid

Spanish police yesterday said they had uncovered a technologically sophisticated and "maze-like" underground tunnel used to smuggle tonnes of hashish from Morocco to Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta and Europe.

The investigation found the site in Ceuta concealed under an industrial warehouse that was protected by pumping and soundproofing systems to avoid detection, police said in a statement.

The bottom of the three-level tunnel, which led directly to Morocco, resembled "a maze typical of a mine", equipped with trolleys "that moved on a rail system of complex construction and characteristic of perfectly designed feats of engineering".

The bales of hashish were prepared and stored on the middle level, from where they were lifted "thanks to a system of cranes and pulleys designed to move heavy loads", the police said.

The entire structure is 19 metres (62 feet) deep, but investigators cannot determine how long the tunnel is "because it is flooded", the officer responsible for the operation, Antonio Martinez, explained at a press conference.



A person works inside a tunnel that was used to bring tonnes of hashish from Morocco into Spain, in Ceuta, in an undated picture released yesterday. (Reuters)

The tunnel, measuring 1.2 metres high and 80 centimetres wide, was "well-equipped" and "purpose-built" by "an extremely powerful organisation" that contacted other groups to transport the drug in speed-boats and fishing vessels, he added.

Police began their investigation in February 2025, seizing more than 17 tonnes of hashish and 1.4 million euros (\$1.6 million) in cash in various operations in Ceuta and mainland Spain over several months.

They also made 27 arrests,

including the network's two suspected leaders.

One of them, based in Morocco and held on March 26, is also suspected of running another drug tunnel police dismantled in Ceuta last year.

Spain's close ties with Latin America and proximity to Morocco, a top cannabis producer, make it a key entry point for drugs into Europe.

Its small Mediterranean coastal enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, adjacent to Morocco, share the European Union's only land borders with Africa.

## Wolf bites woman in Germany in first attack for decades

A woman was bitten by a wolf in a shopping centre in the German city of Hamburg, the city's deputy mayor said yesterday, in the first such attack in modern times. The wolf entered the complex in the northern city's Altona area on Monday evening after being repeatedly spotted in different parts of Hamburg over several days, Katharina Fegebank told journalists.

The incident is the first of its kind since the species began returning to Germany almost 30 years ago, according to the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN). According to the *Bild* daily, the woman was bitten in the face.

The wolf had previously been sighted on Saturday in the west of Hamburg and at other locations on Sunday morning and afternoon, according to the local environment agency.

Fegebank said that "until yesterday evening the wolf had shown typical behaviour for a wild animal and had avoided human contact". She said it was not clear why the wolf had entered the shopping centre, suggesting that "the confined space and proximity to people led to a situation of extreme stress" for the animal.

The wolf has since been captured by police and taken to a wildlife park.

Fegebank said that "we will find a solution for the wolf very quickly". The animal is most likely a cub that was in the process of leaving its pack, according to experts.

Wolves were effectively wiped out in Germany by the mid-19th century, largely due to persecution, bounties and habitat loss. However, wolves migrating from Poland began settling again in eastern Germany after reunification, when stronger wildlife protections were introduced.

An official study last year recorded 219 packs of wolves across the country, as well as 43 wolf pairs and 14 lone wolves. (AFP)



## Sidra Medicine treats 10th patient with duchenne muscular dystrophy

Sidra Medicine, a member of Qatar Foundation, has provided specialised treatment to a child from Egypt diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD).

The treatment protocol, part of Sidra Medicine's gene therapy centre, brings together specialised expertise and multidisciplinary care to support children with complex genetic conditions. The comprehensive DMD gene therapy programme involves specialist care across genetics, neurology, cardiology and rehabilitation services.

Prof Tawfeq Ben-Omran, division chief, Genetics and Genomic Medicine at Sidra Medicine, said: "Since announcing the extension

of the Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy gene therapy programme for older children, we have treated 10 patients to date and continue to attract patients from around the region. Our growing experience reflects the strength of our specialised programme and our reputation as a trusted healthcare partner. This also reflects our ability to safely deliver complex therapies through a structured clinical pathway supported by multidisciplinary care."

Aly, a 10-year-old boy, arrived from Egypt with his parents in December 2025 for DMD treatment. Following several weeks of clinical evaluation and eligibility assessment, Aly was administered the gene therapy infusion



Aly and his family.

on March 1 under the supervision of the hospital's specialised Gene Therapy Team.

Aly's parents said: "Following a

long and difficult journey to reach an accurate diagnosis, Aly was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy at the age of three.

The journey deeply impacted our family until we were able to bring him to Qatar for treatment. We are grateful to Sidra Medicine and Qatar for the exceptional care and support provided to our son. It has given us renewed hope and confidence as we continue his treatment journey and celebrate his health milestones."

Prof Ibrahim Janahi, chief medical officer at Sidra Medicine, said: "Sidra Medicine remains committed to ensuring continuity of care for children with complex and rare conditions, even during challenging circumstances. Aly's treatment also highlights Sidra Medicine's role as a regional referral centre for children with rare and complex conditions, with

families travelling from across the Middle East and North Africa to Qatar. Despite the current geopolitical situation, we are unwavering in our diligence to provide safe and timely access to innovative therapies and comprehensive care to all our patients."

After receiving the therapy, Aly entered a structured post-infusion monitoring protocol designed to ensure safety and support his recovery. The follow-up programme includes regular outpatient visits, laboratory monitoring and cardiology assessments. Aly will also undergo regular physiotherapy evaluations to monitor mobility and functional progress before discharge and readiness to fly back home to Egypt.

## Buildings lit in Qatar colour in display of unity amid tensions

By Joey Aguilar  
Staff Reporter

Building facades and public spaces across the capital have been transformed into vivid displays of national identity, with the maroon-and-white of the Qatari flag lighting up prominent districts, including Msheireb Downtown Doha, as regional tensions continue to unfold.

Large-scale LED installations stretched across streets and wrapped around buildings have turned parts of the city into a canvas of moving light, with the jagged edge of the national flag clearly visible against the night sky.

At Msheireb, one of Doha's busiest urban hubs, illuminated panels suspended above roads and pedestrian areas created a striking visual corridor, bathing passing vehicles and evening crowds in alternating hues of white and maroon.

On major facades, including those of commercial and residential buildings, the flag appeared in sweeping digital patterns, at times static and at other times animated, giving the impression of a waving banner. The displays drew groups of residents and visitors, many of whom paused to take photos or simply observe the installations in silence.

The timing has led many to interpret them as a symbolic gesture of unity and solidarity. The Gulf region has been closely watching escalating tensions in recent days, prompting heightened awareness across communities.

Known for its blend of modern design and cultural heritage, Msheireb's installations complemented the district's architecture, seam-



Illuminated installations resembling the Qatari flag light up streets and building facades at Msheireb Downtown Doha, as the city reflects a message of unity and national pride amid ongoing regional tensions. PICTURES: Joey Aguilar

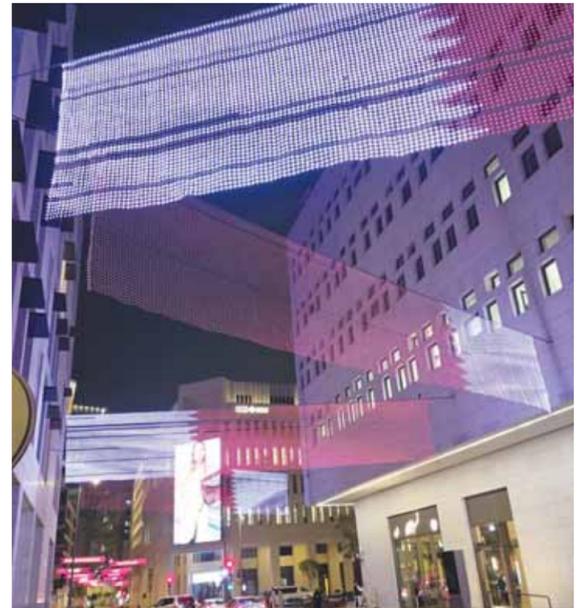
lessly integrating advanced lighting technology with the area's clean, geometric facades.

The result was both a visual spectacle and a subtle civic message. "It feels like the whole city is speaking without words," said Alvin, a Doha resident, who was among those gathered in the district late into the evening. "You see the flag everywhere, and it reminds you of stability and togetherness."

Traffic continued to flow steadily through illuminated streets, with drivers slowing down

as they passed beneath suspended light panels. Pedestrians filled nearby plazas and walkways, creating a calm yet attentive atmosphere.

It is learnt that these kinds of visual displays are common in Doha during important national moments, when buildings and public spaces are used to show shared feelings and unity. However, the size and visibility of the current displays stand out, showing both advanced technology and a carefully curated urban response.



## PHCC marks Earth Hour

Driven by its corporate social responsibility and a commitment to promoting environmental sustainability, the Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) participated in the "Earth Hour 2026" global initiative.

The event took place on March 28, from 8.30pm to 9.30pm, marking a significant step in the Corporation's ongoing support for international efforts to raise environmental awareness and reduce energy consumption.

The participation followed directives from the managing director, Dr Mariam Abdul Malik. Under this initiative, the Facilities and Maintenance Department implemented a plan to switch off non-essential external lighting across PHCC buildings. Importantly, PHCC ensured that all health services remained fully operational and unaffected, prioritising patient safety and operational efficiency.

This participation aligns with PHCC's commitment to implementing best practices in facility management and bio-engineering, consistent with sustainability governance guidelines and international accreditation



standards. Through this initiative, PHCC emphasises that reducing carbon emissions is no longer an option but a collective responsibility requiring co-ordinated institutional and community efforts.

Huda Mohsen al-Wahedi, executive director, Corporate Communications, at PHCC stated: "PHCC's participation in Earth Hour reflects our deep commitment to supporting global environmental initiatives and fostering a culture of sustainability within our organisation and the wider community. We believe that simple steps, such as conserving energy, can make a significant difference when adopted collectively and consistently."

She further added: "The Corporation seeks to embed sustainability concepts into all its operational processes – not just through symbolic gestures, but by adopting long-term strategies to improve energy efficiency and minimise environmental impact, in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030."

PHCC stands as a leading entity in sustainability within Qatar. All its eligible buildings have achieved the Global Sustainability Assessment System certification from the Gulf Organisation for Research and Development. This achievement highlights PHCC's dedication to the highest standards of green building and facility management.

## HMC honours staff from QSW

Hamad Medical Corporation's (HMC) Corporate Social Service, in collaboration with the Corporate Communications Department, organised a ceremony honouring Qatar Foundation for Social Work (QSW) and its employees who participated in an initiative of awareness sessions for social workers at HMC.

The sessions were conducted from October 7 to November 25, 2025, with the ceremony showing appreciation for their contribution to the success of this initiative and to enhancing the exchange of knowledge and expertise in the field of social work.

The sessions were initiated as part of Corporate Social Service's efforts at HMC to enhance the professional capacity of social workers across HMC facilities and expand their awareness of available community resources and services, contributing to their capability to guide patients and their families to support services and help them benefit from specialised community programmes.

More than 30 social workers across HMC facilities joined the initiative, and 11 professionals from QSW and its affiliated centres delivered the initiative's content through a series of awareness and educational sessions, aiming to strengthen co-operation



and integration between health and social institutions. The sessions also provided a shared platform for exchanging professional knowledge, unifying concepts related to social services and keeping up to date with developments in the field.

The initiative aimed to enhance co-ordination and improve referral systems between Corporate Social Service and the centres affiliated to QSW, increase social workers' professional awareness of the services provided by these entities and empower teams to deliver more compassionate and effective social services that address the needs of patients and their families.

The sessions introduced each cen-

tre's referral mechanisms, admission criteria, scope of services and the target beneficiary groups. Time was also allocated to address inquiries from social workers from across HMC hospitals.

A number of representative centres from QSW participated in delivering these sessions, including: Orphan Care Centre "Dreama", Shafallah Centre for Persons with Disabilities, Daam Behavioural Healthcare Centre, Family Consulting Centre "Wifaq", Ehsan Centre for Empowerment and Care of the Elderly, Protection and Social Rehabilitation Centre "AMAN" and Al-Noor Centre for the Blind.

## Continued tensions put pressure on fertiliser exports, food costs

By Ayman Adly  
Staff Reporter

Qatar plays a key role in global agricultural production through its exports of fertilisers – particularly urea – supported by the world's largest single-site urea facility operated by Qatar Fertiliser Company (Qafco), with an annual output exceeding 5.6 million metric tonnes.

Established in 1969, Qafco is widely regarded as the world's largest single-site producer of ammonia and urea.

It has become a cornerstone of the global fertilisers industry, supplying essential agricultural inputs to countries across Asia,

Europe, North America, and Latin America. Qatar is estimated to account for nearly 15% of the global urea supply, while the Gulf region as a whole contributes around 20% of global fertiliser output and approximately 46% of urea exports. Within the GCC, Qatar holds the largest urea production capacity, exporting to more than 35 countries and supporting major food-producing regions worldwide.

Against this backdrop, rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, particularly any disruption to navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, pose significant risks to global food systems. Any interruption in fertiliser exports could have both immediate and long-term

consequences, driving up production costs and, ultimately, food prices. Such increases disproportionately affect low-income populations across the globe.

Nitrogen-based fertilisers such as ammonia and urea are indispensable to modern, large-scale agriculture. They enhance soil fertility, boost crop yields, and enable cost-efficient farming. Studies suggest that fertilisers contribute to 40–60% of global crop production. Urea exported from Qatar and other GCC countries is critical for cultivating staple crops such as wheat, rice, and corn – key components of the global food supply. Any disruption in supply or increase in production costs would likely push food prices higher, a trend already

emerging in some markets.

Continued regional escalation, including attacks on critical infrastructure, could reduce fertiliser output or export capacity. Even short-term disruptions would reverberate across global agricultural supply chains, affecting both production volumes and pricing.

Domestically, Qatar has made notable strides in strengthening its food security over the past decade.

Through sustained investment in advanced technologies and modern agricultural practices, the country has expanded local vegetable production and achieved significant progress in the dairy, fish, poultry, and red meat sectors. These efforts have

reduced reliance on imports and contributed to price stability for essential goods. Qatar has also joined the Global Alliance for Food Safety, in collaboration with the World Health Organisation, to enhance food safety monitoring and improve standards from production to consumption.

Nevertheless, escalating tensions in the region continue to threaten the steady flow of fertilisers and energy supplies – both of which are critical to global stability. Qatar has repeatedly called for de-escalation, urging dialogue and peaceful resolution among all parties to safeguard international markets and prevent avoidable disruptions to food and energy systems worldwide.